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Ambulance driver had texted on run

Albany fire official was told of incident by paramedic who was alleged witness

By [CAROL DeMARE](#), Staff writer

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NISKAYUNA — The driver of the ambulance that ran into a snowbank earlier this week had been cautioned recently by an Albany firefighter about text messaging while driving, an official said Thursday.



Deputy Albany Fire Chief Frank Nerney said his firefighter noticed that the Mohawk Ambulance Service driver in Tuesday's Niskayuna accident was the same driver the firefighter saw texting while she was transporting a patient to an Albany hospital.

Nerney said he called a Mohawk manager "and told him of the incident. I don't know what Mohawk did. I

reported it to them, and they were investigating. I don't know what the investigation revealed."

Tom Nardacci, spokesman for Mohawk Ambulance, said Thursday the driver, Joanna McKinley, is no longer employed by the company. He declined to discuss it further, saying it was a personnel matter. He also cited the ongoing police investigation in which the company was cooperating.

McKinley, 29, of Waterford, was ticketed for following too closely after the accident on Balltown Road near Union

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Street, Niskayuna police spokesman Sgt. Daniel McManus said. The ambulance was on a non-emergency trip, transporting a woman patient, he said.

The vehicle swerved to the right to avoid a car ahead and ended up against a snowback, McManus said.

Following too closely would be a violation of Mohawk's safety policies, Nardacci said.

Nerney, who is in charge of emergency medical services for the Albany Fire Department, said a paramedic recognized McKinley's name under a photo of the ambulance crash that appeared in Wednesday's Times Union and notified him of what had happened in Albany.

The firefighter/paramedic "had an incident previously where he noticed this driver text messaging and mentioned to her he didn't want her to do it again, and she said she would comply," Nerney said.

The paramedic was in the ambulance with a patient. Apparently, a lieutenant firefighter/paramedic was following in one of the department's rescue trucks. The firefighter told him what he had seen in the ambulance and the lieutenant advised him to tell the driver not to text while driving. Mohawk ambulance contracts with the city to transport patients.

Albany Fire Department does not allow any use of cell phones, for talking or texting, while the department members are driving emergency apparatus, Nerney said.


Nardacci said that while state law exempts emergency vehicles from cell phone laws, "Mohawk ambulance has a stringent written policy against the use of cell phones which would include texting except in the use of an emergency or when they have to call a physician at the hospital."

Mohawk had no record of Nerney's advisory, he said. McKinley could not be reached for comment.

Carol DeMare can be reached at 454-5431 or by e-mail at cdemare@timesunion.com.

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