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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 11, 2006; 10:00 AM

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**** NEWS RELEASE ** ** NEWS RELEASE ****

THE FACTS ABOUT EMERGENCY AMBULANCE SERVICES IN SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY

Background to the Dispute Between the County of San Joaquin and the City of Stockton

The County of San Joaquin, through its County Emergency Medical Services (“EMS”) Agency is authorized by the California Emergency Medical Services System and the Prehospital Emergency Medical Care Personnel Act (“EMS Act”) to coordinate and manage the County’s emergency medical services system. The intent of the EMS Act was to eliminate the conflicts between various local governments and agencies in the provision of emergency medical services while recognizing the important contribution each local public entity provides. The cities of Stockton, Lodi, and Manteca are violating the California EMS Act by refusing to cooperate with the County EMS Agency’s new emergency ambulance system. This is exactly the type of self-interest activity that the California Legislature sought to correct with the EMS Act.

HERE ARE TEN FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT EMERGENCY AMBULANCE SERVICES IN THE COUNTY OF SAN JOAQUIN:

1. On January 17, 2006, following full competitive bidding and public hearing processes, the County of San Joaquin entered into a contract with American Medical Response West (“AMR”) to provide exclusive emergency ambulance services in zones that include the greater Stockton, Lodi, and Tracy areas. The award of this contract was an important part of the County’s plan to improve emergency ambulance response times and improve the overall quality of the EMS system for all residents of the County.

2. AMR is one of the largest ambulance companies in the United States and provides quality emergency ambulance services in many counties in California. For example, AMR is the exclusive emergency ambulance provider in Stanislaus County and has handled emergency medical dispatch from its Stanislaus dispatch center, now located in Salida, for many years. Different ambulance providers serve the other areas of San Joaquin County including Escalon Community Ambulance Service (greater Escalon area), Manteca District Ambulance Service (greater Manteca-Lathrop area), and Ripon Consolidated Fire Protection District (greater Ripon area). All of these additional providers utilize the AMR LIFECOM dispatch center in Salida to dispatch their ambulances. Although the ambulances are dispatched from Salida, all ambulances are, of course, strategically located in their respective communities so that they can respond quickly.
3. The City of Stockton, with a third party private ambulance company as a partner, was one of the bidders for the recently awarded exclusive emergency ambulance contract. Following the competitive bid process mandated by State law, the City was not selected as the successful bidder. The City no longer provides emergency ambulance service and is not legally authorized to dictate or control any part of the countywide emergency ambulance system. In addition, the Stockton Fire Department dispatch center does not meet the current dispatching standards set by the County EMS Agency for emergency ambulance providers. Therefore, Stockton Fire Department is currently operating outside the medical control of the County EMS Agency by continuing to provide emergency medical dispatch service.
4. The County of San Joaquin was forced to sue the cities of Stockton, Lodi, and Manteca because of their refusal to transfer live 911 emergency medical telephone calls to the AMR LIFECOM dispatch center. The County of San Joaquin is not attempting to take over the dispatch of fire units from these cities. Fire departments throughout the County remain free to dispatch their units as they please, subject to existing laws and regulations.
5. The result of the refusal by Stockton, Lodi, and Manteca to cooperate with the new emergency ambulance system is that emergency ambulance dispatch in the cities of Stockton, Lodi, and Manteca is delayed. In addition, the Stockton Fire Department is the only fire department in the County that sends a paramedic to every medical emergency in Stockton, while AMR sends a paramedic to every medical emergency in the greater Stockton, Lodi, and Tracy areas. Therefore, it is the City of Stockton's actions that delay the arrival of paramedic-level assistance to medical emergencies outside the city limits of Stockton, including emergencies in Lodi and Manteca.
6. The Stockton Fire Department is reimbursed by the California State 911 Office based on the volume of live 911 calls it handles. A large portion of the reimbursement under the new emergency ambulance system would appropriately go to the AMR's LIFECOM dispatch center, which is also a State-approved 911 dispatch center. Thus, the Stockton Fire Department has a clear economic motivation to resist the change-over to AMR's LIFECOM dispatch system.

7. The City of Stockton claims that fire unit “first responders” should be dispatched first to the scene of any medical emergency in the County. But the City of Stockton delayed in implementing the Computer Assisted Dispatch (“CAD”) communication link between the AMR LIFECOM dispatch center and Stockton Fire Dispatch that the County of San Joaquin and AMR offered at no cost to the City. This direct CAD-to-CAD link has the capacity to communicate the necessary dispatch information to the City of Stockton at the same time the information is input into the computer system at AMR’s LIFECOM dispatch center to dispatch the ambulance. Unfortunately, the City of Stockton and its CAD software vendor delayed implementation of this valuable feature of the dispatch system. AMR had to step in and assume management of this task with the City of Stockton’s software vendor, and expend additional funds to ensure that this CAD-to-CAD link is eventually installed.

8. In a newspaper article published in The Record on July 31, 2006, officials of the Stockton Fire Department attempted to sensationalize facts concerning the operation of the new system. The “unusual occurrence” reports referred to in the article are filed at the commencement of the County EMS Agency’s confidential investigation or quality improvement processes, so it is not possible for the County to comment on individual events. Still, several points must be made to refute the City of Stockton’s claims. First, the vast majority of the “unusual occurrence” reports since the transition have been submitted by the Stockton Fire Department in a transparent attempt to exaggerate the difficulties experienced by AMR in the start-up of the new contract for the exclusive emergency ambulance service. For several years prior to the implementation of the new system, AMR had provided emergency ambulance service in the same ambulance zones on a non-exclusive basis, and yet there were almost no “unusual occurrence” reports concerning AMR’s performance from the City of Stockton. In fact, until June of 2005, the City of Stockton planned to bid on the County’s emergency ambulance service bid in partnership with AMR.

Second, many of the incident reports submitted by the Stockton Fire Department involve very minor matters, or matters related to contract compliance (already being monitored by the County) rather than true safety issues. Other reports submitted by the Stockton Fire Department involve incidents in jurisdictions outside of the City of Stockton where the fire district or city involved did not deem it necessary to file a report. Finally, there have been several “unusual occurrence” reports filed concerning the actions of the Stockton Fire Department since the transition to the new system, which of course, the Stockton Fire officials elected not to disclose in their statements to the Press.

9. In contrast to the City of Stockton’s effort to undermine the new emergency ambulance system, there have been no complaints from any member of the public to the County EMS Agency since the change-over on May 1, 2006.

10. There is little question that there have been some difficulties and issues with the start-up of the new emergency ambulance system by AMR. However, these difficulties have been made more complicated than they needed to be by the lack of cooperation by the cities of Stockton, Lodi, and Manteca. While there have been issues, the County’s new contract with AMR provides for accountability of the ambulance provider and the ability on the part of the County to enforce its response time performance and quality standards. None of this was

possible under the old system of medical dispatch controlled by the City of Stockton. The County and its EMS Agency have already realized the advantages of the new system through superior data collection and associated performance of the ambulance provider than was possible under the previous system.

The County of San Joaquin is committed to providing the best overall emergency medical system for all residents of San Joaquin County. The County of San Joaquin wants all of its residents to be assured that the County will continue working toward an improved EMS system with emergency ambulance response times and overall quality that meets or exceeds national standards. The County of San Joaquin firmly believes that the newly implemented system has already resulted in dramatically improved emergency medical services throughout the County. The County of San Joaquin calls upon the cities of Stockton, Lodi, and Manteca to end this dispute and join the County in providing necessary emergency medical services for all residents of the County in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

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