

MONTANA CAREER FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION



BIG SKY	BILLINGS	BUTTE
BOZEMAN	FRENCHTOWN	GLENDIVE
GREAT FALLS	HAVRE	HELENA
HEBGEN BASIN	KALISPELL	LEWISTOWN
LIVINGSTON	LOCKWOOD	MANG AIR FORCE BASE
MALMSTROM	MISSOULA CITY FIRE	MISSOULA RURAL FIRE
MILES CITY	WHITEFISH	

February 7, 2011

MCFCA Executive Board
305 West Watson
Lewistown, Montana 59457

Montana State Capital Building
Attention: Local Government Committee
Helena, Mt 59620-1415

Dear Committee Members:

The Montana Career Fire Chief Association (MCFCA) asks for your support to oppose House Bill number 400, to create legislation that would prohibit local government from imposing fees for responses to motor vehicle accidents. This legislation would further inhibit a community's ability to fund this important service and would ultimately mean more lives would be lost on Montana's highways.

The majority of Montana's response agencies have very limited means to raise the capital needed to support vehicle rescue operations. The tools and training to accomplish vehicle rescue and victim extrication are expensive. One hydraulic rescue tool (Jaws of Life) which is critical to quickly in removing wreckage, to gain access, and to remove patients cost approximately \$25,000.00. To actually fully equip a fire apparatus with all the tools supplies and equipment can cost in the neighborhood of \$50,000 dollars and that doesn't include the apparatus to get the rescue team on site.

Several years ago, Montana legislators capped local government's ability to increase taxes. As a result, the cost of providing emergency services has out paced local community budgets. Many volunteer and paid departments have had to make tough choices about the number and level of services they can afford.

Many organizations have sought ways to fund these needed and expected services. One way is to charge for services provided. A person trapped in his or her vehicle after a crash would not care if the responding agency sent them an invoice for responding

and safely removing them from the wreckage. This fee is included in their insurance policy and is usually about \$500 to help defray the cost for this service.

If local governments were not allowed to seek a means for funding vehicle rescue and extrication then those services may cease to be available. It is appropriate, and necessary to allow a fee to be assessed for services as an option for a community to continue to respond to motor vehicle collisions. It is essential that emergency medical services, including fire agencies, be allowed to recoup some costs as is allowed in current legislation. Providing vital assistance, with the necessary, often expensive extrication, equipment when every second can count in potentially life threatening injuries is of the utmost importance.

Why is this important? In the Emergency Medical Services terminology it is called the "Golden Hour." If a person is involved in a motor vehicle collision and as a result is critically injured, Medical Professionals know that if the patient doesn't reach definitive medical treatment within an hour their chances of survival greatly diminish.

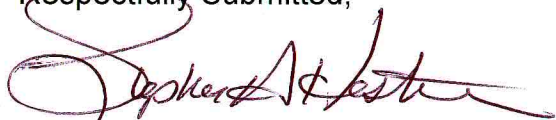
If rescuers are not equipped or trained to stabilize the vehicle, gain access to the patient, and extricate them in a timely manner precious minutes are wasted. Also, if the proper tools and training do not arrive there is a greater chance the patient will be further injured in an attempt to remove them from the vehicle.

Also, Montanan's are at greater risk of being in a motor vehicle crash. In the Montana's Department of Transportation statistics, it was noted, "In 2007 (the most current NHSTA data available), the national urban fatality rate was less than half of the rural fatality rate (0.88 compared to 2.21, respectively). Since Montana has the highest percentage of rural vehicle miles travelled in the nation, it should be no surprise that Montana has the highest fatality rate in the nation."

This report further state: "Currently, and over the next few years, Montana will have an above average number of teen and young adult drivers. This is the highest risk group in traffic safety. Also, the number of elderly drivers and the number of drivers under 30 is increasing while the group of drivers between 30 and 55 will be decreasing.

Montana local government has been hit hard with cut-backs due to the economics of the last 3 years. Limiting another means for public safety to fund services will mean fewer agencies offering vehicle rescue and extrication services. We ask that you oppose this legislation. We appreciate your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted;

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Stephen A. Hester", written in a cursive style.

Stephen A. Hester, Secretary
Montana Career Fire Chiefs Association