

Old, poor receive slowest rescue times

RESCUE

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33,705. The number of calls the Pompano Beach Fire Rescue Department received in the past two years.

The *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* analyzed the department's dispatch logs for 2004 and 2005 and found wide differences in the time it takes paramedics to respond to pleas for help, depending on the neighborhood.

Response consistently crosses the deadly six-minute threshold in areas such as the northwest, where most of the city's poor residents live, and Palm Aire, which is largely a retirement community.

"I'm upset about it," said Esther Mozenter, 79, who has lived in Palm Aire for 11 years. "I'm not happy at all. A couple of times, we've wondered why it takes so long for them to get here. Neighbors will call and ask what's taking them so long."

Response times in other parts of the city, meanwhile, are well under the six-minute mark — a national standard established by the National Fire Protection Association with the American Heart Association.

It's no surprise to Fire Chief Harry Small.

"It's to be expected that it's slower to get out there because we don't have many resources at this time. We've had an explosive growth and that's a challenge."

Although there are no documented deaths that can be attributed to a slow response time, the high demand for paramedics at the city's major retirement homes and large homeless shelter is a sign of the future as the health of a poor and aging population can be expected to deteriorate.

Since 2000, paramedics have seen a yearly increase of 9 percent in the number of people taken to the hospital. Of the more than 13,792 patients they took to the emergency room in 2004, more than 5,000 were over the age of 60.

The situation won't improve, Small said, unless there's more money for new stations, substations and rescue trucks.

"They're going to require more resources," he said. "It's a picture of the world to come."

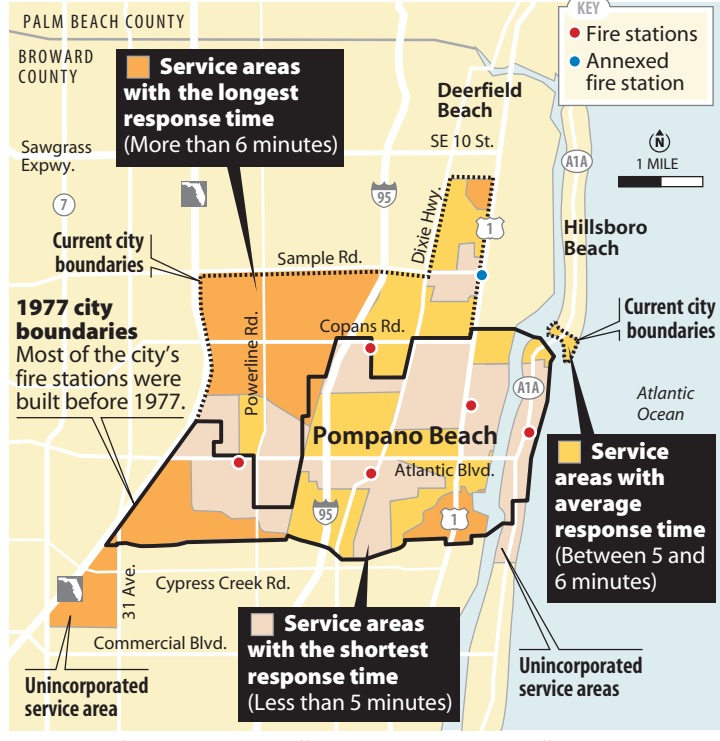
891. How many times in the past two years a rescue truck blasted its sirens through traffic to reach The Preserves at Palm Aire, a large retirement home at the southern edge of the city.

In the past two years, paramedics visited the 229-room mixture of independent and assisted living units on McNab Road more than twice a day.

In 83 percent of cases, re-

Fire-rescue response

A *Sun-Sentinel* analysis from 2004 and 2005 Pompano Beach Fire Rescue dispatch logs reveals the slowest response time is in areas with poor and elderly residents. How Pompano's neighborhoods stack up:



SOURCE: City of Pompano Beach Staff research/Jeremy Milarsky; Staff graphic/Belinda Long

RESPONSE TIMES BY CITY

Here's how other cities report their average response times, in minutes and seconds:

- Broward Sheriff's Office Department of Fire Rescue and Emergency Services (serves Weston, Southwest Ranches, Pembroke Park, Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, Cooper City, Lauderdale Lakes and Sea Ranch Lakes): 4:42
- Fort Lauderdale (services Wilton Manors): 5:30
- Hallandale Beach: 5:00
- Hollywood: 6:30
- Oakland Park: 5:34
- Pembroke Pines: 5:24
- Plantation: 3:50

records show, paramedics took longer than six minutes to reach the home — too late for someone who might be suffering from cardiac arrest. Most residents here are over 80 years old.

"Most of the medical situations are serious," Small said. "It's a very critical facility for us."

The retirement home, with more than 300 elderly residents, is deep on the southern side of the 1,600-acre Palm Aire community. In the assisted living facility, nurses provide emergency aid.

On Palm Aire's independent living side, residents are just that — independent.

"In most instances, the residents call [911] themselves," said Madeline Cohen, the community's executive director. "We just say, 'Oh gosh, who

called now?'"

A few miles north, in neighborhoods comprised of warehouses, low-income families and vast vacant fields, most calls came from the 200-bed Broward Outreach Center. The shelter is a respite for those who sleep on bus benches or under bridges and a treatment center for those beaten or malnourished. Rescuers on average in 2004 and 2005 rushed there more than three times a month. Average response time: 6 minutes 51 seconds.

Almost a minute too late. "I know we have had heart attacks," said Michael Smith, the center's former executive director. "I know that some people have gone to the hospital and not returned because of bad health. I can't give you numbers on that because I'm not tracking it. But I do know that it has occurred."

"This is the first time they've received medical treatment. They never knew they had heart problems. They never knew they had cancer."

29. The number of years since the last fire station was built in Pompano Beach.

Nearly three decades ago, the city was less than half its current population. Newly built Station 61 was at the northern edge of a city at the beginning of a major annexation campaign. Back then, fire stations were tucked inside the neighborhoods of a city of about 40,000. Now they are far from the new borders of a city of more than 101,000.

"We have annexed a tremen-

"Those brain cells start dying when you stop breathing. The clock starts ticking. Time is of the essence."

dous amount of territory in the past few years that presents a tremendous challenge in the relocating of fire stations," Small said.

As years pass, rescue officials fear the aging residents of Palm Aire — average age: 65 — will need more medical attention.

Those in the northwest — average income: \$24,798 — will become even more dependent on the city's healing hand.

"I would think that the population may have to do something with it, but be that as it may, we still have to correct that," said Commissioner E. Pat Larkins, who represents the northwest. "People's lives are depending on prompt response. We need to take a look at it immediately."

Other leaders, however, say little can be done to hasten response times.

"People don't know when they should be concerned and I can understand that," said Vice Mayor George Brummer, who represents Palm Aire. "To me it's not a situation that's dire enough to require a solution at this point. I really don't think it's that bad."

5 minutes, 15 seconds. The average citywide response time.

"That's actually excellent," said Brotons of the University of Miami. "Obviously they're doing something really well."

Rescuers say they have made great strides in reaching the sick and dying. In 2000, the average response time was more than two minutes longer than what it is now. Even with a larger population, busier roads and taller buildings, paramedics are faster at saving lives than they were six years ago.

"There isn't a metropolitan city in the United States that has the same exact response time in every sector of their city," said Sandra King, the city's spokeswoman.

In the city's core, response in 2004 and 2005 was swift — and below the critical six-minutes.

The "over-55" Leisureville community: 5 minutes 33 seconds — 27 seconds to spare.

The historic Old Pompano neighborhood: 5 minutes 2 seconds.

The beachfront towers: 3 minutes 54 seconds.

"I think the fire station is centrally located on the beach to

serve the south end and the north end and they do a great job," said Commissioner Kay McGinn, who represents the beach.

But, she added, "We don't have a homeless center. We don't have a retirement home."

1-30-2006. This is to thank you so much for your service late Monday evening, January 16, 2006.

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I truly appreciate all. JoAnn Doran

\$5,000,000. An estimate of how much a new fire station would cost. If the city took out a five-year loan, each Pompano Beach property owner would have to pay an annual bill of about \$22.

Jean-Paul Renaud can be reached at jprenaud@sun-sentinel.com or 954-356-4556.

AL BROTONS

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI MILLER SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Method of analysis

The *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* analyzed more than two years of reports collected by the Pompano Beach Fire Rescue Department. The newspaper examined 33,876 records in all, eliminating 1,957 corrupted records. Records were eliminated from the final analysis if, for example, an individual call time was 1 second or less, or the record mistakenly showed the call coming in after the time of response. Records also were eliminated if they showed units took more than 10 minutes to arrive. The newspaper then geographically analyzed the data based on U.S. census information.

Who's being served?

This is the second in an occasional series of articles analyzing who is being served in Pompano Beach. In September, a *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* analysis discovered that the majority of Pompano Beach's improvement dollars — for parks, community centers, and playgrounds — were being pumped into a one-square-mile area of the city that is home to some of the area's poorest residents.

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Missouri plans to put drivers on left of road

BY MATT SEDENSKY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KANSAS CITY, MO. • Traffic engineers trying to ease congestion and reduce accidents in Kansas City have come up with an audacious idea for this side of the Atlantic: making people drive on the left side of the road.

Missouri Transportation Department officials considered a number of plans for the downtown Front Street approach to Interstate 435. But the one they settled on appears to be a national first. It involves briefly crisscrossing lanes and putting drivers on the left.

"When we first heard about it from one of our peers, of course we were skeptical," said Josh Scott, a transportation planner who worked on the design. "But not only was it feasible, but it actually worked better from all of the other alternatives."

Planners said they modeled their "diverging diamond" design after one in use in the French city of Versailles, where motorists drive on the right. The cost will be \$6 million, or about half the \$11 million that competing ideas were projected to cost. The project is to be started and finished in 2007.

Drivers will reach a traffic

signal, then be guided to the opposite side of the road, which will be divided by a concrete median with glare screens to minimize the potentially disorienting sight of oncoming cars to the right. After about 600 to 700 feet, motorists reach another traffic signal and are returned to the right side of the road.

Ramps before the first and second lights will allow motorists to enter I-435. The design spares motorists from having to turn left in front of oncoming traffic to get onto the highway.

"Most of us look at it and we say, 'What?'" said Susan McCubbins, a transportation project manager for the state. "Then we think it through and we realize the safety and traffic advantages."

Doug Hecox, a Federal Highway Administration spokesman, said this was the first such use of the diverging diamond in this country, and he suggested it could be seen more often.

"The design is something that really has some potential," he said.

In Ohio, engineers considered a diverging diamond as an alternative to reconstructing a bridge in Findlay. They ultimately decided to put off a new

bridge and simply increase the number of lanes on the existing one, though engineers still have praise for the wrong-side-of-the-road design.

"From an engineering standpoint it makes a lot of sense," said Eric Pfennig, an Ohio Transportation Department engineer. "Bottom line is you can move a lot of traffic with the design."

Others are skeptical.

Ray Mundy, director of the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, said planners must be careful when copying designs used in Europe, where motorists are much more used to driving on both the left and right sides of the road.

"You're so used to always going to that right side of the road, we just do it second nature," he said. "We're not used to changing our behavior based on the country we're in, unlike in Europe."

McCubbins said mistakes will happen with Kansas City's diverging diamond, but not easily.

Most of the world drives on the right side of the road. Countries such as Britain, Australia, India and South Africa drive on the left.



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