

How the City pays for its ambulance service

Insurance co-pays, ambulance utility fee helps maintain adequate service levels

By Brett Bastian, Moses Lake Fire Chief, and Lynne Lynch, Public Information Officer

The City's ambulance service is not free to residents.

This may come as a surprise to some. Especially when an ambulance charge appears on a separate bill from the city showing your ambulance use and also on your utility bill. What gives?

The explanation has two parts. The first part has to do with your insurance company.

Depending on your insurance plan, a charge could appear from the city in the form of an ambulance bill to cover charges not paid for by insurance. Please keep in mind, insurance deductibles and co-pays are not the same. The deductible is how much you will pay in an insurance claim before the insurance starts. A co-pay is a charge your insurance may require to receive a certain medical service or supply.

Residents covered by insurance companies such as Aetna, Signa and Blue Cross are seeing ambulance charges appear on their bills because of how their respective plans work. The city doesn't have a contract for our ambulance service. As a result, some insurance companies process a claim as though it is "out of network," which has a much higher out-of-pocket charge for the patient. Please contact Systems Design West at 1-800-238-9398 for help in filing an appeal with the insurance company.

We encourage you to learn the details of your insurance plan before an emergency happens.

Receiving an ambulance transport bill may be new to those who haven't used the service for many years.

The second part happened in January 2018, when the Moses Lake City Council directed the collection of co-pays from residents using the ambulance service to help retain acceptable service levels. The decision followed a recommendation that came from a cost of service study done by FCS Group.

The demand for service has increased significantly since 2001. Service started Aug. 20, 2001 with 954 ambulance calls logged through the rest of the year. The following year, there were 3,316 ambulance calls. 2014 saw the highest number of calls with 3,529. A full call summary can be found on the back page.

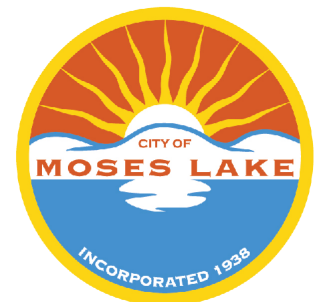
The department eliminated some non-emergent services to focus on emergent transports (9-1-1 responses) without adding significantly more staff. Emergent call volume as a whole (Fire and EMS) trends at about 3 percent per year.

Who to call:

Systems Design West provides patient ambulance billing services for the City and can help you file an appeal with the insurance company. For more information, please call 1-800-238-9398, write to Systems Design West, P.O. Box 3510, Silverdale, WA 98383 or visit their website systemsdesignems.com.

City of Moses Lake: On your City utility bill, the ambulance service utility fee is \$14.45 per month for 2023. Please call the Utility Department at 509-764-3715 if you have questions about your utility bill.

Moses Lake Fire Department: Todd Schanze, Medical Services Officer, 509-764-3849.



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Moses Lake Fire Department Ambulance Statistics

Ambulance Calls	Year	
954	2001	Ambulance Service Started August 20, 2001
3316	2002	
3208	2003	
3386	2004	
2552	2005	
2760	2006	
2964	2007	
3226	2008	
2977	2009	
2908	2010	CEASED TO PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH TRANSFERS
3204	2011	
3397	2012	
3199	2013	
3529	2014	
3381	2015	
3145	2016	CEASED TO PROVIDE OUT-OF-TOWN TRANSFERS
3276	2017	
2905	2018	MRI transfers ceased, in-county return trips ceased
3078	2019	
3383	2020	COVID-19
4063	2021	
4756	2022	

2022 finished the year with 17 percent increase in calls compared to the previous year.

Moses Lake is a growing and thriving community, with an influx of visitors using city services during the summer months. There was a 23 percent increase in Moses Lake's population from 2010 to 2020. The 2020 Census showed 25,146 people living in Moses Lake.

Our ambulance service is also funded with your support each month. Both commercial and residential accounts are charged \$14.45 per month for service which appears as an ambulance utility fee on the City utility bill. The fee was enacted as a stable funding mechanism to ensure that adequate levels of emergency response vehicles and trained personnel are available to respond within the City. Both the insurance co-pays and ambulance utility fee are critical to the long-term sustainability of this important community service.

We are here to help you understand your bills. Please do not hesitate to contact the City at 509-764-3715 or Systems Design West at 1-800-238-9398 for more information.