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Solve Forks emergency squad mess without billing taxpayers

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time to explore possible merger

Another financial crisis has hit the Forks Township Emergency Squad -- this time temporarily mothballing its emergency units and staff.

So far Forks residents have been kept in the dark about the details of the money troubles. What is known is that money problems are at the heart of the crisis and that township police are investigating. The hasty departure of two squad employees -- Director Cory Dailey and her husband, volunteer Mike Dailey -- may or may not be connected to the probe.

It's reassuring that Suburban EMS -- which is based in Palmer Township and also serves Wilson and West Easton -- has agreed to temporarily handle calls in Forks and Stockertown, also served by Forks. Suburban is stationing an ambulance and crew in Forks to help ensure prompt responses to emergency situations. Given the maze-like road connections linking Forks and Palmer, this is welcome news indeed.

Of course, the greater challenges are returning Forks EMS to service -- which the squad says should occur within 60 days -- and fixing the finances.

No one has said whether this latest challenge is linked to the squad's decision in 2002 to expel Medic 9 from the township and expand its own squad to include Advanced Life Support -- an ambitious and expensive endeavor. At the time, the cost estimate was \$600,000 over four years, a figure that left some in the community skeptical of success at a time when many squads were consolidating services or exploring cost-cutting mergers.

Whatever the cause of the financial troubles, the supervisors and squad must find a solution that won't overburden taxpayers, who contributed \$15,000 to the squad's operation last year. The majority of funding comes from billings and subscriptions.

If the Forks squad can't find ways to become self-supporting, perhaps it is time to explore the possibility of a partnership or merger with a neighboring squad.

The health and safety of residents are at stake and a permanent solution must be found soon.

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