



PRESS RELEASE

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BC Air Ambulance Services in the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality

FORT NELSON – The Northern Rockies Regional Municipality is a growing municipality of approximately 6,000 residents, the vast majority of which reside in and around the community of Fort Nelson. It is geographically separated by nearly 400 kilometres from the nearest urban centre, and it supports hundreds of thousands of annual travellers on Alaska Highway each year and thousands of workers in natural gas development camps. All residents and visitors within the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality expect and deserve to have their health care needs met when and wherever necessary. The Northern Rockies Regional Council is concerned that the current Air Ambulance system offered by the BC Ambulance Service (BCAS) is not meeting these needs.

Fort Nelson's geographic isolation makes air travel for attending local paramedics (even to the nearest centre) lengthy, removing them entirely from the community they are committed to serving. Additionally, attending on Medivacs reduces available local staffing to sometimes critical levels. Consequently, BC Ambulance's preferred model for air transfer is to send staffed aircraft from a larger centre (Vancouver, or Kamloops) in place of contracting private aircraft based in Fort Nelson and using local paramedics for the transfer (as was the practice in past years). The need for timely and reliable Air Ambulance services increases particularly when adequate local medical services are disrupted or unavailable.

Unfortunately, the length of time expended in following appropriate BC Ambulance dispatch protocols, plus the length time for an aircraft from Vancouver to arrive in Fort Nelson is often excessive. Especially for a patient who is in a life and limb state where minutes, may mean life or death. A particular concern with this arrangement is that 89% of all 2012 transfers for care from Fort Nelson General Hospital were transfers within Northern BC or Northern Alberta Hospitals, while only the remaining 11% of transfers were to facilities in the Vancouver area or other BC Hospitals. The Northern Rockies is not the only jurisdiction to have concerns about the current Air Ambulance service, a program which is currently under the review of the Auditor General.

"The Air Ambulance system that we currently have in place causes unacceptable levels of risk and financial cost for all those involved," stated Northern Rockies Acting Mayor Kim Eglinski. "Improvements are needed now!" Fort Nelson has formally expressed concerns in the past with the transportation standards and quality of service provided by BC Ambulance. Today's matters of Air Ambulance service are of priority to Mayor and Council and are the easiest to resolve.

The Northern Rockies is looking forward to working with the BC Ambulance Service to find solutions that can address everyone's concerns. To this end, an invitation has been sent today to the BCAS for a meeting to be held with the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality at BCAS's convenience.

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