

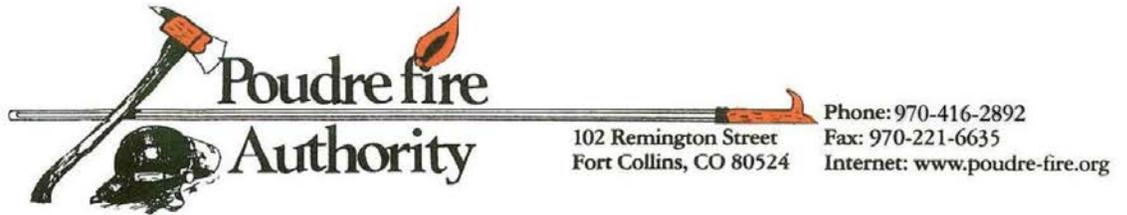
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Poudre Fire Authority pilots innovative, roving medical program

You may soon spot a PFA-branded SUV, driving through Old Town Fort Collins or parked in the lot at Harmony Road and Lemay Avenue, and wonder what it's all about. Let us introduce Poudre Fire Authority's new Roving Alternative Medical, or RAM, unit.

Jan. 2 marked the start of the low-cost, 14-week pilot program, intended to improve emergency services by deploying this quick-response vehicle to lower acuity medical calls – think of an older adult falling at a senior care home or a slip on the ice at a school playground. Dispatching the RAM unit allows PFA's engine and truck crews to be available in their service areas more often to respond to more serious medical calls, as well as fires, motor vehicle accidents and other emergencies.

"Personally, I hope it's going to be an innovative idea to better serve the community," said PFA's Emergency Medical Services Chief Ryan McLean, who estimates the program will cost \$5,000.

Contrary to popular misconception, firefighters – not just our PVH/UCHealth ambulance partners -- respond to all medical calls. In 2016, PFA was dispatched to more than 21,094 incidents, roughly 17,734 (84 percent) of which were medical in nature. Community growth has driven the agency's total number of incidents up 35.7 percent over the past five years.

A captain and firefighter firefighters will operate the RAM unit, from 2 p.m. to 2 a.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. The idea for the unit came about roughly a year ago.

The RAM unit is equipped with the same complement of emergency medical equipment carried by all PFA apparatus. It's important to note that an ambulance will still be dispatched to every call to which the RAM unit responds. In the event the call is more serious in nature a PFA engine or truck (the vehicles bearing tall ladders) will also respond, ensuring enough personnel will be on scene. Examples include a person having a heart attack, having difficulty breathing or being unconscious.

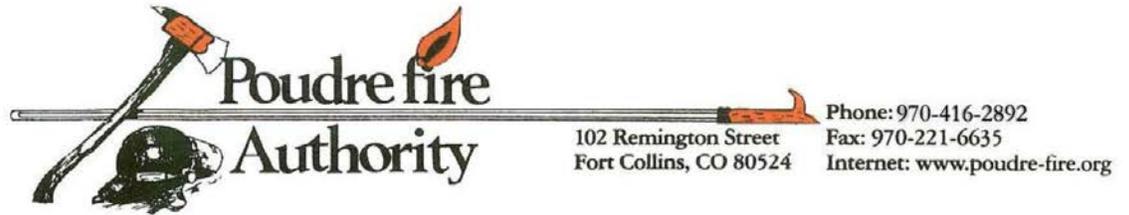
Over the 14 weeks, the RAM unit will respond to calls and track data. An influx of calls in the Old Town area – helping to stabilize an intoxicated person – might mean the vehicle spends more time there the next day. Or RAM firefighters may find that they spend the greater part of their shift helping provide needed resources to people who call 911 for help multiple times a day or week.

Throughout the pilot, PFA will also look at the program's effects on responders. Crews at some fire stations, particularly those in Old Town and south Fort Collins, are hit hardest, often helping injured, sick, elderly or

intoxicated patients dozens of times each 24-hour shift. Firefighters who work at high-call-volume stations often suffer from fatigue and increased stress.

This can lead to an increase in injuries, career burnout and long-term health problems. The hope

is that the RAM unit can improve their working conditions; thus, improving the overall services provided to those within PFA's 235-square-mile service area.



Chief McLean and others emphasized that the RAM unit isn't intended to compete with the excellent service provided by PFA's ambulance partners at PVH/UCHealth EMS. Rather, it's to apply a model – proven effective at other fire departments in Colorado and nationwide – and see if it benefits both first responders and the people we serve.

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