



# County of Accomack Department of Public Safety


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Fire & Rescue ~ Emergency Management

**Date:** May 1, 2008

**To:** Board of Supervisors  
Steven B. Miner, County Administrator

**From:** Jason Loftus, Director 

**Subject:** Department of Public Safety Historical Overview

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*Fire Medic Wayne Lewis*  
*Administrative Assistant Fredia Ward*  
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## History of Career Fire Medic Staffing in Accomack County

Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) were first employed by Accomack County in the late 1970's. Mr. Harold Johnston, Assistant County Administrator, and Mr. Norris Beasley, Chairman of the Accomack County Highway Safety Commission discussed the employment issue with the Board of Supervisors. [1977 Minutes](#). The first employees were hired under the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) and then as full-time classified employees when CETA expired in late 1979. The Board members discussed the decrease in CETA funds at length and expressed concern for the individuals and county programs involved. [1979 Minutes](#). During budget preparations in March of 1979, the Honorable Mr. C. D. Marsh presented a resolution to the County Administrator for regarding an EMT for the Onancock Volunteer Fire Department. [1979 Minutes](#). Support of the citizens of the county for the paid EMTs was evident through the petitions presented, the straw votes taken, and the people who appeared before the Board and spoke on behalf of

employing paid EMTs. [1979 Minutes](#), [1979 Minutes](#), [1979 Minutes 0503](#), [1977 Minutes 1006](#), [1979 Minutes 1121](#).

Onancock, Onley, Melfa and Wachapreague stations were the first to have career staff. Eight personnel were hired in the fall of 1977 with one of those remaining with the County today.

The EMTs were hired at the request of various fire/rescue stations due to a lack of available daytime volunteers. [1979 Minutes 0503](#). The requests of the various fire/rescue stations occurred over a period of time as the individual stations identified daytime staffing shortages. [1979 Minutes 0627](#). These requests by the fire/rescue stations resulted in unofficial straw votes which indicated widespread public support for special taxes to support this service. [1979 Minutes 0919](#). The Board of Supervisors subsequently established fire and rescue tax districts and paid EMT positions. [1979 Minutes 1121](#).

In July 1982, Parksley added two career staff to increase the total number to ten. In July 1992, Oak Hall added two, Saxis added one and Greenbackville added one. There was much discussion as to whether Saxis and Greenbackville needed one person or two people. [1992 Minutes 041428](#) .

The Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution at its November 19, 1986 meeting formally recognizing the establishment of a volunteer rescue squad by the Bloxom Volunteer Fire Company. [1986 Minutes 1119](#). In 1993, Bloxom requested and was granted two personnel. [1993 Minutes 0526](#)

The Board of Supervisors hired an individual to oversee the career staff in May of 1997. This person was given the title of Director of Public Safety after much discussion as

to what the title should be. The volunteer companies were adamantly against this person being called a “chief”. The Accomack County Department of Public Safety was formally dedicated on December 8, 1998 during a ceremony at the Accomack County Airport.

The Honorable C.D. Fleming stated that Saxis and Greenbackville were the only stations within the EMS districts which did not have two paid EMTs on duty and the citizens needed the protection. Mr. Fleming referenced letters from the Town of Saxis and Saxis Volunteer Fire Company noting the need for additional advanced life support personnel and also regulations mandated by the state Department of Emergency Medical Services. [2000 Minutes 0322](#). In March of 2001 a motion was made to reduce the increased staffing to maintain tax rates. [2001 Minutes](#)

As the volume of calls kept increasing and the number of available volunteers decreased, the stations in Lee District approached the Dept. of Public Safety in regards to increasing the amount of daily coverage. Lee District proposed a plan where the county would staff the Lee District stations around the clock 24/7. [Lee District Newspaper Clips](#) This proposal was implemented in September 2000 with four persons assigned to Onancock and four persons assigned to Onley.

Other stations within the county sought to be more creative in solving their response issues. Parksley and Bloxom proposed a split shift between the two companies. [2001 Minutes](#) There was much discussion as to the viability of a split shift. [2001 Minutes 0516](#) Oak Hall Rescue proposed two additional personnel with funding being provided by Oak Hall Rescue through the use of ambulance billing. [2006 Minutes 0118](#). Later that same

year, Parksley proposed a similar package with a few strategic differences. [2006 Minutes](#) As of March 2008, Oak Hall and Parksley are on the same 24 hour coverage system as Onancock and Onley.

Funding for the career staff has always been somewhat haphazard. Reference the following links from the various board minutes from the last 31 years. [1977 Minutes](#) [1979 Minutes](#) [1980 Minutes](#) [1984 Minutes](#) [1992 Minutes](#) [1996 Minutes](#) [1999 Minutes](#) [2001 Minutes](#) [2004 Minutes](#) Finally, in May of 2005, the Board approved a flat rate tax concept to go to Public Hearing. [2005 Board Minutes March](#)

Various studies were conducted over the years evaluating fire and EMS in Accomack County. Virginia Department of Fire Programs in 1986 [1986 Fire Study.pdf](#) , Tidewater Emergency Medical Services Council (TEMS) in 1989 [1989 TEMS Study.pdf](#) and again in 1992 [1992 TEMS Study.pdf](#), the EMS Study Committee in 1995, and All Hands Consulting study completed in 2007. <http://www.acdps.net/UserFiles/File/Risk.pdf>, <http://www.acdps.net/UserFiles/File/Capability.pdf>, <http://www.acdps.net/UserFiles/File/Strategic.pdf>