

Charlottetown Area Office, 100 Capital Drive, Charlottetown, PEI C1E 1E7

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 22nd, 2010

Island EMS Inc. Putting Islanders at Risk with Restrictive Speed Policy for Island Ambulance Service Paramedics (CUPE Local 3324)

Charlottetown – “Island EMS Inc. has recently implemented a new Speed Policy which dangerously restricts their paramedic employees (members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3324 – in their ability to respond quickly and safely to medical emergencies for Islanders,” says Bill McKinnon, CUPE National Representative.

CUPE represents approximately 100 Paramedics across Prince Edward Island working for Island EMS Inc. The policy (copy attached) prevents ambulances (with lights and sirens on), from travelling more than 10 kms over the speed limit, where the limit is 60 kms or less (and only two lanes of traffic); and only 20 kms over the speed limit, to a maximum of 120 kms /hr, when travelling on the highway. CUPE had requested, in writing, a meeting with Minister Bertram on February 1st, 2010 to discuss this issue, but at the time of the writing of this release, the Minister had not yet committed to a meeting.

“The *Highway Traffic Act of PEI* itself, at Section 237(1)(a), permits emergency vehicle drivers to “exceed the speed limit”, subject to having due regard for safety and road conditions. Nowhere in the Act will you find an arbitrary or subjective limit like this on the actual speed that emergency vehicles can travel when responding to an emergency call.

There are good reasons for that. In the real world of emergency response there is no ‘cookie cutter’ scenario for emergencies, medical or otherwise. Certainly there is a recognized obligation and expectation that Paramedics, just like Police and Fire personnel, will drive safely and with due diligence, taking into account the weather, road conditions, traffic and civilian presence.

But it is absurd to suggest that taking our Paramedics’ professional discretion away to decide if one emergency requires a faster response than another, would not put Islanders unnecessarily at risk. Furthermore, having Paramedics focusing on not violating this wrong-headed speed policy, at the risk of being disciplined, rather than the safest and quickest response to the medical emergency at hand, also is a dangerous shift in the focus of these Professionals at a time when their extensive training should be their guide.

The Employer suggests that there is some safety reason for implementing this speed restriction on ambulances. Yet against our best efforts, we could not find one single record of an ambulance being involved in a motor vehicle accident on PEI, which was a direct result of excessive speed, during an emergency response.

Then they tell us that the few minutes (or even seconds) lost by this policy, ultimately won’t matter medically. However, as just one example, The Heart & Stroke Foundation’s own literature on cardiac emergencies states that ‘if you find someone experiencing cardiac arrest, you must act quickly. With each passing minute, the probability of survival declines by 7% to 10%. ‘This is consistent with the message Paramedics hear constantly in their training process that ‘Time is Tissue!’

We wonder if there are any Islanders out there whose family member(s) might suddenly suffer a heart attack, or a stroke, or aneurysm, or choking, or serious trauma injuries with bleeding, who would really care about the ambulance following a subjective speed policy getting to the scene (and then to the hospital), or would they rather that their Paramedics arrived safely, but as quickly as possible?” asked McKinnon.

For more information/or an interview, call Bill McKinnon at (902) 566-4006 or (902) 439-1055.