

# EDMONDS FIRE DEPARTMENT

## Emergency Medical Services Transport User Fees

### Frequently Asked Questions

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#### Have a Question About a Medical Transport Bill?

Call a Customer Service Rep  
At Systems Design Northwest  
800-585-5242                      360-692-5242  
FAX 360-698-4968  
Email: [info@SystemsDesignEMS.com](mailto:info@SystemsDesignEMS.com)  
Web: [www.SystemsDesignEMS.com](http://www.SystemsDesignEMS.com)

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#### Is there a charge for EMS transport services provided by Edmonds Fire Department personnel?

Yes, if the patient is transported in an Edmonds Aid or Paramedic Unit to a medical facility such as a hospital.

#### When did EMS transport user fees begin?

January 1, 2009.

#### Were there EMS transport fees before January 1, 2009?

Yes. For a few months in 1997, EMS transport fees were charged when the City was part of Medic Seven. Those fees ended in November 1997.

#### Why is an EMS transport user fee being charged now?

To help cover the costs of providing emergency medical services to the community. Combined with funds from the voter-approved EMS levy, transport fees help move emergency medical services toward the goal of being self-supporting, with less reliance on the regular property tax.

#### Are there other cities in Snohomish County that charge EMS transport user fees?

Yes. We understand that every public provider of EMS transport in Snohomish County charges some form of fee. It is estimated that approximately 80 percent of public EMS providers nationwide charge transport fees.

## What process did the City use to adopt EMS transport user fees?

<u>Date (2008)</u>	<u>Activity</u>
February 1 and August 18	Discussion at City Council Retreats
September 12	Fire Administration sent Council a White Paper titled <i>EMS Transport User Fees</i> , which included a virtual turnkey transport fee program based on successful programs used throughout Snohomish County
October 16	Fire Administration sent Council the <i>Financial Assistance Policy</i>
September 30 October 7, 21, and 28 November 3 and 18	Presentations, workshops, and/or public hearings held in Council chambers on 2009-2010 budget
November 18	City Council voted to institute EMS transport fees

## Is the ability to pay a pre-condition for calling 9-1-1, receiving emergency care, or being transported by Fire Department personnel to the closest, appropriate medical facility for the patient's condition?

No. The ability to pay for any emergency medical service is not a pre-condition for service. Transport by Fire Department personnel is the only service that triggers the transport fee.

## Can a patient refuse transport by Fire Department personnel?

Yes. Patients that refuse are asked to sign a *Refusal of Treatment And/Or Transportation Form*. When a patient is mentally impaired and/or poses a threat to themselves or others, law enforcement becomes involved and may place the person in protective custody, which may involve transport to the closest, appropriate medical facility for the patient's condition.

## Will a patient receive a bill from the City if they are not transported by the Fire Department?

No. Patients that are medically evaluated but not transported by Fire Department personnel do not receive a bill for the services provided at the emergency scene.

## What are the EMS transport user fees?

There are three different fees based on the level of service provided, and a charge per loaded mile (patient on board).

Basic Life Support (BLS), Emergency – \$475. Transport by ambulance and the provision of medically necessary supplies and services, including BLS ambulance services as defined by the state (Chapter 18.73 RCW). The ambulance must be staffed by an individual who is qualified in accordance with state and local laws as an emergency medical technician basic (EMT Basic). Basic emergency medical technicians perform non-invasive, basic emergency treatment skills.

Advanced Life Support (ALS), Level 1 – \$700. Transport by ambulance and provision of medically necessary supplies and services including provision of an ALS assessment or at least one ALS intervention. Advanced life support services are medical treatment skills beyond the scope of EMTs as defined in Chapter 18.71 RCW.

Advanced Life Support (ALS) Level 2 – \$800. Transport by ambulance and provision of medically necessary supplies and services including (1) at least three separate administrations of one or more medication by intravenous push / bolus or by continuous infusion (excluding crystalloid fluids); or (2) ambulance transport and the provision of at least one of the following ALS Level 2 procedures: manual defibrillation/cardio conversion; endotracheal intubation; central venous line; cardiac pacing; chest decompression; surgical airway or intraosseous line.

Mileage Assessment per Loaded Mile – \$15.50. One-way mileage transport by ambulance with the patient on board using a map grid system from the emergency scene to the closest, appropriate medical facility for the patient’s condition. NOTE: transports other than to the closest, appropriate medical facility for the patient’s condition may result in costs not covered by the insurance provider(s).

**What is meant by “medical emergency?”**

The emergent and acute onset of a symptom or symptoms, including severe pain, that would lead a prudent layperson acting responsibly to believe that a health condition exists that requires immediate medical attention, if failure to provide medical attention would result in serious impairment to bodily functions and serious dysfunction to a bodily organ or part, or would place the person’s health in serious jeopardy.

**What is meant by “medically necessary?”**

Medically necessary means the health care services or supplies a health care provider exercising prudent judgment would provide to a person for the purpose of assessing, evaluating, diagnosing and/or treating an illness, injury or disease or its symptoms that are:

- In accordance with generally accepted standards of medical practice;
- Clinically appropriate in terms of type, frequency, extent, site and duration, and considered effective for the person’s illness, injury or disease; and
- Not primarily for the convenience of the person, physician, or other health care provider, and not more costly than an alternative service or sequence of services, or supply at least as likely to produce equivalent therapeutic or diagnostic results as to the diagnosis or treatment of the person’s illness, injury or disease.

**Who is billed for EMS transport?**

The patient transported. In most cases, however, the transported patient’s insurance company(s) – Medicaid, Medicare, and most other private insurance policies (health, auto, and/or homeowners) – will pay all or part of the charge.

**Are charges for City residents, employees of businesses located in Edmonds, City Employees, and residents of Fire/EMS contract jurisdictions (Esperance and Woodway) handled differently from other patients who use EMS transport services?**

Yes. Once the insurance company(s) for City residents pays the claim under conditions of the individual policy(s), the outstanding balance is assumed to have been paid by the EMS

levy. Charges for employees of businesses located in Edmonds, City employees, and residents of Fire/EMS contract jurisdictions (Esperance and Woodway) receive the same balance bill waiver as City residents.

### **Are patients asked to sign a form at the time of service?**

Yes. Patients are asked to complete and sign the *City of Edmonds Ambulance Billing Authorization and Privacy Acknowledgment Form* which includes:

1. Release authorizing the patient's insurance company(s) to be billed (Section I – Patient Signature), or a release signed by the patient's authorized representative if the patient is physically or mentally incapable of signing (Section II - Authorized Representative Signature).
2. Verification that the patient received the legally required Edmonds Fire Department *Notice of Privacy Practices*.
3. *Balance Bill Waiver Affidavit* with checkboxes indicating whether the patient resides in Edmonds, Woodway or Esperance, and/or is employed by a business in Edmonds.

### **What if a person refuses to sign anything but wants to be transported or needs to be medically transported immediately?**

The patient will be transported immediately. The ability to pay is never a condition of service; however, in order to maintain a fair and equitable system for all users and the taxpayers, the transported patient will receive a bill.

### **What if the patient is not able to provide the information at that time?**

Emergency personnel will attempt to get the information at the hospital, or the patient will be asked by Systems Design to provide the billing information at a later date. Patients can contact Systems Design at the phone numbers listed on the first and last pages of the FAQ.

### **What if a patient transported does not have health insurance, or cannot afford to pay for the service?**

The ability to pay is never a condition of service; however, in order to maintain a fair and equitable system for all users and the taxpayers, the City will make every effort to accommodate those who wish to pay out of pocket, on an installment plan, or apply for relief through the Financial Assistance Policy.

Many auto and homeowner insurance policies provide some form of medical coverage. Patients should review their various insurance policies to verify the limits of coverage under each policy.

### **What if the insurance company refuses to cover the transport user fee?**

Systems Design will help the patient demonstrate to the insurance company(s) that the transport was a medical necessity. Ultimately, however, the patient is responsible for the bill.

### **Does the City have a financial assistance policy?**

Yes. Financial assistance – also known as a charity policy, indigent policy, and/or debt forgiveness policy – information is available at the Fire Department ([www.edmondsfire.org](http://www.edmondsfire.org))

and City [www.ci.edmonds.wa.us](http://www.ci.edmonds.wa.us)) websites. Users may learn more about the financial assistance policy and request an application by contacting Systems Design Northwest, Inc – at 800-585-5242, 360-692-5242, or [info@SystemsDesignEMS.com](mailto:info@SystemsDesignEMS.com).

**Who is responsible for determining if a patient qualifies for financial assistance?**

After Systems Design receives the application and assembles pertinent information, Fire Department representatives determine if the applicant qualifies. The financial assistance policy is modeled on those used by local area hospitals to include Federal Poverty Guidelines updated annually. Financial assistance may take several forms – payment plan, adjusted balance, or debt forgiveness.

The City recognizes that some people may have no financial means to pay an EMS transport fee and may also lack the social network and/or family necessary to help them complete paperwork required to apply for financial assistance. With this limited population in mind, the City realizes there may be individual cases where no financial assistance application is completed. When this situation occurs, the EMS transport fee may be written off and considered uncollectible.

**Is there a finance charge associated with EMS transport user fee bills?**

No.

**Will unpaid EMS transport bills be turned over to the City collection agency?**

On rare occasion, an unpaid transport bill will be forwarded to the collection agency as the City does with other uncollected debts. The decision to forward an unpaid bill to collections is made by the Finance Director and Fire Department representatives.

**Do EMS transport user fees cause health insurance premiums to increase?**

Nationally, EMS transport costs represent less than one percent of health-care expenditures. Other local governments that have implemented a revenue-recovery program for transport fees have reported no evidence that EMS billing increases health insurance premiums. Health insurance premiums continue to rise regardless of whether or not a community bills for EMS transports. Prescription-drug coverage, litigation, medical technology improvements, and depressed insurance company investment returns result in escalating health insurance premium costs.

**Who does a patient call with questions about billing, insurance coverage, or to receive a financial assistance policy application?**

Systems Design Northwest, Inc.  
PO Box 3510  
Silverdale WA 98383-3510  
Customer Service:  
Fax:  
Email:  
Web Site:

800-585-5242, 360-692-5242  
360-698-4968  
[info@SystemsDesignEMS.com](mailto:info@SystemsDesignEMS.com)  
[www.SystemsDesignEMS.com](http://www.SystemsDesignEMS.com)

**Want to contact the Edmonds Fire Department?**

Business Phone

425-771-0215

Fire Chief Thomas J. Tomberg

425-771-0214, [tomberg@ci.edmonds.wa.us](mailto:tomberg@ci.edmonds.wa.us)

Assistant Fire Chief Mark Correia

425-771-0216, [correia@ci.edmonds.wa.us](mailto:correia@ci.edmonds.wa.us)