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For Immediate Release:

Enhancing Communications between Municipal and Non-Municipal Ambulances During Mass Casualty Incidents

Today, Mayor Michael Nutter announced a new milestone in achieving interoperable communications between the City's municipal and non-municipal ambulances. Mayor Michael Nutter was joined by Deputy Mayor for Public Safety Everett A. Gillison, Fire Commissioner Lloyd Ayers, Philadelphia Regional Emergency Medical Services Chief George A. Butts, Jr., Acting Deputy Managing Director for Emergency Management Liam O'Keefe, and Burholme Emergency Medical Service Managing Director Timothy C. Hinchcliff at a ceremony marking this partnership and enhanced level of preparedness in the event of a mass casualty incident in Philadelphia.

"As the second largest city on the East Coast, Philadelphia must be well prepared to handle mass casualties in the event of a major emergency," said Mayor Nutter. "The Philadelphia Fire Department's EMS system is one of the finest in our nation. However during a mass casualty incident that could deplete our systems' resources, it is imperative that we plan for surge ambulances to support these efforts."

Philadelphia is known as America's Birthplace and is home to some of our Nation's most important icons and institutions. "Our city frequently hosts major, large-scale events such as the annual Independence Day activities on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, the 2009 Phillies Playoff and World Series Games and Championship Parade and the 2010 Philadelphia Flyers Playoff and Stanley Cup Games," noted Deputy Mayor Gillison. "Having an enhanced EMS system in place that can respond, if needed, when thousands of people are visiting our City, is an essential part of our public safety efforts."

Medical response to public safety emergencies in Philadelphia, through the 9-1-1 emergency system, is routinely provided by municipal-owned ambulances operated by the Philadelphia Fire Department. However in circumstances where an unusually large number of casualties require emergency medical services (EMS) or a healthcare facility

requires evacuation, the Fire Department may need to call upon the emergency assistance of non-municipal ambulance services to provide ambulances and EMS professionals.

Fire Commissioner Ayers noted that approximately 50 municipal ambulances are on duty in the city daily, depending upon demand. In addition, approximately 50 non-municipal ambulance companies, with 300 ambulances, operate in Philadelphia. “Incorporating non-municipal ambulances into our EMS surge response strategy and ensuring that we have a system in place to communicate critical information to them in the event of a major incident will assist us in our mission of saving lives.”

During the past two years, Philadelphia Regional Emergency Medical Services Chief George Butts oversaw the coordination and implementation of this interoperability project which consisted primarily of two major components - a technical solution and a programmatic solution.

The technical solution connected the non-municipal radios to the Fire Communications Center. The City conducted a recent test of the system and the Fire Communications Center successfully communicated with several non-municipal providers, achieving a level of interoperability that did not previously exist in Philadelphia.

The programmatic solution involved revising the Statement of Participation that non-municipal ambulances are required to sign in order to operate in the City. Among the many changes, the Statement of Participation requires that all ambulances have a radio capable of communicating with Philadelphia’s Fire Communications Center.

“This enhanced level of communications will provide us with much needed resources should an incident occur resulting in injuries or illness that may exceed the City’s EMS and hospital capabilities,” noted Acting Deputy Managing Director for Emergency Management O’Keefe. “We commend the Philadelphia Regional EMS staff for their role in finding a viable solution that now allows municipal and non-municipal ambulances to communicate with each other.”

In order to participate as surge ambulances, non-municipal ambulance services agree to furnish EMS personnel and resources that may be necessary to provide emergency medical service at an incident of such magnitude that it is likely to exceed the capacity of the Philadelphia Fire Department emergency medical response. As part of the agreement, non-municipal ambulance services will only respond to a request for services through the established communications channels, which is the Philadelphia Fire Communications Center.

All emergency response efforts will be performed in accordance with the National Incident Management System, existing local and regional Mass Casualty Incident plans, local and regional healthcare facility evacuation plans, as well as other relevant laws, codes, and ordinances affecting patient transport and care. The non-municipal ambulance services also participate in joint planning, training and exercises.

In addition, non-municipal ambulance services will maintain operational VHS radio equipment to communicate with the Philadelphia Fire Communications Center. Philadelphia Regional Emergency Medical Services offered rebates to participating ambulance companies to assist with the purchase of the compatible VHS radios. The

rebates, in the amount of \$400 per radio, covered half the cost of the radio. Because of the rebates, nearly 20 non-municipal ambulance companies with 80 vehicles are now equipped with the radios. The rebates were made available through a grant to Philadelphia Regional Emergency Medical Services from the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

“We are all here to serve the people of Philadelphia and this project is the first significant step in developing an ongoing public/ private partnership for Emergency Medical Services support within our region,” said Timothy Hinchcliff. “The non-municipal EMS agencies of Philadelphia look forward to continuing this collaboration with our municipal partners in areas of response as well as our joint planning and training efforts. Today's event marks an unprecedented new chapter in the cooperation and deployment of the non-municipal EMS assets that our great city has to offer.”

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