

Energy Goes Together With Public Safety



By Patrick J. Bahnken

Most New Yorkers take the electricity that powers our hospitals and homes for granted. But on the occasions when the power goes out, dangerous things tend to happen.

During the 2003 blackout, emergency call volumes for the first responders I represent soared in excess of 500 percent. While the lights were out, New York City's Paramedics and EMS crews on the front lines treated and saved the lives of thousands of patients with medical emergencies, as emergency rooms overflowed. At the same time, firefighters conducted hundreds of subway and elevator rescues and police made sure chaos did not reign.

These are but a few examples of the importance of keeping the lights on for public safety in every corner of the state.

Think about the emergency response systems we rely on and the power it depends on. Radio transmissions dispatch and allow us to communicate with hospital emergency rooms and the doctors we are speeding to. Onboard computers communicate with those in hospitals to relay known information on the patient and their condition. Regardless of the medical need: a heart attack, stabbing, serious car accident or a stroke, without quick and ready access to operating defibrillators, oxygen, blood pressure monitoring or even keeping blood supply chilled, patients won't stand a chance.

The energy that powers New York is not only about jobs and economic development, it enables my members to protect and preserve life. It's why we need to retain New York's existing supply of reliable and clean power from hydro and nuclear, which provides more than 50 percent of our electricity.

Every day, we respond to hundreds of calls in poor communities where asthma rates are triple the state-wide average. Inundated with industrial uses, including greenhouse gas-emitting peaker power plants, residents and elected leaders in these neighborhoods are fighting hard to reduce the health and social impact. We stand with them.

It must be clear that a sound state energy policy affects the jobs of EMT's, Paramedics, emergency room personnel and the patients we are all sworn to protect.

Patrick J. Bahnken is President of the Uniformed EMT's, Paramedics & Fire Inspectors FDNY – Local 2507, whose 3,000 members operate on the front lines to provide life-saving service to New Yorkers on a daily basis.

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