

Island County Fire District #3
Fact Sheet
M E R V
(Medical Emergency Response Vehicle)

- MERV stands for Medical Emergency Response Vehicle. It is equipped with all the gear needed to respond to a medical emergency. Whenever a 911 call is received that may require medical aid a MERV is dispatched. You may also see a MERV standing by at a high school football game or other public event.
- Island County Fire District #3 has three MERVs, which are checked out by volunteers. The volunteer keeps the MERV from a few hours to a few days. During this time they take the MERV where ever they go and must respond to all emergencies in their area. This is why you might see a MERV at the grocery store or the post office for instance. The goal is to shorten response time by eliminating the need to drive to a station and pick up a response vehicle.
- There are three areas for MERV response. Each MERV responds to calls in their area. The smaller the response area the faster a MERV gets to your emergency. The vehicles are 10 years old and must be kept in excellent condition. Plans are to upgrade and replace them with Honda Pilots in the near future.
- The South Whidbey district covers an area of 66.5 square miles with 57 miles of shoreline. There are six stations staffed by approximately 80 volunteers and a small paid staff. Stations are located in Freeland, Maxwelton, Saratoga, Langley, Clinton, and Bayview. MERVs are currently housed at the Freeland, Clinton and Langley stations when not checked out by a volunteer.
- Currently there are approximately 55 trained EMTs (Emergency Medical Technicians) in our department. These medical responders have completed 150 hours of coursework, plus ride time and patient contact requirements. They also are required to pass stringent written and practical skills exams to become licensed by the state of Washington. After licensure they work under the direction and protocols of their Medical Program Director. They also continue attending weekly training and are required to recertify their license with the state every three years. Both men and women volunteer, representing a wide range of ages and backgrounds.

- Volunteers check out a MERV and are on call the entire time they have the vehicle in their possession. This means they must immediately respond to all calls in their service area. This may be three hours, three days or anything in between. During this time they drive the vehicle wherever they go, even when on personal errands. They must be attired in an informal uniform when they have a MERV checked out. This way they are ready to respond immediately to all alarms from any location. Volunteers are required at a moment's notice to drop everything, jump in their MERV and respond to all calls in their response area.
- MERVs are not licensed as transport vehicles. However, they are licensed aid vehicles and as such, are used to provide patient stabilization at the scene of an emergency. In the event of a disaster or scene location the ambulance is unable to access, there is however adequate space to accommodate a patient on a backboard in a MERV.
- The Fire Department MERVs are four wheel drive vehicles to allow for safe response and access in inclement weather and situations where access would otherwise be difficult, if not impossible. In most cases ambulances from Whidbey General Hospital are utilized to carry the injured.
- There are two ambulances, staffed by one EMT and one Paramedic, who are employed by Whidbey General Hospital serving South Whidbey. When both ambulances are busy on alarms, a third can be dispatched from Coupeville or Oak Harbor if available and as needed.
- Because of the large area in our response zone, MERVs are invaluable to the level of emergency care provided to our community. They can be on scene providing care and stabilizing patients while the ambulance is still enroute.
- Supervising the EMS (Medical) Division is Connie Shields, who started as a volunteer in 1984. There is currently a need for more volunteers. For more information call (360) 321-1533 or visit www.icfd3.com.