

At 6:45 am, August 28, 2012 an ambulance from Swan River drove off the road outside of Neepawa. The two paramedics on board were returning to their station after a patient transfer to Winnipeg. It seems that workplace fatigue may have contributed to this accident. Fortunately no one was seriously injured in this incident; sadly that has not always been the case.

In 2003, in the United States it was reported that 6500 ambulance crashes a year injured an estimated 10 people daily and at least 2 people per month. (*Detroit News Washington Bureau Monday, January 27, 2003*) Many of those accidents were caused by exhaustion and fatigue due to long working hours of paramedics.

In Manitoba there have been accidents involving ambulances caused by fatigue before. Most of the rural Emergency Medical Service professionals responsible for ensuring your safety in a medical emergency have experienced the horror of nodding off while at the wheel of their ambulance. Rural EMS stations are rarely staffed with 24 hour coverage and the rural regional health authorities rely heavily on on-call paramedics.

Solutions must be found to ensure Manitoba's paramedics can perform their vital role safely without risk to themselves and others. Where MAHCP represents paramedics, it has successfully worked with employers to improve the hours of work our paramedics endure, but much still needs to be done.

Wendy Despina, President of MAHCP spoke directly with Gerry Delorme, Executive Director Health Emergency Management, Manitoba Health, just as we were becoming aware of this unfortunate and avoidable accident. MAHCP had already secured a further meeting with Mr. Delorme for September 6th where the issue of excessive duty hours and the risks that this is placing on our EMS members and the greater public is one of the critical items to be discussed. MAHCP is committed to working with the Province and RHAs to resolve this serious matter, but solutions must be found quickly to ensure all EMTs in Manitoba are not putting themselves, their patients or the public at risk. Thankfully, no lives were lost this time, let's ensure solutions are found to prevent further incidents where there may be losses to life.