

Village OKs ambulance rate hikes

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Officials say it is critical to keep fees on par with neighboring departments

The Saukville Village Board approved a series of increases in ambulance fees Tuesday.

The new rate schedule was recommended by LifeQuest, the firm that handles billing for the village's ambulance service, and the Public Safety Committee.

The last rate hike came in 2011.

Under the new fee schedule, the charge for basic ambulance calls will increase from \$425 to \$500 for residents and from \$500 to \$600 for non-residents.

The charge for calls where life-support services are needed will rise from \$525 to \$600 for residents and from \$575 to \$675 for non-residents.

According to the billing company, non-resident rates are covered by virtually all private insurance companies.

In cases where a call to the ambulance is made but the patient refuses or does not need to be transported, the fee will increase from \$150 to \$200.

"These rates would bring us right in line with what Port Washington charges," EMS Director Shari Kirsch told the Public Safety Committee.

Keeping parity in fees with neighboring communities is essential, Fire Chief Gilly Schultz said.

"We handle a lot of joint calls with Port Washington. The worst thing would be for us to transport one family member at an accident scene and Port make another, and then for the family to see the charges are drastically different," Schultz said.

He said that doesn't mean he supports unjustified increases in ambulance fees.

"I do feel sorry for the elderly. If they call for an ambulance and it ends up costing them \$600 or \$700, they might not make that call the next time when they really need to," Schultz said.

In most cases, Kirsch said, LifeQuest accepts the Medicare-approved level of payments for elderly residents.

"I know billing companies like to recommend raising rates because they get a percentage of the money collected, but we can justify all of these rate increases," she said.

Trustees unanimously approved the new fee schedule.

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