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Forks squad halts operation

Emergency services provider under investigation by police; finances a concern.

By Joe Nixon Of The Morning Call

The Forks Township Emergency Squad suspended operations Tuesday night amid reports of financial problems, and township police confirmed an investigation involving the organization.

Emergency medical calls in the township are being handled in the interim by Suburban Emergency Medical Services, based in Palmer Township. Suburban Executive Director Barry Albertson Jr. said his group would have a crew and a vehicle operate out of the Forks squad's building on Sullivan Trail.

"We're going to do that in the short term until they come up with a plan of action," Albertson said Wednesday. In the meantime, Albertson said Suburban EMS will likely hire eight of Forks' 13 full-time staff "to make sure staffing levels are kept current."

Bill Carver, advanced life support coordinator for the Forks squad and one of its approximately 30 paid full- and part-time employees, said the police investigation is related to "financial matters."

Township Police Chief Gregory Dorney would not specify the nature of the probe, except to say that public safety was not affected. Dorney said police were contacted by the emergency squad on July 11 and predicted the investigation will be "time-intensive."

Carver said all the paid Forks staff is laid off.

Carver declined to go into detail about the organization's financial difficulties, or discuss the group's annual operating budget, but said he expected it will be back in business before long. "Our goal is to have an updated plan done and in place in 60 days," he said. "Most of it would be financial restructuring."

The Forks squad, incorporated in 1972, serves the township and neighboring Stockertown.

Carver confirmed that two Forks squad officials, director Cory Dailey and her husband, recent board president Mike Dailey, left the squad early last week, but he would not comment on the circumstances of their departure or whether it had anything to do with the group's finances or the police probe. The couple could not be reached Wednesday.

Easton attorney Gary Asteak said the Forks squad has consulted with him on and off over about the past year on a variety of matters, including finances, but said he didn't have details on the probe and was not at liberty to discuss it.

The Forks squad operates independently of township government, but gets an annual contribution from the township. This year, the township gave \$15,000. Most squad revenue comes from billings and subscriptions.

Forks Supervisor Bonnie Nicholas, chairwoman of the supervisors' Public Safety Committee, said the township was previously told squad bills were being paid, something she said turned out not to be the case. She did not want to say who made those representations but said they predated Carver's tenure. Nicholas said her committee had a regular meeting scheduled for next week with township police, fire and EMS and said she'll now try to get that session together sooner.

Nicholas also said she believed the squad was still trying to get a handle on its financial situation. She said municipal officials were not conducting their own investigation, and added the only probes were by the squad itself and township police.

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