

ALS vs. BLS What's The Difference?

When Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is discussed, we often use the titles Paramedic and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). We also use the acronyms ALS and BLS. What is the difference between ALS and BLS, Paramedics and EMT's? This month I would like to explain the differences and provide some insight into how your EMS system works in North Mason. Over 85% of the emergency calls for the Fire District are for EMS incidents.

BLS is an acronym for basic life support. The basic life support system is comprised of EMT's who have completed over 300 hours of both classroom and practical education in trauma care, cardiac and stroke care, CPR, advanced first aid, child birth, and basic medication administration. EMT's are the backbone of the entire EMS system. Their skills and abilities are essential to a positive medical outcome. All of the Fire District's career personnel and nearly all of our volunteer fire personnel are trained to at least the EMT level.

ALS is an acronym for advanced life support. The ALS system is comprised of paramedics who have received over 3000 hours of training in aggressive cardiac life support, pediatric life support, severe trauma and over 200 other life threatening emergency medical conditions. Paramedics can administer over 30 advanced medications and medical procedures. Paramedics work to orchestrate an emergency medical scene and direct the operations inside the medical transport unit (ambulance). During an emergency medical call the paramedic is in constant phone contact with a hospital emergency room physician. The paramedic and the physician pair together in making critical life care decisions. With advanced medical equipment, medical protocols, and advanced medications, the Fire Districts medic unit serves as a hospital emergency room on wheels. The Fire District maintains eight paramedics on staff.

When 911 is dialed in Mason County the emergency call is routed to the MACECOM dispatch center in Shelton. Critical information is obtained from the caller using a series of predetermined questions. The information obtained helps to determine the nature of the emergency and the level of service (ALS or BLS) that is required. This type of system is referred to as a "tiered response system". The closest emergency unit, whether it is an ALS or BLS medical unit or a fire engine will be dispatched to assist. Having the closest unit respond allows for the emergency to be rapidly stabilized and for treatment to quickly begin. A tiered response system allows for the fastest response time possible and provides the necessary amount of responders to handle the emergency.

Mason County Fire District 2 provides emergency medical care for over 100 square miles of area in North Mason. With the closest emergency rooms in Bremerton and Shelton our medical units will spend anywhere from an half an hour to an hour working with a

patient to mitigate a medical emergency. Life and death decisions are made every day within the EMS system. It is comforting to know that Fire District 2 has a professional, effective and dedicated group of volunteer and paid EMS responders that are ready to jump into action should you or your family ever need them.

We hope that your summer has been enjoyable and safe. For more information on Mason County Fire District 2 please visit our web site at WWW.MCFD2.COM or by calling 360-275-6711. With summer now here plan ahead now for wild land prevention before it is too late.

Question of the month: When did Fire District 2 first start providing ALS service? The first email or phone call that I receive with the correct answer will receive a gift from Starbucks Coffee.

Jeromy Hicks is currently Mason County Fire District 2's community outreach coordinator. With ten plus years of firefighting service including being a paramedic, fire prevention is his passion. Jeromy currently provides assistance with inspections, investigations, and education though out Mason County. He can be reached at 360-275-6711 ext. 2.