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Fewer ambulances, paramedics

RICHMOND—The provincial government's latest move to "fix" ambulance services in the Lower Mainland is to cut the number of ambulances and paramedics. According to the BC Ambulance Service, the plan is to eliminate 14 ambulances while slashing the equivalent of 36 fulltime jobs. The details were revealed during a meeting with CUPE 873, Ambulance Paramedics of BC.

Union representatives call it a giant step backwards that will put even more pressure on the already overloaded emergency response system in Greater Vancouver. CUPE 873 president John Strohmaier says that despite Health Services Minister Kevin Falcon's promises to "fix the broken system," this latest move just doesn't add up. "Fewer ambulances and fewer paramedics dealing with a growing population and an estimated 29,000 additional calls in the next year equals longer wait times and more backlogs in the health system. Patients will pay the price of these cuts."

A comprehensive joint study by the BC Ambulance Service and the union carried out in 2008 called for more ambulances just to try to keep up with growing call volumes.

"There is no doubt that cutting the ambulance fleet will mean longer wait times," said Strohmaier, "and when seconds mean the difference between life and death longer wait times can be fatal. It's that simple."

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