

Information Report



To Chair and Members of the Social Services Committee

From Stephen Dewar, Chief and General Manager, Guelph-Wellington Paramedic Service

Date January 11, 2023

Subject **December Winter Storm Debrief Report**

Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

To provide an update to the Committee the operational impacts of the recent winter storm and to highlight the actions of Paramedics, Firefighters and County Staff in providing services under difficult circumstances.

Key Findings

Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service paramedics continued to respond to emergency calls during the storm, despite closed roads and extremely difficult conditions, and with the assistance and extraordinary efforts of local Firefighters and County staff.

Report

As Committee members are aware, a significant winter storm affected Wellington County and the City of Guelph over the holiday season. The storm began as rain early in the day on December 23, followed by a flash-freeze and the rain changed to snow with high winds, low visibility and slippery conditions.

By 7 pm on December 23 the conditions had deteriorated so that many of our paramedics working the night shift could not make it to the stations, and many of the paramedics working during the day could not safely make it home and opted to stay the night at the stations. In many cases and as circumstances allowed they continued to respond to emergency calls from their locations. Some paramedics who were unable to reach the County stations reported to stations in Guelph and signed onto spare ambulances there, and responded to calls as they could. The call volume remained moderately high on December 23rd with slip and fall injuries, motor vehicle collisions and medical emergencies linked to shoveling.

The storm continued through the night, and in the morning we had three of our paramedics call to report that they had gone off the road attempting to make it into the stations (and a fourth who was trying to make it home). The emergency call

volume continued to be moderately high with collisions and cars off the roadway. One notable collision in the Drayton area proved very difficult to reach with a reported five patients involved. Our responding ambulances became stuck in snow drifts across the roadway. Other ambulances from Waterloo Region and Perth County also attempted to respond to the scene and were also unable to traverse the roads. Ultimately the patients, fortunately with minor injuries, were transported by the Drayton Fire department to a location that our ambulances could reach.

As this was occurring, one of our ambulances that was stuck in a snow drift in Mapleton was struck head-on by a transport truck. Both paramedics were injured in the accident, but fortunately their injuries were relatively minor.

During the day on December 24, conditions continued to deteriorate. Most of the roadways were closed, and paramedics needed to traverse these closed roads to try to reach people in distress. Multiple ambulances became stuck and stranded in snow drifts or laneways. Eventually the tow truck services advised that they were no longer available as it was too dangerous for them to service requests for assistance. Paramedics continued to respond to emergency calls, in many cases making extra efforts to reach those patients.

By 7 pm virtually all roads in Wellington County had been closed as visibility was near zero. While most of the snowplows had been pulled from the roads, there were a few that remained in service and escorted our ambulances to calls, plowing the way. Paramedics were again unable to get home and were bunking down for their second night in the stations, this being Christmas Eve.

Throughout Christmas day and into Boxing Day, although the winds had died down and snow had subsided, roads remained closed and travel to emergency calls remained difficult. Although our response to some calls was delayed, our paramedics continued to make great efforts to reach people and provide their usual exceptional care.

Even with the exceptional efforts of our paramedic teams, the care that our residents received was only possible because of the assistance of the volunteer firefighters in each of our townships who helped access patients and provide care, and those snowplow operators who helped us reach the callers. We also had a great deal of help from local residents – farmers brought out their equipment when they saw us trying to reach their neighbours, and others assisted with shovels and snowblowers to help us access our patients.

Our paramedics have expressed their appreciation to the residents of Wellington County, not only for their help in reaching patients but in their support of our teams between calls as well.

Summary

The recent winter storm provided great challenges to the people of Wellington County, the Firefighters and County staff and to the Paramedics of GWPS. Exceptional efforts by everyone ensured that everyone who was in distress received care, and demonstrated the true nature of those who live and work in Wellington County.

Respectfully Submitted by:



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