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Published March 11th, 2015

ConFire Seeks Public-Private Ambulance Partnership

By Nick Marnell

Jeff Carman has proposed his most radical idea yet as the chief rebuilds the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. Carman convinced the Board of Supervisors to allow ConFire to pitch for the available county ambulance contract, up for renewal this year. But not only does the district plan to pitch for the ambulance contract, it is looking to partner with a private ambulance company to help secure the winning bid.

Financial advantages to both the ambulance company and the fire district make this partnership concept feasible. "The ambulance companies are very good at the business side of their operation, including billing and dynamic deployment of resources," said Carman. Private ambulance companies are not eligible for the government Ground Emergency Medical Transportation reimbursement program - a federal match, up to costs incurred, for providing approved services - which is available only to public entities. So partnering with a public entity may be a sound business model for the ambulance companies. AP Triton LLC, a fire consultant, estimates that nearly \$10 million per year will be available in GEMT funds in Contra Costa County.

ConFire posted a request for qualifications last month to prospective contractors. The incumbent county ambulance vendor, American Medical Response, likely a bidder for the new county contract, could also be a partnership candidate. "Yes, we'll certainly consider it," said Erik Rohde, AMR General Manager for Contra Costa County. "We're looking to improve the county emergency medical system in whatever way we can."

Proposals were due to the district at the end of February; ConFire expects to choose its partner later this month. "Other fire agencies in and around the Bay Area and across the state are watching what model emerges from our negotiations," said Carman. "I am excited about it. I think it will be a true blend of public and private and will provide the best service to the citizens of any system I have seen."

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[back](#)

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