



T-E ALARM

The State of Fire & Rescue Services in Tredyffrin and Easttown

A publication of the T-E Fire Companies Funding Coalition



Courtesy of Alex Lowy Photography LLC of Narberth



Four Local Fire Companies Unite to Find a Sustainable Funding Solution

T-E Fire Companies Funding Coalition Working With Townships Leaders

Concerned a lack of reliable funding and increased demand for emergency services threaten citizen safety, Tredyffrin and Easttown volunteer fire and rescue organizations united to find a solution.

T-E Fire Companies Funding Coalition, formed by the volunteer fire companies that serve Tredyffrin and Easttown townships, has been meeting with township supervisors and staff to both outline the problem and cooperatively solve it. Knowing that elected leaders need the community's support to act, the Coalition - comprised of the Berwyn, Paoli, Radnor, and Malvern fire companies - is also working hard to provide residents and business leaders with the facts. This publication is part of that effort.

"We love what we do, and we are devoted to it," said Fire Chief Joe Maguire of Radnor. "But our organizations are expected to respond to emergencies, recruit and retain volunteers, and maintain high training standards. Without sustainable funding from the townships our ability to keep pace with the ever-growing demands of providing fire/EMS services will be negatively impacted."

A summary of the situation:

- In 2014, Coalition fire companies responded to approximately 2,479 fire and rescue incidents. Coalition emergency medical services responded

to 8,204 medical emergencies and public assist calls.

- The new developments going up around our area, especially medical facilities and senior living complexes, increase demand for emergency services.
- Tredyffrin and Easttown townships currently provide only supplemental funding in an amount that is approved annually and not tied to any predictable formula. These funds account for less than 25 percent of the T-E fire companies' annual budgets.
- No portion of residents' tax bills is specifically dedicated to fund emergency services.

Township officials are responsible for ensuring their municipalities have sufficient fire and EMS services, and if the T-E fire companies currently in place could no longer provide fire and/or EMS services to either township, the municipalities would have to either contract out those services to another organization or run a fully paid fire department of its own. This would cost taxpayers

millions of dollars more each year than ensuring the continued success of the current system, which benefits from free, volunteer labor.

The Coalition seeks the right local solution to a nation-wide problem, one especially acute in our state, where most communities are served by volunteer departments and combination departments, such as ours, where our volunteer-run organizations pay the salaries of career firefighters, EMTs and paramedics who cover daytime hours when most of our volunteers are working.

"The Coalition's work has generated a lot of community and media attention on this important issue," said Paoli Fire Company Chief Andrea Testa. "Residents have expressed their support, and township leaders have begun working with us to solve the funding problem."

"Our joint fire company coalition, our townships' leaders, and residents all want our departments to remain vibrant and effective," said Fire Chief Eamon Brazunas of Berwyn. "We believe by working together, we can ensure they do."

Q&A

Here are the answers to the most common questions the Coalition has received about our efforts:

Q. How can fire companies in affluent areas such as Tredyffrin and Easttown face financial challenges?

A. Our fire companies face the same resource challenges as others throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. More than 97% of fire companies in the Commonwealth are classified as volunteer or mostly volunteer according to FEMA. We have limited options for revenue sources, and costs continue to outpace current funding levels from ambulance billing, donations, and township contributions.

Q. Aren't the fire companies fully funded by the townships? Don't my taxes pay for these emergency services?

A. No. The municipalities' contributions cover less than 25 percent of our budgets. There is no predictable funding formula. No portion of residents' or businesses' tax bills are dedicated to funding fire or ambulance services, nor is there a dedicated commercial fire tax or fee.

Q. Can't you just fundraise?

A. While we do hold fundraisers and seek donations from both residents and business owners, the participation rate is low –less than 30 percent of residents and less than 15 percent of businesses donate to the fire companies in our community.

Also, the costs of spending more time and effort fundraising would outweigh any benefits. Most of our volunteers have full-time jobs and families. They drop everything to respond to fires and medical emergencies. The average first responder donates hundreds of hours per year to training and responding to emergencies, and additional time to participate in fire prevention education and other community events.

Q. What will happen if a sustainable funding solution is not found?

A. Our fiscal conservatism has so far allowed us to maintain high service levels despite these challenges, but without a sustainable funding solution, careful budgeting soon will not be enough. If we could not afford to properly maintain a reliable vehicle fleet, provide essential safety gear for volunteers or hire enough paid personnel to cover the hours when volunteers are working, the safety of both residents and emergency responders would be jeopardized. Our fire companies would be forced to close.

If our predominantly volunteer fire companies were no longer serving this community, state law obligates the townships to provide fire and EMS services. Whether Tredyffrin and Easttown created their own, fully paid fire companies or contracted with a fire company based outside the townships, the cost to taxpayers would dwarf that of providing adequate, sustainable funding to the Berwyn, Paoli, Radnor and Malvern volunteer fire companies.

T-E Fire Companies' Coverage Area



Volunteer Spotlight: Ted Brawn

Before Berwyn Fire Company Captain and paramedic Ted Brawn was old enough for elementary school, the sound of the fire alarm sent him running to watch his father and the other Berwyn volunteer firefighters drive off to save lives and property.

At 16, he joined Berwyn as a junior firefighter, following in the boots of his dad, grandfather and great-grandfather. After high school, Ted served all over the world in the Navy, then joined the Reserves. Wanting to help his friends deployed to Iraq, Ted worked as a medical security contractor from 2004 to 2005.

A Berwyn Fire Co. volunteer for 25 years, Ted, 40, is a PennSTAR flight paramedic for the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. He treats the severely ill or injured as they are flown from scene to hospital or from smaller hospitals to HUP.

Ted and Colleen, his wife of 10 years, have two sons, Everett, 5, and Logan, 2. Ted is also

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— Ted Brawn

earning a bachelor's degree in public safety administration from Neumann University.

With all that's going on, why continue to volunteer?

"I feel that I have the responsibility to, based on my experience and training. And I want to set a good example for my boys about service to the community," Ted said. "I also enjoy the people at the firehouse. They are my family."

Personal Sacrifice: A Glimpse into a Volunteer's Life

A March Sunday: Ted works a 24-hour shift at PennSTAR's Atlantic City facility, during which two patients are treated and transported on two separate calls.

Monday, 8 a.m.: He comes home and sleeps.

11 a.m.: Colleen, a pediatric dietician for special needs children, heads to work. Ted gets up, gets lunch for their sons, and puts the boys down for their naps.

12:30 p.m.: Ted does homework.

3 p.m.: Time with the kids.

4:30 p.m.: Ted and the boys leave for Everett's basketball practice, where they meet Colleen.

6 p.m.: Ted heads to training where he and other Berwyn volunteers cut ventilation holes in the roof of a soon-to-be-demolished building. Such holes make a burning structure safer for firefighters by allowing smoke and gases to escape and letting light in.

9 p.m.: Just as the crew finishes cleaning up and putting gear and equipment away, a call comes in: House fire. Ted and the other volunteers gear up and get to the scene.

A heater caught fire. No one is hurt, and damage is confined to the heater. The volunteers cut off the electric and gas feeds. Once certain the family is safe, they return to the firehouse.

10 p.m.: The Berwyn crew again cleans up readies equipment for the next call.

11 p.m.: Ted gets home.



At the Heart of the Funding Crisis: Changes in EMS (Ambulance) Billing

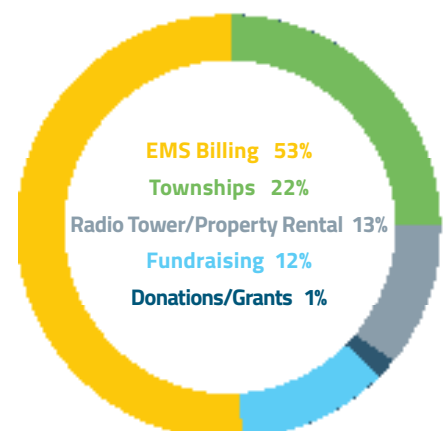
Currently, more than half of our fire departments' revenue comes from billing for ambulance services, as the projected 2016 revenue numbers for Berwyn Fire Company illustrate (see chart at right).

But this dependence on money received for treating and transporting patients puts our ability to serve Tredyffrin and Easttown communities at current levels at risk. Here's why:

- Medicare and insurance companies often do not send payments to us, but to the patient. Patients frequently do not send those payments to us.
- We bill for the cost of providing the service, but the reimbursement amounts set by Medicare and Medicaid don't cover the full cost. They also have decreased in recent years, and the

amounts to be set in the future are unpredictable.

- Medicare and insurance companies often do not send payments to us, but to the patient. Patients frequently do not send those payments to us.
- A state law that went into effect in January allows ambulance providers to be directly paid by insurance companies, but they have to opt into their networks and accept a reimbursement that absolutely does not cover all the cost of transport.
- EMS personnel from Berwyn, Paoli, Radnor, and Malvern fire companies serve everyone, regardless of their ability to pay.



Volunteer-based Fire and EMS Service is Far From Free



These costs must be covered for every firefighter, and are just a fraction of the costs of providing emergency services to Tredyffrin and Easttown townships. Our biggest expenses include:

- **APPARATUS:** An ambulance costs **\$190,000**, a pumper/rescue truck costs **\$725,000** and a firetruck with a 100-foot aerial ladder costs \$1.3 million. We take excellent care of our vehicles, but they eventually must be replaced. Paoli Fire Company currently needs to replace Tower 3 (about **\$1.3 million**) and Engine 3-5 (about **\$750,000**), Chief Andrea Testa reports.
- **FACILITIES:** As the area we serve grows, we need more vehicles, more space, and greater efficiencies. Frankly, some of our buildings have been too small and outdated for decades, including Berwyn's fire house. A new one will cost about **\$7 million**.
- **PAID PERSONNEL:** The compensation for paid firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics hired to cover shifts when volunteers are working is our largest annual expense – about 65 percent of the budget.

You can see why finding a sustainable funding solution for our predominantly volunteer fire companies is crucial. Consider that most of our labor is free – 70 percent of our EMTs and firefighters are volunteers! If the Berwyn, Paoli, Radnor and Malvern fire companies disbanded, all expenses to the left, plus the tremendous cost of replacing all our volunteers with paid personnel, would fall on taxpayers.

YOU Can Help Solve the Funding Problem and Keep Volunteer Fire and EMS Services Strong!

If you value the emergency services our fire companies provide and appreciate the tax dollars our volunteers save Tredyffrin and Easttown residents, be sure your voice is heard!

Let our township supervisors know that you support this collaboration and want them to continue to work with the T-E Fire Companies Funding Coalition to find a sustainable funding solution.

Email the Tredyffrin supervisors at BOSt@tredyffrin.org
 Email the Easttown Supervisors at easttown@easttown.org

