

Letter to the Editor - Saturday, August 2

Re: Hackett: Red Deer firefighters need more support (July 26, 2025)

There's been a lot said recently about emergency services in Red Deer, and it's time to set the record straight.

As Fire Chief, I see firsthand the professionalism and commitment our firemedics bring to every call. I am proud to be a firefighter, and I am proud to be the Chief. The public puts a great deal of trust in us, and I want to be clear: Red Deer Emergency Services (RDES) is committed to the safety of our community and our crews.

Why Dynamic Staffing?

Dynamic staffing was introduced to address an unsustainable level of overtime in our department. In 2024, overtime costs reached \$3.2 million, the highest per capita in Alberta. The goal of this model is not to cut staff or compromise safety. It is about protecting the long-term health of the system, managing burnout, and being responsible stewards of public dollars.

This model allows us to deliver 24/7 high-quality service through skilled firemedics. Our system has always been supported by and continues to be supported by mutual aid agreements with other fire and emergency services and strong regional partnerships.

Community Coverage Remains Strong

RDES continues to dispatch 17 firemedics to structure fires, a consistent standard for more than 20 years. Today, we employ 194 firemedics, a 73% increase since 2007, even as Red Deer's population has grown by 35 percent. That is not downsizing. That is an investment.

All RDES stations remain operational. Our strategic station network provides overlapping coverage across the city. For example, Station 2 is directly supported by Stations 1, 4, and 5. In the second quarter of 2025, Station 2 was at full capacity 81 percent of the time. When Station 2 is not at full capacity, coverage continues. If the engine has fewer than four firemedics, another unit is immediately dispatched to support the response. This operational adjustment increases the total number of responding firemedics from four to six or seven, enhancing the overall capacity and effectiveness of the response.

The idea that we are not meeting response standards simply does not hold up to the facts.

We also recognize the strain that long-term leaves place on operations. With 12.5 per cent of our team currently on extended leave, we worked with the Union to bring in temporary paramedic staff to offset the operational impact of extended leaves.

A Shared Commitment

Change in a vital service like emergency response naturally invites concern. We believe the public deserves open, honest communication about how emergency services operate. That's why we continue to share operational updates, staffing levels, and performance indicators on the city's website. Transparent data helps the community stay informed and helps build trust in how we manage this vital public service.

We support our firemedics. And we support the operational decisions that keep our system strong, now and into the future.

Sincerely,

Ken McMullen

Fire Chief, Red Deer Emergency Services