

CUPE COMMUNIQUÉ

Canadian Union of Public Employees **CUPE.ca**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CUPE calls for the provincial government to properly support rural emergency in Sun Country

WEYBURN:

CUPE Local 5999 is calling for the next provincial government to properly support rural emergency medical response services in Sun Country Health Region.

"There are chronic staff shortages that can lead to shutdowns of EMS on a continual basis in multiple communities in the Sun Country region. Rural communities can be without EMS for as much as 10 days a month," said Sandra Seitz, president of CUPE Local 5999. "This means that the already short-staffed communities are covering larger areas in emergencies, and response times are longer, due to those periods of wider coverage."

The heart of the issue

"Patient care is the most important part of our job as EMS and health care providers. This is our prime directive. The present issues have a direct impact on our patients, whether it be in response time due to staff shortages or the quality of care available. These issues are directly and negatively affecting patient health," said Michael Harlos, an EMS worker in Redvers.

EMS is a vital service and should be treated as such. EMS workers should be paid according to their level of training and not have to have a full time occupation on the side to support themselves and their families.

"There are many EMS workers in the Sun Country district working between 4,000 and 7,000 on-call hours per year, compared to 1,944 average hours for full time work," said Cindy Thompson of Maryfield EMS.

"These working conditions make it hard to recruit new staff and retain the staff we have," said Harlos. "Workers are paid very little for our time on call. On top of this, only the hours where we respond to a call count towards benefits, holiday accruals, or pensionable earnings."

"EMS workers are the first response in pre-hospital care. They play an essential role in our health care system, and our provincial government needs to be supporting this work," said Seitz. "CUPE is calling for the next government to invest in our emergency medical services so every community has access to timely care."

CUPE represents 13,000 health care workers in the province of Saskatchewan, including workers in Sun Country Health Region.

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