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### When Seconds Count

In the month of August, approximately thirty emergency calls were made in St. Paul, Arkansas, and the surrounding areas. Those emergency calls ranged from trauma accidents to medical emergencies and fires. Yet, with the nearest hospital or fire station at least thirty minutes away, who answered the call to provide the care needed until an ambulance or other trained officials arrived? The St. Paul Volunteer Fire Department were the ones who answered the calls in August and are the ones who continue to do so today, showing that first responders are vital in small communities where training, equipment, and time are limited.

First of all, with the nearest medical professionals miles away, first responders with the proper knowledge and training are necessary for small communities. To become a certified first responder, a person must complete three required classes: Introduction to Fire Fighting, Personal Protection Equipment, and a 40-60 hour training class. The training class covers the general medical field. It teaches the signs, symptoms, and treatments of different medical emergencies. The other two required classes focus strictly on the components of a fire, different tactics to extinguish it, and the proper protection that should be worn when fighting fire. First responders also must have the knowledge of the geography of the land. By knowing the roads and landmarks, first responders are able to find the quickest route possible to the scene.

However, if the proper equipment is not available, the knowledge and training will have no effect. By having a fire department, small communities have access to the equipment needed

to respond properly to an emergency. Most local fire departments are stocked with fire trucks, blazers, and protection gear. With the general knowledge of how a fire works and the equipment needed to extinguish it, responders are able to act fast while still being safe. Likewise, first responders are also prepared for trauma calls by having simple tools like bandages, slings, and collars and more advanced devices such as an EKG machine, OB kits, and oxygen.

The proper equipment saves time and lives. Studies from *Firehouse Magazine* have shown that the chance of survival decreases between seven to ten percent for every minute that passes after a major accident. For this reason, it is vital that small communities have first responders that can act fast until higher-trained officials arrive. The number-one goal of responders is to keep the patient alive until EMS, Air Evac, or other assistance has arrived. Once EMS or other assistance arrives, the first responders provide them with the patient's medical history and any other information necessary. First responders may also be asked to perform certain tasks to save EMS time, such as taking vital signs, fetching medical equipment, assisting with procedures, or even directing traffic. First responders are the first on the scene to provide critical care in the first few minutes, whether a trauma accident or medical emergency.

The St. Paul Fire Department's assistant chief, Jeff Haire, stated, "I love this county we live in, and I'm more than willing to give back to it in any way. In this rural area we need people who can arrive fast and provide help even faster. The St. Paul Volunteer Fire Department makes this possible." Time and lives are saved because first responders are able to respond to emergencies in small communities with the training and equipment needed to provide the necessary care. By acting fast and being familiar with the geography in rural areas, first responders bridge the time between the 9-1-1 call and the arrival of further assistance, becoming the first line of defense.