

Gloucester County Regionalized EMS Municipal Frequently Asked Questions

What is Gloucester County Emergency Medical Service (GCEMS)?

Gloucester County EMS was created by the Gloucester County Board of Chosen Freeholders to provide lifesaving emergency medical services to any municipality within the County of Gloucester requesting service. The Board of Chosen Freeholders began this regional service on September 30, 2007, after significant research, in response to lengthening response times experienced in numerous municipalities. GCEMS has been hailed by state officials as a model for delivery of high-quality EMS services. GCEMS has been honored as the Public EMS Agency of the Year by the New Jersey Office of Emergency Services

How many municipalities have joined the EMS regional service?

Nineteen municipalities currently have joined the GCEMS family: Clayton, East Greenwich, Elk, Franklin, Glassboro, Greenwich, Harrison, Logan, Mantua, National Park, Newfield, Paulsboro, Pitman, Swedesboro, West Deptford, Woolwich, South Harrison, Wenonah, and the City of Woodbury. Additional County of Gloucester municipalities are welcome to request service from GCEMS.

What is the current staffing level at Gloucester County EMS?

At this time, the GCEMS is made up of over 190 skilled pre-hospital providers that respond from 13 stations throughout the GCEMS service area. A minimum of 13 ambulances are staffed around the clock. Additional units are staffed during peak call volume hours each day. Additional ambulances are staffed as needed for community events, foul weather or periods of increased call volume. "On the street" Supervisors are also on-duty, 24 hours per day.

Will patients be billed for service, will the GCEMS provide services to those without insurance and will the County profit from these payments?

The County seeks insurance reimbursement wherever possible to offset operating costs which in turn saves the taxpayer money. The County will not make a profit from insurance payments for Emergency Medical Services. Insurance payments support the operating costs of the GCEMS; however, insurance payments do not cover all costs. **The monies collected from insurance payments will be considered full payment and no outstanding costs will be billed to county residents.** GCEMS will provide services to patients regardless of whether or not the individual has health insurance. We will, however, seek full payment from non-residents.

How is Gloucester County EMS performing and how has regionalizing improved EMS for those municipalities that join?

The performance of the regionalized system is evaluated on a call by call basis. Ongoing performance reviews confirm that calls for service are answered with an average response time under 6 minutes. These statistics show that the regional system operates well under the 8 minute, 59 second "Gold Standard" response time goal adopted by the Board of Chosen Freeholders.

At this time, some non-participating municipalities do not have EMTs covering emergency calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and struggle to provide timely weekday coverage. Prior to implementing regionalized EMS, the County assessed non-responses of the various EMS agencies in the County. A "non-response" is when a squad is contacted for an emergency and the squad does not respond to the call. Whenever this occurs, the next nearest and available squad is dispatched per existing mutual aid agreements. **This process wastes precious, life-saving time during an emergency.**

Significant cost savings have been realized by the participating municipalities, saving local tax dollars. Participating municipalities save an estimated \$3.6 million dollars annually in avoided costs.

Most important of all, a full-time, paid service that is "in station 24-7" has improved response times and provided more reliability to the system. Adequate response time is a key factor in determining whether an EMS provider is meeting its obligation to the public. The Gloucester County Board of Chosen Freeholders has committed GCEMS to meeting or exceeding an average response time of 8 minute, 59 seconds, the recognized "Gold Standard" for Basic Life Support service providers.

What steps are involved with a municipality joining the regionalized system?

County staff is available by request to present a program overview should a town or other public organization wish to learn more about GCEMS. Staff is also available for individual consultation with a municipal mayor, administrator, or other interested parties representing a municipality. For more details, the municipality should contact the Gloucester County Administrator's office by calling (856) 853-3275. In a nutshell, below is a list of the basic steps to joining GCEMS:

- During November of each year, the County of Gloucester sends a letter to all non-participating municipalities offering the opportunity to join in the upcoming year.
- A municipality wishing to join the regionalized system must first adopt a resolution during the month of January authorizing the execution of a Letter of Intent. The municipal governing body must then adopt a resolution designating GCEMS as the BLS provider, as well as any leases for stations or ambulances. GCEMS typically begins service around April 1st.

Who oversees the operation of Gloucester County EMS?

The Gloucester County Board of Chosen Freeholders oversees the operation of GCEMS, a division of the Gloucester County Department of Emergency Response. The day-to-day operation of GCEMS is directed by the GCEMS Chief with the assistance of the administrative and operational staff. GCEMS also contracts with a Board Certified Emergency Medicine Physician(s) as a Medical Director who is responsible for all clinical aspects of the operation and continuous quality assurance.

Are Gloucester County EMS ambulances available to cover community events?

Yes, we welcome these opportunities to stand-by community events in case an emergency arises and to provide public education and outreach. For further information or to schedule a GCEMS crew, contact GCEMS at (856) 307-7120. Adequate notice is required to assure scheduling of crews.

What are response areas?

Response areas are defined by the call volume, geography, and population of participating municipalities. In general, a response area may cover a portion of a municipality, a single municipality or it may cover several neighboring municipalities. During peak times, crews will be staged at locations that will allow them to respond quickly to 9-1-1 calls. Additional crews may be added in times of adverse weather and high call volume. Using "dynamic staging", ambulances are being placed in high demand areas at high demand times. Future plans will be guided by the "Gold Standard" of medical care adopted by the Board of Chosen Freeholders.

Where do the ambulances and stations come from?

The County has and will continue to seek to lease, for a nominal amount, existing, licensable ambulances and stations from the municipalities and current EMS providers that join the regional service per the terms set forth in the inter-local agreement. Going forward, the county will assume all maintenance costs for ambulances and stations leased from the municipality. Every year, the County purchases new ambulances and equipment as needed.

How is GCEMS funded?

EMS is an essential, life-saving service that should be provided just like other public safety services. Gloucester County citizens travel throughout the county and should receive equal access to pre-hospital medical care regardless of where they are located in their time of need. For this reason as well as the fact that mutual aid will be provided to those towns that do not join, broad based support is a fair mechanism for supporting a regionalized EMS system. The County relies on several funding and capital sources:

- Existing ambulance building, ambulances, and other assets are leased from the municipalities and current EMS providers;
- Insurance payments offset approximately one-half of the cost of GCEMS. The balance is funded from general revenues of the county budget.

Will EMS regionalization increase County expenditures?

Yes, EMS regionalization will increase County expenditures, but these costs are expected to be significantly offset by revenue from insurance billing. EMS regionalization will deliver this life-saving, essential service in a more efficient and effective way. Regionalization will also shift the financial burden from municipal budgets to the County, sharing the financial cost of this essential regional service in a more equitable way. The 19 municipalities that joined reported budgetary savings of \$3.6 million each year.

Has the County considered subsidizing existing squads to increase staff and ambulances to cover areas?

Current state law strictly limits the amount local governments may give to volunteer ambulance squads, so additional subsidies are not the answer. Also, regionalizing EMS is a more effective and cost-efficient way to address both financial and service problems facing ambulance services throughout Gloucester County.

Is there a role for volunteers in GCEMS?

Yes, volunteers are welcome and encouraged to be a part of GCEMS. Volunteer opportunities will include supplementing shift coverage and extra assignments such as athletic events and task force participation. College internship opportunities are also available. GCEMS will provide for any emergency medical service related training needs of volunteers.

Will employees currently employed by a municipality or volunteers in the field be hired by the County?

The county will give preference to qualified EMT's, both career and volunteers, subject to the below listed requirements.

Candidates for county employment should be aware that County job positions are subject to civil service application and testing. Candidates will also be required to demonstrate basic EMS proficiency through testing.

Two municipalities in Gloucester County have career EMTs that have tested with Civil Service; all others would need to be tested. EMTs employed by a municipality may be able to move to County employment through an inter-local transfer. Municipal leadership is encouraged to contact Gloucester County Administrator's Office at (856) 853-3275 to learn more about how regionalization could affect their employees.

Once employed, the County will seek to station employees in response areas with which they are most familiar; however, operational needs may prevail.

Will GCEMS ambulances stand by at working fires?

GCEMS does provide recovery and other BLS services at working fires.

Will GCEMS do wellness visits to senior centers, outreach to schools and other public education activities such as CPR, Vial of Life, etc.?

Spreading the word about Emergency Medical Services and promoting a presence within community will be a responsibility and priority of GCEMS. As time allows, GCEMS will offer these kinds of community services.

Will GCEMS participate in task force activities and assignments?

GCEMS supports task force activities and assignments at the County and State levels. GCEMS's participation in regional EMS organizations and drills enhances GCEMS's ability to respond to major incidents.

How do I call a GCEMS ambulance?

As with any public safety emergency, dial 9-1-1 from any telephone and follow the instructions given to you by the trained Public Safety Telecommunicator.

What hospital are patients taken to?

The medical condition of the patient will often dictate the hospital that they are transported to. Specific conditions such as a traumatic injury may require treatment and transportation to specialized hospitals such as a trauma center. As much as possible, GCEMS will attempt to honor our patients' requests when selecting the destination hospital.

Why do I see Gloucester County EMS ambulances parked at several locations around the county?

Gloucester County EMS utilizes a dynamic deployment plan to position ambulances at strategic locations to better respond to emergencies. Ambulances are scheduled and positioned based on historical call data and current call volume. During traditionally busier times of the day, more ambulances are on duty. This process is similar to how law enforcement schedules and positions their officers. From time-to-time ambulances are re-positioned in an effort to provide a better response times to the entire GCEMS coverage area. Occasionally, you may see a GCEMS ambulance staged at a street corner or adjacent to a highway awaiting the next call.

If I, or one of my constituents, need a CPR or First Aid class, where should we go?

Gloucester County EMS offers many opportunities for both. Check the calendar of events on the County website for upcoming scheduled classes or give us a call at the office 856-307-7120.

An elderly family member must use an ambulance to get to her appointment at the doctor's office, but it's not an emergency. What should I do?

In order to assure that we are always available to the residents of Gloucester County when they are experiencing an emergency, Gloucester County EMS only provides emergency treatment and transportation. Non-emergency transports are handled by private ambulance services or other medical or paratransit service providers. The County Department of Human Services can provide information on transportation for non-emergency medical visits. This information can be obtained by calling county transportation specialists at 686-8355. If you simply need assistance getting your family member into your car, or back into your home, give us a call at the non-emergency number 856-589-0911 and we will gladly provide that assistance at any hour of the day or night.

A disabled family member has slipped out of his/her wheelchair and isn't hurt, but I am unable to lift her back up off the floor. I don't know where to turn for help, what should I do?

Gloucester County EMS crews are on-duty around the clock and can provide assistance at any time for this type of situation. Simply dial 9-1-1 and explain to the emergency dispatcher the situation. We will gladly send a GCEMS crew over to provide immediate help.

How do Gloucester County EMS staff members maintain their proficiency and medical knowledge?

Cooper Emergency Medicine and Trauma physicians serve as GCEMS Medical Directors and provide clinical training directly to GCEMS personnel. Cooper Emergency Medicine and Trauma doctors and paramedics also work directly with Chief Lovell in quality assurance, insuring GCEMS patients receive the best pre-hospital care possible.

Gloucester County EMS hosts numerous continuing clinical education classes throughout the year. These free classes are also offered to any public safety provider affiliated with any public safety agency within the County of Gloucester. Well respected Emergency Medicine physicians

are recruited on a monthly basis to provide care review and current "Hot Topics" in prehospital medicine. GCEMS has been recognized for its annual Clinical Education Symposium, cohosted with Rowan University EMS as well as its innovative "Dialog with a Doc" discussion groups. These and similar educational programs are attended by providers throughout the tristate area, thus improving the quality of EMS care within Gloucester County and throughout the surrounding region.

In 2010, GCEMS received recognition from the NJ Department of Health as EMS Public Agency of the Year. GCEMS leadership and clinical staff have received similar individual recognition. Chief Andy Lovell serves as a member of the NJ Health Department EMS Advisory Council and is the EMS representative on the NJ Department of Health Trauma Advisory Council.