

# Response unit relieves pressure on Mesa Fire

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A successful pilot program aimed at staving off rising Mesa Fire Department response times is back on the streets.

Three weeks ago, the first Transitional Response Vehicle (TRV) began taking non-emergency or basic medical calls, freeing up engine and ladder trucks that normally would be called in.

A second TRV unit is expected to start in a few weeks.

TRV units consist of a paramedic and EMT driving a ladder truck to handle basic life-support calls from 9 a.m. until 9 p.m., the peak hours of the day for calls.

The first one, TRV201, is stationed out of Fire Station 201 near Mesa Drive and First Street, to help relieve some of the busiest fire stations in the city. They handle about a five-mile radius from Dobson to Gilbert roads and McDowell Road to U.S. 60.

So far, the TRV unit has averaged about 9.5 calls per day, keeping the four-member engine and ladder trucks available for emergencies and fires, Mesa fire Deputy Chief Mike Dunn said.

"It's a stopgap measure," Dunn said.

The units are intended to keep response times from continuing to rise until funding is available to build, equip and staff fire stations. Response times have spiked 27 seconds over the past two years and the department says it's four fire stations short of what it needs.

Fire Department staff developed and tested the TRV program last summer to come up with alternatives to handle medical calls and reduce response times. Medical calls make up 76 percent of all fire calls.

The city provided \$1 million to fund the two specialty units for the fiscal year, Dunn said. The TRV is staffed by firefighters who sign up for overtime.

Mesa fire roving engineer Jason Jackson and fire paramedic John Wilcken, both nearly eight-year veterans, rode the TRV shift last Wednesday.

It was Jackson's second run on the new unit. On his first TRV ride, he said about a third of the calls were dispatched to them but they can also "jump" calls where they hear a call that sounds like a

non-emergency or basic life support and asked to be assigned to them.

On Jackson's first TRV run, he helped an elderly woman who called for assistance after she fell getting out of bed.

"It's a perfect example to help citizens and those who need help but weren't an emergency," Jackson said.

Another call was a homeless man who was sleeping on the grass. People called 911 worried about him.

"We made sure he was OK and gave him some Gatorade," Jackson said.

In one case, a naked man in his middle 40s was walking down the street. The TRV unit checked his vitals and police were called. The man told Jackson he had gotten into a fight with his girlfriend and she kicked him out of the house.

On Thursday, Wilcken and Jackson were the closest unit to an office where a woman was having chest pains. They arrived first, started vitals and got information. About a minute later, the fire unit arrived and all six firefighters worked together.

"It keeps a \$500,000 engine close to home and ready for a fire or a true emergency, Jackson said. "It is nice knowing you are helping taking the load off (other firefighters) and helping the citizens in need."