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Merger of Fire Service and EMS Results in 50 Percent Response Time Reduction; 7 New Ambulances to be Purchased Early 2023

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A V.I. Fire Service fire truck in Richmond, Christiansted. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The director of the V.I. Fire Emergency Medical Services (VIFEMS), Daryl George, said Tuesday that the tiered response system signed into law this year has tremendously decreased the time it takes to respond to medical emergencies within the territory.

In 2019, Governor Albert Bryan proposed the Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services Act, which merged the Virgin Islands Fire Services and the Department of Health's Emergency Medical Services to expand available resources. After years of back and forth, the measure finally made it out the Senate and was signed into [in April law by Mr. Bryan.](#)

Since then, Lisle Evelyn, the assistant director at VIFEMS, said response times have been less than 10 minutes in most situations, accounting for about a 50 percent reduction.

“It’s a perfect model, that’s what we’ve been saying for the past three years. This tiered response system is now playing out,” he declared.

On average, Mr. Evelyn said EMS responds to approximately 300 calls monthly in each district and 6,000 calls territory-wide each year.

In overwhelming situations, fire chiefs and supervisors are equipped to respond to calls.

“We have our EMS chiefs and supervisors assigned to quick response vehicles. Whenever there’s a surge of calls, these chiefs go out and they respond ... they are fully equipped and they can respond and stabilize while the ambulance is in route to transport,” he noted.

According to St. Croix EMS Chief Robert A. Bryan, the work put in by the Fire Department is a replica of what occurs in the United States.

“With the integration, I want the public to know that having a fire truck show up on scenes is the new norm here as it is the normal stateside,” he said.

With the integration system already reaping rewards, Mr. George, the VIFEMS director, announced the addition of seven new ambulances that will further beef up response.

Using a grant application through the Department of the Interior, the team was able to secure \$1.9 million dollars to purchase these new vehicles.

“We got a verbal commitment for \$1.9 million to buy seven new ambulances. As soon as that money is released, either January or February, we’ll go ahead and procure those ambulance for the territory,” he said.

Meanwhile, VIFEMS is actively hiring more certified mechanics to help maintain the old fleet of vehicles.

Mr. George also remains optimistic that a cohort of eight employees will soon receive certification to become Emergency Medical Responders (EMRs). Without the certification they are at risk of becoming unemployed with the department.

In addition, Mr. Evelyn will take up a suggestion by Senator Angel Bolques, chair of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety to seek to recruit returning veterans interested in working and are EMS certified to fill the vacancies within VIFEMS.