

Henrico County Virginia Division of Fire

The Henrico County Division of Fire is a 575-member all-hazards career department operating out of 20 fire stations serving a diverse urban, suburban and rural population of more than 300,000. The Division of Fire (DOF) is the primary EMS agency providing first response on all suppression apparatus and advanced life support transport, utilizing 14 paramedic-level ambulances. Mental illness is involved in about 20 percent of all EMS calls. Although most of these incidents are resolved with relative ease, a number of them test all components of the public safety team including fire, law enforcement, mental health and the local health care community.

In 2006, several key stakeholders from police, fire and mental health began to investigate best practices in response to citizens in crisis due to mental health. In 2008, the Henrico County Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) was established to ensure the best possible outcomes for these citizens. The Henrico County CIT incorporates local fire-based EMS resources as part of the service model.

Recognizing the valuable expertise in medical issues offered by the Henrico County Division of Fire (DOF), the county's public safety agencies turned to the DOF to play a critical role in shaping the Crisis Intervention Team. The Division of Fire members offer expertise in medical issues that frequently precipitate, contribute to, or exacerbate a crisis attributed to mental health. Fire service-based EMS providers offer law enforcement officers additional options for restraint, including medical monitoring and chemical restraint. This well-practiced multi-disciplinary response has already proven effective in improving safety for the public and responders. Effective crisis intervention leads to fewer unnecessary incarcerations and hospitalization stays, and supports community-based solutions for consumers leading to an improved quality of life, and reduced liability for the involved agencies.

The basis for all CIT training is creating a mindset of treating people with mental illness with respect. To date, Henrico CIT has trained over 296 personnel. All Division of Fire lieutenants and captains who hold medic certifications, including all on-duty EMS Field Supervisors, have received 40 hours of training as CIT responders to give Henrico County 24-hour coverage for crisis calls.