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## Rotterdam EMS asked to expand its coverage

### Group informs town it needs financial help

By Justin Mason (Contact)  
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**PRINCETOWN** With only one ambulance crew on the road per shift, the Rotterdam Emergency Medical Service is now being asked to expand coverage farther into the western edge of Princetown.

Previously, the area was covered by the Duanesburg Volunteer Ambulance Service, which has its station about 4 miles away from the Princetown border. But because of a reorganization effort and a continuing volunteer shortage, the company is no longer able to meet its obligation to the town, explained Charles Leoni, chairman of DVAC's Board of Directors.

"At this time, we find ourselves unable to do this," he told members of Princetown's Town Board Tuesday.

The announcement came as a shock to officials from REMS, who had initially attended the meeting to request a financial contribution from Princetown. Representing the Rotterdam corps, Terry Hannigan asked the board for an estimated \$30-per-household contribution in the corps' 2009 budget to aid REMS, which has had its own problems lately.

"Unfortunately, it's a pay-to-play system," he told the board. "It's a situation where there has to be money coming from either the municipalities or the citizenry."

There are roughly 1,072 properties in REMS' original coverage area, with another 72 parcels that were previously served by DVAC. Princetown Supervisor Nick Maura said he intends to discuss the REMS proposal with Rotterdam and then reach a decision with the board sometime in the coming months.

"Obviously we need an ambulance service," he said following Tuesday's meeting.

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REMS, which was created by a 2003 merger between the White Eagle and Rotterdam ambulance companies, has struggled financially. The merger effectively transformed the ambulance corps from a predominantly volunteer organization to a service with an all-paid staff.

Joe Vanderwerker, the president of REMS' board, said the merger was done under the assumption that the town of Rotterdam would eventually fund the service through either an annual contribution or a taxing district. He said the original concept of the merger was to have two ambulances covering the town 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

But after the merger was approved, the town funding didn't follow. Hannigan said REMS was also forced to abandon its volunteer staff because of insurance premiums.

"Had they [funded REMS] in 2004, it wouldn't be an issue," he said. "Unfortunately, we've been held hostage by that Town Board's inability to do what they said they would do."

As a result, REMS now has only one crew per shift scheduled to serve Rotterdam, with a secondary crew on call. During DVAC's reorganization during the spring, REM's coverage area intermittently expanded to include all of Princetown and most of Duanesburg.

Having the single ambulance means REMS can sometimes be taken out of service for nearly two hours if an emergency requires a crew to take a patient to Albany Medical Center and a secondary crew can't be summoned. Without crews from Rotterdam, the area relies on the private Mohawk Ambulance Service, which dispatches from the city of Schenectady.

Vanderwerker said REMS remains the only one in the county not subsidized by a municipality. He said REMS has the equipment ready for a second ambulance, but can't hire more staff until it becomes subsidized.

"It's doable with [the equipment] we have right now, but we need assistance."

Meanwhile, Vanderwerker said REMS is slowly pulling itself out of debt to the state and other creditors, such as Rotterdam. He said the company is also in litigation with the Internal Revenue Service to clear more than \$250,000 worth of federal payroll tax liens that arose sometime after REMS switched to a paid staff.

The Rotterdam Town Board on Wednesday allocated \$3,000 for the town auditor to review REMS' finances. Supervisor Steve Tommasone said the audit is to develop a fiscal report on the corps that can be shared with the other towns interested in subsidizing the company.

Tommasone said the audit should be completed by the end of September, at which time he plans to press his Town Board to make a decision. He said that decision should be aimed at bringing "a long-term resolution" to an issue that affects thousands of people living in the western area of the county.

"This is a huge issue," he said. "This is very big for the community."

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