

COOPER CITY NEWS

A firefighter slept through a fatal emergency. New changes aim to not let it happen again.

By Lisa J. Huriash

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When firefighter-paramedics got the 911 call of a Cooper City man in distress, there was no immediate response from the

Broward Sheriff Fire Rescue confirmed Tuesday that one of the firefighter-paramedics slept through the emergency, delaying the truck from ever leaving the station. The fire station has a system that alerts the firefighters about emergencies, but it remains in question whether the system worked properly that night.

“Testing could not empirically establish that the fire station alerting system worked properly at the time the alert was sent. In addition, the agency was able to duplicate the pagers not alerting,” Fire Rescue spokesman Battalion Chief Michael B. Kane said.

Now among the Sheriff’s Office’s proposed changes: louder ring tones in the bunkrooms, and a “Personnel Accountability” check to ensure that the firefighters who must respond to a call show up.

On Aug. 17, a 57-year-old Cooper City man went into cardiac arrest while in bed asleep, according to records. His wife began CPR, as she called 911 for help about 11:34 p.m.

According to documents, the alarm was sounded to the station at 11:34 p.m. and 36 seconds.

No answer.

The alarm tolled again at 11:37 p.m. and 16 seconds.

Nothing.

The alarm went off a third time, at 11:37 p.m. and 38 seconds.

No response.

Now dispatchers tried to send out another rescue unit instead. At 11:37 p.m. and 52 seconds, records show the initial rescue truck was “not responding,” and so dispatchers called for another unit instead that was based out of the same fire station.

According to records, at 11:41 p.m. law enforcement is “requesting fire rescue step it up.”

The second rescue truck arrived at 11:47 p.m.

The man was taken to Memorial West Hospital, and died at 1:38 a.m., according to records.

The man's house is about one mile from the fire station, said Cooper City Commissioner Ryan Shrouder.

"They should be there fairly quick. To have them not respond ... it's fairly disheartening. Public safety is our main function of government."

[\[RELATED: A dying baby, a home in flames and a father in distress: Broward 911 callers cry out for help and no one answers the phones \]](#)

Tracy Jackson, director of the county's Office of Regional Communications and Technology, said the county conducted repeated testing and could not find anything wrong with the equipment.

"We want to make sure all the stuff is working all the time," he said, and a communications employee even responded on site to check the equipment.

"All the technological components ... including the transmission of data worked and functioned as designed," he said.

Shrouder said he had to find out what happened from the city manager, who was demanding information from Fire Rescue.

"I would really like to understand and be able to explain what happened — if it was not an equipment failure then what occurred," City Manager Joseph Napoli wrote fire officials in an undated email provided by City Hall. Napoli wrote that that "there does not appear to be any final conclusion on what occurred."

The ultimate verbal response, according to Shrouder: Fire Rescue said an officer "didn't wake up."

Shrouder said there were three people who were supposed to be on that truck: two paramedics who did wake up, and go to the truck to head out to the call, but when their officer wasn't there, Fire Rescue "said they went back to their bunkroom aka they went back to bed. Why didn't the other two wake him up?"

Kane confirmed Tuesday the officer slept through the emergency.

According to a sheriff's memo, "both firefighters believed that [the other rescue unit] was handling the call in place of Rescue 28 so they went back inside the station."

Kane said policy has now been immediately changed to initiate a "PAR" (Personnel Accountability Report) check if all crew members are not assembled within 60 seconds during the day and 90 seconds during the night. "If all firefighters do not assemble within the specified time, the assembled crew is to identify where that member is," he said.

The Sheriff's fire union president called the incident a "horrific death."

Union President and Battalion Chief Jason Smith, who is a firefighter out of Port Everglades, said the firefighter-paramedics involved are very upset: "It stays with you awhile." "The complete station as a whole" worry about not hearing a call, he said, referring to all three shifts at the station off Stirling Road.

He said the tones, if they worked, did not wake up the officer, but woke up the other two firefighters who were going to the call.

When they heard on their radios the second rescue truck was being sent, they assumed they were canceled from the call. They had no idea they had been previously sent.

"They go back to their sleeping quarters," he said.

And, Smith said, the two head officers, both lieutenants in charge of two separate rescue units, share the same bunkroom. He said neither officers heard the first set of alarms while they were sleeping, so he said he still believes there was a

technological breakdown: “Technology isn’t flawless.”



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There is no partition in the bunkroom, Smith said, and if the tone went off properly, either of the officers would wake up — like they both did when the second rescue truck was finally called.

As a precaution, the agency ordered new pagers, which have already arrived, with a louder tone.

Shrouder said whether the man’s death could have had a different outcome is a big question.

Attempts by the South Florida Sun Sentinel to reach the man’s wife were unsuccessful.

According to records, deputies conducted CPR and relied on an [automatic external defibrillator](#), which “analyzed the patient’s heart rhythm and advised not to shock.” The deputies continued to do CPR until fire rescue arrived and took over the patient’s care.

Paramedics are important, Shrouder said. “The reality is the whole idea about fire rescue is about time,” he said. “If we’re in trouble with them responding or waking up, to me it’s critical.”

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