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OIG FINDS NEW ORLEANS EMS DID NOT MEET NATIONAL RESPONSE-TIME BENCHMARKS, SHOULD WORK WITH CITY ON HIRING AND STAFFING PLAN

The New Orleans Office of Inspector General today (April 16) released an Audit Report finding that New Orleans Emergency Medical Services (NOEMS) did not meet national standards for response time for calls requiring both patient transportation and Advanced Life Support (ALS). These calls often included emergencies classified as potentially life-threatening or life-threatening.

The OIG audit focused on NOEMS calls requiring both patient transportation and ALS between Oct. 1, 2023, and Sept. 30, 2024. During this period, NOEMS responded to a total of 73,661 incidents. Of those incidents, 33,001 were classified as ALS emergencies that required transporting patients to medical facilities. These types of calls include cardiac arrest, heart attacks, and strokes.

In reviewing these calls, the OIG found:

- NOEMS did not establish and formally document performance objectives for emergency response times, as required by best practices.
- NOEMS did not meet national standards, set by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), for response times for 71% of the calls reviewed by the OIG. Though NOEMS is not required by law to comply with NFPA standards, these standards are widely recognized as a national benchmark. The NFPA response-time standard for calls requiring both patient transport and ALS is nine minutes. The OIG found that:
 - NOEMS had an average response time of 19 minutes and 57 seconds for ALS dispatches classified as “potentially life-threatening.” NOEMS had an average response time of 14 minutes and 31 seconds for ALS dispatches classified as “life-threatening.” These types of calls composed more than 84% of the calls reviewed by the OIG.
 - NOEMS had an average response time of 10 minutes and 40 seconds for the highest-priority calls, which are classified as “cardiac arrest/imminent death.” OIG auditors noted that NOEMS was closest to meeting NFPA response-time standards when responding to these highest-priority calls. However, these calls represented a small fraction, or about 3%, of the calls reviewed by the OIG.

NOEMS management advised that understaffing, largely due to non-competitive wages, was the main driver of NOEMS' insufficient response times. NOEMS management stated that NFPA response-time standards were not attainable at NOEMS' current staffing levels. For example, based on 2025 call volume, NOEMS needed at least 26 ambulances available each day to meet national response-time standards. Although NOEMS averaged 26.7 ambulances available per day in 2025, NOEMS could staff only about 17 ambulances per day.

As a result of the audit's findings, the OIG recommended:

- NOEMS should formally implement measurable performance goals for response times in alignment with NFPA standards. NOEMS should also implement a process to evaluate its overall performance using those benchmarks.
- The City and NOEMS should work together to develop and implement a targeted hiring and staffing plan to ensure NOEMS has adequate personnel to provide effective and efficient emergency response. NOEMS policy and City Code should be updated to reflect the same performance objectives for response times.

In conducting the audit, the OIG also noted that a Chief Administrative Office (CAO) Memorandum, issued in October 2025 by the previous administration, recommended approval of a NOEMS budget request to increase salary levels and staff size. The Memorandum concluded that the increases would likely result in net profit for the City as NOEMS could respond to more calls, collecting service fees that would otherwise go to private EMS providers.

As a result, the OIG released a Public Letter on April 9 specifically recommending that the City reexamine the feasibility of increasing NOEMS staffing and salaries. Expanding staff could allow NOEMS to improve response times for urgent calls and to direct more service fees to the City rather than private companies.

Inspector General Ed Michel stated:

“This report highlights an issue that can affect every resident and visitor to our City: the ability of New Orleans Emergency Medical Services to respond to urgent medical calls in a timely manner. Improving EMS response time is not just a matter of compliance or efficiency, but a matter of public safety. The citizens of New Orleans need and deserve an effective EMS capable of responding to high-priority emergencies.”

To view the report, visit nola.ig.gov.

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