FDNY's siren-ara to EMTs

By GINGER ADAMS OTIS

The Fire Department has booted the city's volunteer ambulance companies from its emergency 911 system, The Post has learned.

The volunteer ambulances "are no longer required," a high-ranking EMS chief told dispatchers in an e-mail last month.

About 35 community-run corps of volunteer EMTs dot the city, mostly in Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island, staffing a fleet of about 50 ambulances.

The volunteers respond to an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 emergency calls annually, said Ryan Gunning, head of the state volunteer ambulance association.

"If it weren't for us, patient wait times would often be much longer. We get called in when the FDNY doesn't have an ambulance to send. This change comes at the patient's expense," said Alan Wolfe, president of the Forest Hills Volunteer Corps.

The community medics, many of whom are off-duty city emergency medical technicians, carry the same state certification as city medics. Volunteer ambulances also are insured, the leaders said.

Even so, the volunteer units "will not be logged into the EMS Computer Aided Dispatch [CAD] system during routine operations," EMS Deputy Chief Tony Napoli wrote in an e-mail obtained by The Post.

That changes a policy the FDNY put in place on Jan. 5, 2001, when it issued an order allowing volunteer ambulances to participate in the 911 system.

All the "vollie" ambulances responded on 9/11. Forest Hills medic Richard Pearlman, 19, died when the Twin Towers collapsed.

Last summer, at the height of the swine-flu panic, the FDNY asked the vollie-run units for help, Wolfe said.

FDNY spokesman Jim Long said the department and the volunteer units have collaborated at times. But he claimed the vollies are never assigned calls through the official FDNY CAD system that handles 911 emergencies.

"At one point, they were able to log into the system, but they just sat there. Nothing ever happened. They never answered a call," Long said. "It was decided about six months ago to cut them off."

The volunteers called Long's claim "ludicrous," and said the FDNY was playing semantics.

"It's a complete lie. They call us all the time. If not through their system, they call us on the mutual-aid radio system or just call us directly," said Gunning, who also heads the Glendale Volunteer crew.

The vollies have their supporters at City Hall.

"These volunteer ambulance groups provide a vital service, and any city action that might harm them would soon be the subject of a City Council hearing," said Councilman Peter Vallone Jr.

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