



## **The Los Angeles Fire Department Cycle Team**

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In 1984, the City of Los Angeles hosted the games of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Olympiad. The Los Angeles Fire Department had many issues to deal with for the games, including how to provide EMS services for the masses that would be attending these games. Many ideas came across the table: golf carts, medics on foot, medics on bicycles. At that time, the LAFD decided that medics on bikes was not a viable option.

Almost three decades later in 2003, two events challenged the Los Angeles Fire Department's EMS delivery system. During the LA Marathon, engines and rescue ambulances (RA's) were not able to negotiate the 26-mile course. These engines and RA's were parked on side streets adjacent to the course. The members found themselves on foot with gear and gurneys in hand, traversing the streets block by block, patient by patient. The Fiesta on Broadway, while only ten blocks long in the heart of Los Angeles' Downtown District, had created a slightly different problem: tens of thousands of partiers elbow to elbow. With the combination of alcohol and heat, the LAFD was again challenged in its ability to provide BLS and ALS care to the attendees at the event.

In true LAFD fashion, all patients needing aid were taken care of with the best care possible. However, during post-incident critiques, the LAFD again proposed the idea of medics on bikes.

EMS bike teams had been sprouting up from Canada to Florida since the early 1990's. These bike units had proven that they could be a useful tool in EMS. One of these teams just happened to be a neighbor to the city of Los Angeles – Pasadena, the home of the "Tournament of Roses" Parade and the Rose Bowl game. Because of their success, the LAFD decided to revisit the idea. Firefighter/Paramedic John Vigil, Firefighter/Paramedic Shawn Agnew and Firefighter/Paramedic Renee Herrera, under direction of Assistant Chief (then Battalion Chief) Dan McCarthy and Paramedic Captain Mark Segal, started to research and develop the program. This working group relied on the Los Angeles Police Department bike unit and Pasadena Fire's EMS bike unit to help develop the training program and equipment specifications. In 2004, the first training class of twenty members took to the streets. The first deployment was Firefighter Jamie Foster's funeral, followed shortly thereafter by the International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference.

In the four years since its inception, the Los Angeles Fire Department Cycle Team has grown to 170 members, one of the largest bike medic programs in the country. These teams deploy all across the city, from street fairs in the San Fernando Valley to all night raves downtown, from 4<sup>th</sup> of July at Venice beach to the May Day March and many other street protests. Some of the larger events include the LA Marathon, Fiesta on Broadway, the Hollywood Christmas Parade, USC football home games (providing EMS response during pre-game tailgate parties), and the Martin Luther King Day Parade. These deployments can range from one team to six teams. During the holidays, two teams are placed at Los Angeles International Airport terminals. These teams provide a rapid ALS response when the Rescue Ambulance and Engine Companies assigned to the airport have difficulty negotiating the heavy traffic during the holiday rush. The bike team's response time at the airport averages between 1 to 2 minutes from the time of call.

In recent years, the department administration has been striving to have all members certified by the state for their positions, including specialty assignments such as Haz Mat, USAR, and ARFF. In 2006, the department was looking to provide certified training for the members of the cycle team as well. The



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International Police Mountain Bike Association (IPMBA) provides such a program specific for EMS Cyclists. IPMBA began in the 1990's as a police bike association, but as EMS bicycle units were established, they turned to the police for help. IPMBA, seeing this need, developed a training program specifically for EMS bike units. The 32-hour course provides skill training, maintenance, and operational considerations specific to EMS bikes. IPMBA is the largest and most reputable public safety bike organization in the nation that provides this type of program. At IPMBA's annual conference, there are a number of courses and seminars specific to EMS cycling, according to Maureen Becker, IPMBA's Executive Director. The LAFD has four members certified to teach the 32-hour EMS Cyclist Course and is developing a plan to certify all of the cycle teams' active members.

A cycle team consists of two members: one Paramedic and one EMT. This two-person team is considered to be a "Paramedic Assessment Resource" by Los Angeles County Department of Health Service (LACDHS) standards. The bicycles, mountain bikes built to police specs, carry a three-bag pannier system on the rear. The bags are set up as an ALS set and a BLS set. Each set weighs approximately 40 pounds. Between the two bikes, these bags carry all that the LACDHS requires for a Paramedic Assessment Unit, with the exception of backboards and large splints.

The LAFD Bike Medic Program has become a great public relations tool for the fire department. It has become so routine that City Councilmen have personally asked to have the bike medics at some events. The LAPD has realized that bicycle officers are more approachable to the public than officers in police cars. The fire department has found this to be true as well. While firefighters and paramedics are viewed as friendly, typically they do not have significant one-on-one citizen contact. The bikes provide an opportunity for such interaction. For example, at a street fair, the bikes are a novelty and an ice breaker, encouraging citizens to ask questions about the bikes, the program, and other fire department related issues. Many people especially enjoy the "green" aspect of the bike program, both in fuel savings and reduction of pollution.

With rising fuel costs and increasing traffic congestion, some cities have put bike units on regular duty, such as Chicago, Ill., and London, U.K. The London Ambulance Service Cycle Response Unit was responsible for saving \$4000 in fuel costs in 2007 alone. Orlando, Florida, has used routine units on Friday and Saturday nights in the entertainment district.

The Los Angeles Fire Department is always looking to provide better emergency medical service to the community it serves. The bike medic program has proven to be one such way, and new applications are continually sought. The addition of three John Deere Gators with MEDBEDS and gurneys has aided the bike medics in transporting patients out of crowded areas to awaiting RA's. The Los Angeles Fire Department Fire Prevention Bureau has been working closely with the bike medic program to remedy budget constraints with the possibility of including the cost of cycle teams in special events permits. Despite budget cuts, the bike medic program continues to grow and adapt to the ever changing dynamics of EMS delivery. Future plans include the ability to deploy up to 20 teams at one time and the eventual goal of a full-time team. The LAFD Bike Medic program is sure to be an integral part of the Los Angeles Fire Department's future.

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