

Town of Whitby

Staff Report

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Report Title: Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS) Change Over & Tiered Response

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: May 12, 2025

Report Number: FES 01-25

Department(s) Responsible:

Fire and Emergency Services

Submitted by:

Fire Chief Michael Hickey

Acknowledged by M. Gaskell, Chief Administrative Officer

For additional information, contact:

Fire Chief Michael Hickey
hickeym@whitby.ca

1. Recommendation:

1. That report FES 01-25 be received for information on the pending changeover to the Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS); and,
2. As per the *Fire Department Establishing and Regulating By-law #7263-17* (Attachment #1), Council approves an amendment to the Town of Whitby's current *Fire Tiered Response Criteria* (Attachment #2), moving the Town of Whitby to Level A, in alignment with the City of Oshawa, the Town of Ajax and the Township of Clarington.

2. Highlights:

- Durham Provincial Ambulance Communications Centre informed the Regional Fire Chief's that the Centre is moving to an improved triage system, called Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS), effective May 21, 2025.
- MPDS is an internationally recognized patient triage system designed by the International Academy of Emergency Dispatch.

- MPDS is already in use by several Communication Centres across the Province including Toronto (since 1992), Niagara (since 2006) Peel Region/Mississauga (since 2022) and most recently, Halton Region.
- MPDS is a sophisticated dispatch triage tool, with over 1,800 potential determinants to specify the agencies and/or resources required given the emergency event, which in turn avoids over prioritizing calls.
- In alignment with changeover to MPDS triage system, Whitby Fire & Emergency Services (WFES) is proposing to move from Level C to Level A on the *Fire Tiered Response Criteria* (Attachment #2); aligning the Town of Whitby with the City of Oshawa, Town of Ajax and Township of Clarington.

3. Background:

The current dispatching triage system utilized across Durham Region is called the Dispatch Priority Card Index (DPCI II). The DPCI triages calls into four (4) categories (Code 1 through to Code 4), with two (2) categories (Code 3 and Code 4) used for emergency calls. DPCI algorithms currently prioritizes over 60% of all emergency calls as Code 4 (Urgent – life threatening or in immediate danger) which has led to mass over-prioritization and ineffective deployment of resources.

Effective May 21, 2025, the Durham Provincial Ambulance Communications Centre will migrate over to the Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS). This system was developed by an Emergency Physician, with oversight given to the Medical Director for final determinations and has been successfully substantiated through many trials over a forty (40) year period.

Specifically, MPDS uses a sophisticated dispatch triage tool which generates more detailed questioning to assign patients into one (1) through six (6) priorities, with five (5) priorities being used for emergency calls. This level of detail and prioritization is currently not available with the existing DPCI system.

MPDS is used by a number of surrounding fire services including the City of Toronto (since 1992), Niagara (since 2006), Peel Region/Mississauga (since 2006) and most recently Halton Region. Opportunities for improvement and learnings from previous launches have been openly shared by other services and will be used in the implementation across the Durham Region.

Whitby Fire & Emergency Services (WFES) contracts dispatching services through Oshawa Fire & Emergency Services and in 2024, responded to over 7,300 calls, with a majority of the calls falling within Ontario Fire Marshall Incident Type of medical/resuscitator. WFES currently operates under *Level C Fire Tiered Response Criteria* (Attachment #2). Specifically, Level C is an immediate tiered response request for respiratory arrest (absence of breathing), cardiac arrest (absence of pulse), unconsciousness, motor vehicle collision with EMS attending, profuse and uncontrolled bleeding and acute chest pain and/or shortness of breath/difficulty breathing. WFES

does not response to Long-Term Care Homes or Medical Facilities unless it is a confirmed cardiac arrest (i.e. CPR in progress).

Presently, only the City of Pickering and the Town of Whiby operate under Level C of the *Fire Tiered Response Criteria* (Attachment #2); with neighbouring fire services such as the City of Oshawa and the Town of Ajax operating under Level A of the *Fire Tiered Response Criteria* (Attachment #2).

In light of the pending MPDS changeover, coupled with consideration for the wellbeing of personnel and longevity of assets, Whitby Fire & Emergency Services wishes to amend the existing response criteria and transition to Level A of the *Fire Tiered Response Criteria* (Attachment #2).

4. Discussion:

The pending changeover to MPDS will bring several positive impacts to WFES and significantly improve the overall prioritization of calls received for first responders. In recognition of the pending changes to call prioritization across the Durham Region, WFES would like to change from a Level C *Fire Tiered Response* (Attachment #2) to a Level A *Fire Tiered Response* (Attachment #2), which would place the Town of Whitby in alignment with the City of Oshawa, Town of Ajax and the Township of Clarington. This slight response change will greatly assist in aligning with call prioritization and assist in ensuring WFES crews are available to respond to those most in need within the community.

Specifically, the change to a Level A *Fire Tiered Response* (Attachment #2) would add one (1) additional criteria to the existing services, in that WFES will only respond to acute chest pain and/or shortness of breath/difficulty breathing when a paramedic response time is anticipated to be greater than ten (10) minutes. All other criteria currently outlined within the Level C *Fire Tiered Response* (Attachment #2) would remain unchanged. In addition, with this slight adjustment, WFES resources would not be unnecessarily dispatched to certain lower priority calls and as such, these resources would be available for higher priority calls where WFES' skills, training and equipment can be used in a manner that leads to the greatest impact on saving lives throughout the community.

In addition, the changeover over to MPDS provides the Town with an opportune time to incorporate a tiered response change, as Durham EMS is currently working closely with all fire departments to capture and build out each departments response obligations within the new triage system.

Overall, MPDS will bring a number of efficiencies with prioritization dispatching and provide in depth call details which will aid to ensure WFES crews can implement appropriate safety measures and utilize specific tactics when responding to an emergency scene. WFES remains committed to delivering important life saving services in a manner that is safe efficient, agile and deserving of the community. The launch of

MPDS and a slight change to the exiting *Fire Tiered Response Criteria* (Attachment #2) will greatly assist WFES in achieving this commitment.

5. Financial Considerations:

Not Applicable.

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

Not Applicable

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

Since notification of the changeover, the WFES Leadership Team has met with representatives from Durham EMS and the local Central Ambulance Communication Centre (CACC) to ensure WFES' response information is up to date and accurate. Additional resources have also been shared from the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs and existing users of MPDS, to assist Durham Regional Chiefs with required changeover preparations.

8. Strategic Priorities:

The recommendation contained in this report advances the following Strategic Pillars and Actions identified in the Town's Community Strategic Plan:

- Whitby's Neighbourhoods – Safe, Healthy, & Inclusive
 - Objective 1.1 – Improve community safety, health, and wellbeing

Specifically, by moving to a Level A *Fire Tiered Response* (Attachment #2) like our neighbouring departments in the Town of Ajax and the City of Oshawa, Whitby Fire & Emergency Services crews will be available for higher priority calls where our specialized skills, training and equipment can be used in a manner that leads to the greatest impact on saving lives throughout the community.

9. Attachments:

- Attachment #1 - Fire Department Establishing and Regulating By-law #7263-17
- Attachment #2 - Fire Tiered Response Criteria