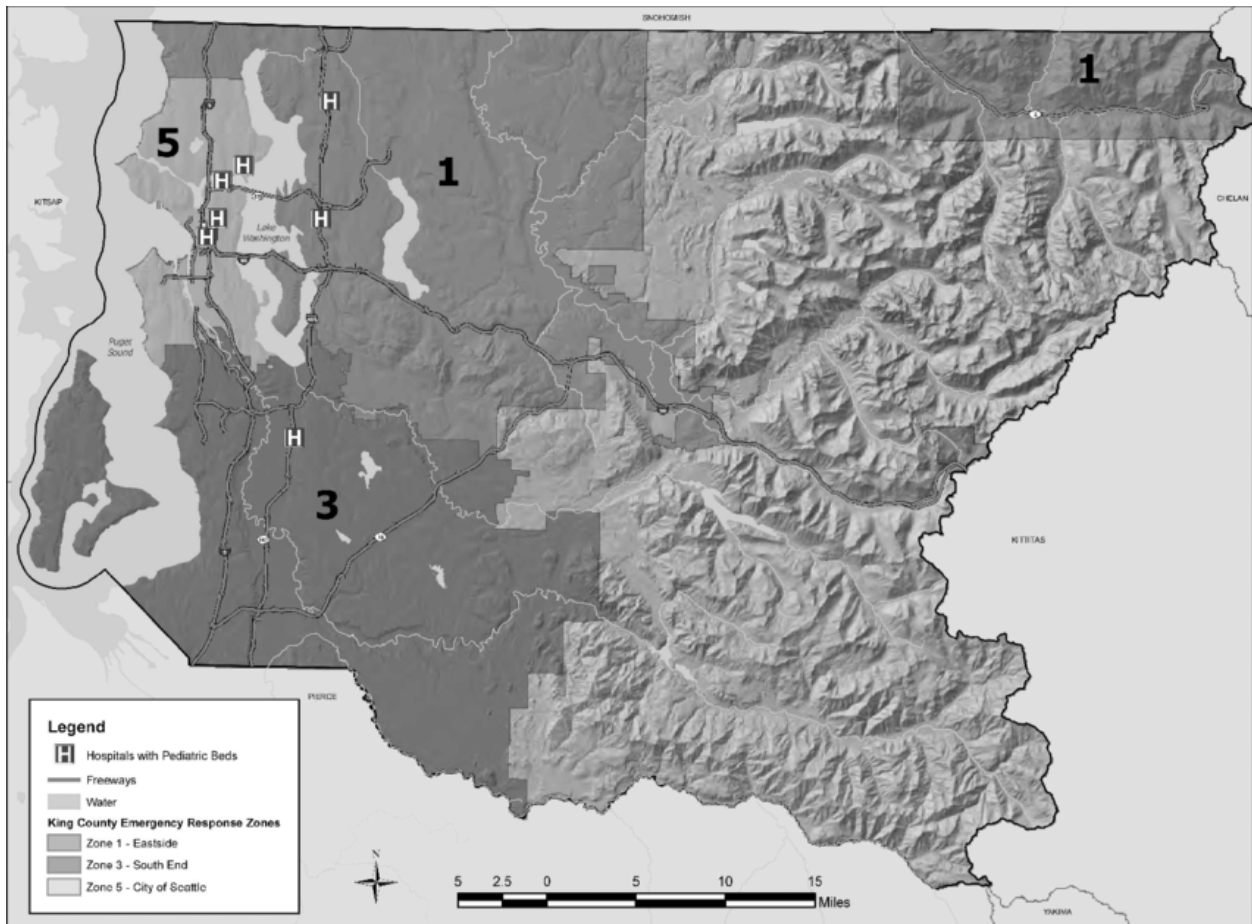


## Overview of Mutual and Automatic Aid

Staff received questions from community members and Councilmembers regarding Mutual Aid and Automatic Aid in the fire service, including how it works on Mercer Island. The following information provides a general overview of both.

### Emergency Management Zones

King County is divided into three local emergency response zones that are designated Zone 1, 3, and 5. Mercer Island is in Zone 1. These zones have been established for emergency 911 call routing and dispatch of first responders. Eastside Fire & Rescue is also located in Zone 1. See map below.



### Dispatch

Mercer Island Fire is dispatched by the NORCOM dispatch center who provides emergency 911 service covering the area from Shoreline to Bellevue, which is referred to as Zone 1.

### What happens when there are multiple 911 calls at the same time?

At times there are 911 responses of a significant nature such as a residential or commercial fire, large accident on I-90 with multiple patients, or technical rescue events that require additional emergency

response from outside agencies. This type of assistance falls within two primary categories, automatic aid and mutual aid, both further described below.

When a large incident occurs and units need to “Move Up” to cover a jurisdiction for an extended period, NORCOM calls the Zone 1 coordinators. The Zone 1 coordinators are comprised of four Zone 1 Deputy Chiefs that assume on duty status for two weeks at a time. These Deputies evaluate coverage and work in coordination with NORCOM to identify units from around the zones to “Move Up” to provide effective coverage during the emergency.

### **Automatic Aid**

Automatic aid is the tool used to manage, coordinate, and share resources within a singular dispatch center or zone (e.g., NORCOM or Zone 1). Most agencies within Zone 1 have entered into an Interlocal Agreement governing the sharing of resources to address fire and emergency response services in that Zone. This approach ensures efficient coordination of services, minimizes response delays, utilizes the same radio frequencies, and eliminates manual dispatch.

The dispatch process for Automatic Aid occurs through pre-planned response plans and Automated Vehicle Location (AVL), which tracks all emergency units via GPS, choosing the closest to handle the emergency. Routinely, Mercer Island provides services off the island involving medical, traffic collisions, working fires, and command to Zone 1 agencies. In return, Zone 1 agencies respond to assist Mercer Island when multiple calls occur on island. Those agencies that respond on the island are primarily Bellevue and Eastside Fire & Rescue.

### **Recent Examples of Automatic Aid**

About two years ago, there was a technical rescue that occurred on Mercer Island due to a collapsed trench and an individual that was trapped inside the trench. Mercer Island firefighters were on scene first and relayed additional needs to NORCOM. Automatic aid resources were provided by Eastside Fire & Rescue, Redmond, and Kirkland. This was considered an Automatic Aid response as all the units came from within Zone 1 and were dispatched by NORCOM.

Mercer Island also routinely provides off-island assistance to other Zone 1 agencies under the provisions of Automatic Aid. For example, in March 2023, Zone 1 agencies dispatched by NORCOM, including Mercer Island fire units, responded to a working fire in Bellevue (2900 block of 136<sup>th</sup> PI SE). Mercer Island units were off island for 2.5 hours working alongside other Zone 1 agencies to bring this fire under control.

On April 14, 2023, a ladder truck from Eastside Fire & Rescue, along with units from Bellevue responded to Mercer Island for a working fire. In this example, three agencies were involved to handle this alarm, and all were dispatched by NORCOM.

### **Mutual Aid**

Mutual aid is used to describe emergency responses that occur between dispatch centers. Mutual aid is governed by the King County Mutual Assistance and Interlocal Agreement.

For example, NORCOM requesting additional units from the Valley Communication Center (Zone 3) which covers the south end of King County from Renton to Auburn, out east to Enumclaw and west to Vashon Island, would constitute a Mutual Aid request for service.

The process involves NORCOM calling the other dispatch center and requesting resources. If resources are not available, NORCOM will pursue alternative options through another dispatch center.

### **Recent Examples of Mutual Aid**

On February 15, 2022, Mercer Island units responded to a hazardous materials response at the 3000 block of 80<sup>th</sup> Ave SE on Mercer Island. Both Automatic Aid and Mutual Aid were required. NORCOM contacted Seattle Fire Dispatch, and Seattle Fire Hazmat responded to mitigate this dangerous situation along with units from Bellevue.

On March 27, 2023, Mercer Island Fire responded to I-5 and I-90 (in Seattle) to handle an encampment fire under I-5. Mercer Island units routinely respond to calls in this area of Seattle, including motor vehicle accidents.

### **Why are different agencies at my house on a medical call?**

Mercer Island Fire provides the same level of Basic Life Support (BLS) service as the rest of the King County fire departments. Mercer Island firefighters all maintain an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification, and this will not change under a regional fire services model. Mercer Island firefighters may respond on either an aid unit or an Engine company and begin BLS care. If the condition requires a higher level of medical training, assistance from one of five Advanced Life Support (ALS) services in King County will be utilized.

Medic One is funded by the Medic One Levy that is voted on every six years by the voters of King County. Mercer Island is primarily served by the Bellevue Medic program along with support from the City of Seattle. The other agencies in King County that provide ALS response are the Shoreline Medic Program, Northeast King County Medic One (Redmond Fire), and South King County Medic One.

The difference between BLS and ALS is all firefighters certify as a Basic EMT after a 5-week EMT academy and then are required to take continuing education training monthly and recertifying with the state every three years. They focus on CPR, airway management, defibrillation, blood control, orthopedic, trauma, and more.

The City's ALS partners (Paramedics) graduate from a 10 month to 1 year training program through Harborview/UW medicine. Paramedics are trained to a higher level of EMS allowing them the ability to introduce I.V. therapy, medications including cardiac and breathing meds, whole blood transfusions in the field, cardioversion, and intubation. They operate as an extension of the hospital emergency department in the field. They operate under the King County Medical Director's license.