

Aptos paramedics to quit hospital transport

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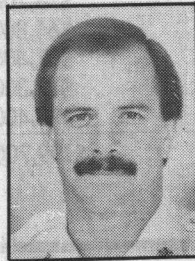
APTOS — The only fire department in the county with its own paramedics and ambulances will no longer transport patients to the hospital.

Beginning Aug. 15, paramedics in the Aptos/La Selva Fire Protection District will ride on the fire engines instead.

The move is expected to save the department money and free paramedics to respond to calls close to home.

It also eliminates duplication of services with the countywide ambulance provider, American Medical Response West.

While the change will cost Aptos paramedics their ability to rush critically injured patients to the hospital if AMR is delayed, they haven't had to do that in two years, said Chief Chuck Mornard.



Mornard

The fire district, which expects the change to

trim \$40,000 from its \$3.5 million budget, is "tightening its belt" despite being spared from this year's state budget ax, Mornard said.

"It's a good solution," said Elinor Hall, county Health Services Agency administrator. "I think they will save money and not really impact quality of service."

Aptos/La Selva has nine paramedics — two on duty each day — and two rescue vehicles.

Under the existing system, Aptos/La Selva responds to a call with its paramedics. AMR also responds with its ambulance.

Fire department paramedics, who typically arrive at a scene before the AMR unit, begin treating the patient. The paramedic then accompanies the patient to the hospital in the AMR ambulance while the fire department's ambulance follows.

The fire department currently

transports patients only when the patient's condition is too critical to wait for the AMR ambulance.

Under the new system, Aptos/La Selva paramedics will respond to calls, but will not take patients to the hospital. That means they will be return to the station, remaining available for other calls.

Mornard said he wants to make sure the county ambulance crews will respond quickly to the Aptos area — hopefully within nine minutes 90 percent of the time.

County ambulances are stationed in Watsonville, Capitola, Santa Cruz and Ben Lomond. If there is a long delay, the fire department will put pressure on the county to relocate an ambulance to

Aptos, Mornard said.

Officials say they will keep careful records on the new system during the first six months.

The Aptos/La Selva ambulances will be kept for use in a disaster.