



NEWS



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Southern California has a paramedic shortage. What's being done about it?

By Jeff Horseman, The Press-Enterprise

April 2, 2023



Emergency medical services students, from left, Joaquin Tomilloso, Robert Tinco, John Cardoza and Michael Quintero, use Broselow Pediatric Emergency Tape in a class at Chaffey College's Fontana campus Thursday, March 30, 2023. Southern California counties have been dealing with a shortage of paramedics and EMTs blamed in part on a disruption in paramedic/EMT classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

An ambulance's flashing lights are a welcome sight in a medical emergency.

But a different light — a warning one — has been flashing in Southern California, which like the rest of the nation is struggling with a shortage of paramedics and emergency medical technicians that's had a ripple effect on public safety and patient care.

The shortage delays how long it takes an ambulance to get to a scene, and sometimes, ambulances arrive with no paramedic, Riverside County Supervisor Kevin Jeffries wrote [in a newsletter to constituents](#). When that happens, a fire engine paramedic rides with the patient to the hospital, taking that fire engine out of service until the paramedic gets back, Jeffries added.

[American Medical Response](#), Riverside County's emergency medical transport provider — which also is active in Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties — cited the paramedic/EMT shortage in a discussion of why it failed to meet response time benchmarks.

That failure led Riverside County officials this month [to deny a one-year extension of AMR's contract](#), which runs through mid-2026.

Besides Riverside County, Los Angeles, Orange and San Bernardino counties reported dealing with a shortage of paramedics and EMTs, who offer emergency care but have less advanced training than paramedics.

"We do have a shortage of both EMTs and paramedics," Orange County EMS Medical Director Carl Shultz said via email. "We really don't have much input into this situation, as there is not much we can do to expedite a remedy of the situation."

In an emailed statement, LA County's Department of Health Services acknowledged the shortage, but said it is "actively recruiting highly talented paramedics and EMTs to serve our county through incentives such as competitive benefits package and commitment to career development."

Tracey Martinez, a spokesperson for the **San Bernardino County Fire** Protection District, said via email that the district has "thought outside of the box with creative solutions such as adjusting deployment models and hiring EMTs, and then sending them to paramedic school."

"The shortage was much more prevalent at the end of 2021 and early 2022," Martinez wrote. "With our adjustments to our business practices, we have minimized the effects it has had on our fire district."

Nationwide, the turnover rate for paramedics in 2021 was 27% while the rate for EMTs, who have less advanced training than paramedics, was 36%, [the American Ambulance Association reported](#).

The turnover rate increased in 2022, “meaning that EMS agencies are experiencing a full turnover of all staff every 3 (to) 4 years,” the association reported.

“Greater than one third of all new hires (leave) within their first year of employment. Not surprisingly, this converted into a relatively high rate of currently open positions, especially for EMTs and paramedics at EMS agencies around the country.”

Like shortages of nurses and other healthcare providers, the paramedic/EMT shortage has its roots in the [COVID-19](#) pandemic, which put paramedics and EMTs in routine contact with COVID-infected people before vaccines were available.

The pandemic led many in the field to reconsider their career choices, AMR Director of Regional Operations Jeremy Shumaker said in an emailed statement.

Citing federal Bureau of Labor Statistics data, Shumaker said that between 2020 and 2030, EMTs and paramedics were projected to leave their professions at a higher rate than all other occupations in the U.S. economy.

“The cancellation of EMT and paramedic training programs and drastically reduced class sizes during the onset of the pandemic only further exacerbated the crisis,” Shumaker wrote.

“The number of new paramedics entering the EMS industry in 2020 and 2021 was dramatically reduced from previous years,” he added. “Compounding that problem is the reduced number of EMTs entering the EMS industry is now resulting in fewer EMTs being eligible to begin paramedic school.”

Besides limiting the number of EMT students who could be in a class due to coronavirus protocols, the pandemic also restricted students’ access to hospitals where they get hands-on clinical training, said Joyce Johnson, vice president of career education, counseling, nursing, and allied health at [Mt. San Jacinto College](#) in Riverside County.

Starting this fall, the four-campus college, which has 32 students enrolled in its EMT program, is expanding its one-semester EMT course offerings, Johnson said.

“You essentially can come in and within 18 weeks be trained to take the national registry exam and to go right into the workforce.”

Shortages in other healthcare fields also affect response times. A lack of hospital emergency room staff means paramedics and EMTs have to wait at the hospital until they can hand off their patients, meaning they can’t respond to other 911 calls until they leave, Jeffries and AMR said.

Riverside County’s shortage is easing, said Dan Bates, EMS administrator with the county’s EMS Agency.

“Trends are currently moving in the right direction that we’re starting to see more enrollments (in paramedic and EMT schools),” he said. “So that’s a positive note.”

“We hope to continue to see increased enrollment, which will minimize that gap,” he added. “But that’s the hard part, right? Like it takes (as long as two years) to produce a paramedic.”

Riverside County also is changing its emergency medical services model to ease the strain on paramedics and EMTs. One way is through an emergency medical dispatch system that can handle more minor calls, like less-severe cuts on fingers, without the need for an ambulance.

“We’re trying to find all these different innovative solutions and really collaborate ... to ensure that we are getting the right resources to those in the community when they call 911,” Bates said.

<https://www.sbsun.com/2023/04/02/southern-california-has-a-paramedic-shortage-whats-being-done-about-it/>

Corona's new drone is latest tool to warn rivers' homeless about storm danger

By Brian Rokos, The Press-Enterprise

March 31, 2023



A San Bernardino County Fire swift rescue team prepares to cross the Santa Ana River to rescue 8 stranded individuals in 2019.

On New Year's Eve, 10 Corona firefighters waded into the Rincon Wash, searching in the dark through thick brush for two homeless people who were trapped by rising stormwater.

Finally, after an hour, the people were located and rescued.

"Every time we put one of our guys in the water, especially swift water, it puts them at risk," Corona firefighter/paramedic Mike Leckliter said.

But now, with the acquisition of a state-of-the-art drone in late January, the Fire Department can more accurately pinpoint the location of the homeless people inhabiting the city's rivers and washes to alert them to impending storms and use that information to decrease the time to reach them if they require rescue. The drone can even deliver a life vest.

"It's going to be a game-changer for us," Deputy Fire Chief Justin McGough said.

The drone is just one of many ways, high tech, low tech and no tech, that public safety agencies in Southern California warn homeless people to move to higher ground ahead of rising water. The methods often involve person-to-person contact using outreach teams, cell phone alerts and messages broadcast over loudspeakers from police helicopters such as Riverside Police Department's that flies over encampments in the Santa Ana River ahead of major storms.

The consequences of failing to relocate were spotlighted in November when a surge of water in the Cucamonga Wash in Ontario following a rainstorm swept three homeless people to their deaths. This winter, a seemingly never-ending series of storms has kept water levels — and the danger — high and filled creeks and rivers that can often be dry.

"We're always looking at ways to prevent a tragedy like that from happening," said Orange County sheriff's Sgt. Frank Gonzalez, who is assigned to a team of 12 deputies and a clinician in the department's behavioral health bureau.

Six deputies are assigned to the Santa Ana River, which in OC stretches from the Riverside County border to the Pacific Ocean. When the skies are clear, the deputies offer resources such as housing and food. When rain is coming, the deputies return to urge the homeless to relocate.

“The biggest thing is gaining trust, communication and showing empathy and showing over time that we are genuine. We earn their trust, they know we are empathetic to what they are going through and over time, we are able to gain compliance from a lot of these individuals,” Gonzalez said.

In Los Angeles County, sheriff’s deputies working with the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority talk to homeless people living in rivers personally and make announcements over loudspeakers.

The Ontario deaths spurred change in San Bernardino County.

Before then, said sheriff’s spokeswoman Gloria Huerta, the threat of flood hazards to life was “generally the responsibility of flood control personnel or the jurisdiction where the risk was present.” The county’s homeless outreach team would “sometimes make notifications in major waterways,” and a sheriff’s helicopter crew would make announcements as well.

Now, the county is working toward a more formalized process. The outreach team has been meeting with the county Office of Emergency Services and has proposed using the reverse 911 system to warn homeless people living where dangerous flooding is likely, Huerta said. In the meantime, outreach workers are handing out cards instructing homeless people how to sign up for a county emergency telephone system that sends text messages.

“It is a common misnomer that most folks who are homeless lack cell phones,” Huerta said.

Riverside County officials count on homeless people owning cell phones. The county several times during the winter storms sent alerts to cell phones, accompanied by loud tones, urging people in the Santa Ana River to move to higher ground.

Corona’s new \$32,000 drone can’t make phone calls, but that’s about it.

The advantages it has over the Fire Department’s fleet of six smaller drones are that it can fly for an hour vs. 20 minutes on a battery charge, it can fly in rain and high wind, its cameras have improved zoom lenses and can detect heat signatures coming from a person from farther away, and it can deliver a payload weighing up to 7 pounds.

Leckliter put the drone through the paces in a recent demonstration. He zoomed in on a construction worker from 1,000 feet away, close enough to get a detailed description of his build and clothing. Leckliter then snapped on an attachment and hooked a life vest to it. He pressed a button on a control panel and the drone released the vest. The drone can also drop two-way radios and bottles of water to lost hikers.

“It’s whatever our imagination is,” Leckliter said.

The infrared camera system has allowed firefighters to find homeless encampments where there were believed to be none. That will help them target more people for alerts. Operators of the drone can attach a loudspeaker and drop a pin on an electronic map that shows up on tablets that are in each fire engine, allowing crews to go more directly to victims.

Leckliter has his own fleet of drones, including a racing drone that can travel at 80 mph and one with a GPS system that will follow him as he rides his bicycle. He said he lobbied the department to purchase this advanced drone.

“As a drone pilot I understood the abilities that would bring our department to be able to more rapidly acquire intel and get to scenes faster than we ever could and ultimately decrease the risk of putting our personnel in hazardous locations when we can do the same thing with remote resources,” Leckliter said,

<https://www.pressenterprise.com/2023/03/31/coronas-eye-in-the-sky-is-latest-effort-to-warn-rivers-homeless-to-storm-danger/>

Fatal Fiery Crash Involving A Vehicle And A Semi Car Hauler On Southbound I-15 Near Stateline

By Staff Writer, Pain In The Pass

April 2, 2023



STATELINE, CA, (Pain In The Pass) >> A fatal crash involving an overturned semi tractor trailer and a sedan, closed a lane of southbound Interstate 15 for hours near Stateline Saturday night.

California Highway Patrol, Nevada Highway Patrol, Clark County Fire Department and **San Bernardino County Fire** Department were on the scene of an overturned semi car hauler. The semi had multiple vehicles on the trailer that fell off the and were on fire about one mile before the Yates Well Road exit at about 10:06pm on Saturday April 1, 2023.

Rescue crews and firefighters were on the scene and had to temporarily shut down the southbound side of the freeway while they worked on getting the all the vehicle fires put out. The vehicle that was involved in the accident was one of the cars on fire. They were both traveling on the southbound side, then both collided off the roadway and the sedan was “fully engulfed” in flames with heavy damage. It was reported to be a Chevrolet Malibu sedan. The semi overturned and sending some of the vehicles off of the trailer and that were also reported to be on fire too. At this time it’s unknown who cause or what cause the collision.

Family members and the help of good Samaritans reportedly tried to reach in the vehicle to get a boy out of the burning vehicle. Very sad to report they could not reach the 4-month-old boy in time, because the flames were to intense.

One person was injured and was reported to be transported to St. Rose Hospital in unknown condition. The 4-month-olds identity has not been released publicly at this time.

CHP opened the fast lane at 10:30pm and all lanes were reopened by 9am on Sunday morning. At one point traffic was backed up all the way to just before Primm Nevada.

We will update this story with more information when the preliminary accident report is available. Additional details were limited at this time. This incident will be under investigation by the California Highway Patrol Barstow Office.

<https://paininthepass.info/2023/04/02/fatal-fiery-crash-involving-a-vehicle-and-a-semi-car-hauler-on-southbound-i-15-near-stateline/>