

NEWS RELEASE

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SUFFOLK FIRE & RESCUE EMS HONORED BY TIDEWATER EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

SUFFOLK, VA (June 25, 2021) The Tidewater Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Council, Inc., celebrated their regional EMS awards on June 21, 2021. The Council presented honors to those individuals and agencies in Hampton Roads who were considered for their remarkable contributions to the EMS field. At the event, Suffolk Fire & Rescue EMS received the Outstanding EMS Agency Award.

“The Suffolk Department of Fire & Rescue delivers the highest level of pre-hospital emergency medical care to the citizens of Suffolk and our visitors each and every day” said Suffolk Fire & Rescue Chief Michael Barakey. “This award is for the 300 men and women of the Department who staff 8 Advance Life Support (ALS) medic units, 11 ALS Engine Companies, 3 ALS Ladder Companies and 1 ALS Heavy Rescue Company, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. In addition, our Operational Medical Director, Dr. Carl Wentzel III, our EMS Bureau Officers, and our training bureau work in concert to provide the best equipment, training and advanced medical techniques to our paramedics and Advanced-EMTs who serve our citizens.”

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Suffolk Fire & Rescue, like many other regional departments, faced one of its toughest challenges in the Spring of 2020. As the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic were taking hold on the City, a critical shortage of personal protective equipment would soon leave the men and women of Suffolk Fire & Rescue without a means to protect themselves from the ravages of this deadly disease.

The Agency realized the need for new and innovative methods of procuring this vital equipment. Suffolk Fire & Rescue asked for the assistance of the very citizens we serve. This request led to a heartfelt and humbling experience as the community answered the call by providing not just masks, gloves, and gowns; but also food, cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, and messages of love and appreciation.

The Department also assigned a procurement officer to relentlessly search for any available equipment across the nation that met the necessary standards for personal protection. Hours of phone calls and internet searches led to the procurement of thousands of pieces of personal protective equipment that was stockpiled and rapidly deployed to our Suffolk firefighters and paramedics when needed as our call volume and exposure risks increased.

Additionally, The Department partnered with local businesses and agencies to supply and even manufacture components of personal protective equipment that could not be procured by other means. An example was a unique request made to the Suffolk Public Library regarding the manufacture of face-shield components utilizing their 3D printer. Suffolk Fire & Rescue's innovative approach to creating difficult-to-source parts protected its personnel. It also reduced the overall national demand, placing Suffolk Fire & Rescue in the unique position to return the favor and expand its medical services to the City and its citizens.

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This expanded effort began with testing campaigns, whereby Suffolk firefighters and fire academy recruits assisted Western Tidewater Health District workers in providing on-site testing at drive-thru testing locations. Next, Suffolk Fire & Rescue created educational pamphlets with information regarding when to call 911 if a person exhibited possible COVID-related symptoms. These highly effective educational tools reduced public confusion and the need for unnecessary transports, thereby increasing hospital emergency room capacity. Suffolk then released videos via YouTube and other social media outlets to further educate the public on proper techniques for reducing transmission and infection rates.

Soon, the world collectively achieved one of its most outstanding humanitarian accomplishments in developing a series of vaccines in record time to fight the deadly pandemic. In response, Suffolk's firefighters and paramedics stepped up, in partnership with Meals on Wheels, to provide in-home vaccinations for those elderly citizens unable to reach a clinic. So highly effective was this effort that Suffolk continued providing vaccinators to local vaccine clinics when qualified vaccinators were in limited supply.

COVID-19 was, however, but one danger in the chaotic world that was 2020, and no agency can afford to neglect the "low frequency, high risk" events that come with a rapidly changing social landscape. As a leader in the region, Suffolk has taken the threat of active shooter/hostile events very seriously by providing every one of our firefighters and paramedics with a personal steel-plated body armor vest with which to protect themselves and "Active Threat" trauma treatment bags to aid in rapidly rendering care to victims of these tragic events.

These are but a few examples of Suffolk Fire & Rescue's commitment to its community and its providers, who never fail to answer the call with professionalism and compassion. Suffolk has shown that it stands by its motto, "Our Family Protecting Yours."

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Recipients of this year's regional awards will have the chance to compete for the prestigious 2021 Governor's EMS Awards, which will be announced later this year. Winners will be presented with a trophy and a certificate signed by the Governor.

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