

---

## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2009HSERV0033-000615  
April 1, 2009

Ministry of Health Services  
BC Ambulance Service

### **AMBULANCE SERVICE DECLARED ESSENTIAL DURING STRIKE**

VICTORIA – The BC Ambulance Service (BCAS) is reassuring the public that ambulance services affecting patients are considered essential services by law following job action initiated today by paramedics and dispatchers.

The current collective agreement between BCAS and the union representing paramedics and dispatchers, CUPE 873, expired at midnight, March 31. CUPE 873 is on strike starting April 1 and has picket lines at a number of ambulance work sites throughout the province.

“The public should continue to call 9-1-1 for an ambulance as they would at any other time,” said Health Services Minister George Abbott. “All existing service levels of ambulance transports, including those by ground or air ambulance, as well as inter-facility patient transfers have been declared as essential services by the Labour Relations Board.”

At the same time as the parties were bargaining with the assistance of a Labour Relations Board (LRB) mediator, the employer and CUPE 873 worked with the LRB for several weeks to designate essential services in the event of a strike. An essential services order ensures that the health, safety and welfare of the public are maintained by B.C.’s paramedics and dispatchers during job action. Paramedic administrative duties that do not affect patients are vulnerable during job action. The LRB issued an interim essential services order to the BCAS and CUPE 873 on March 27.

“Staffing levels will be the same during job action as they are normally,” said BCAS chief operating officer Sue Conroy. “We expect that paramedics and dispatchers will continue to provide the same high-quality, timely emergency medical services during a strike that they do on a daily basis.”

Attempts to reach an agreement through mediation and subsequent intervention by the associate deputy minister of labour and the minister of health services were not successful.

Since bargaining began on Dec. 10, 2008, the BCAS has tabled four separate contract offers that ranged in term from one to three years and provided improvements to wages and benefits for part-time and full-time paramedics and dispatchers. The employer’s final offer was tabled on March 26 included a three per cent wage increase and a signing bonus worth up to \$2,600 for part-time and \$4,100 for full-time paramedics for a one-year deal. All paramedics and dispatchers received a two per cent wage increase in 2008/09.

The last contract offer tabled by CUPE 873 included a 21 per cent wage increase over a three-year term as well as improvements to benefits. The total value of the proposal would equate to a 28 per cent compensation increase over three years.

- 2 -

For more information on the BC Ambulance Service, please visit [www.bcas.ca](http://www.bcas.ca).

-30-

Media      BCAS Communications  
contact:    250 963-3651

Bernadette Murphy  
Media Relations Manager  
Ministry of Health Services  
250 952-1887 (media line)  
250 213-9590 (cell)

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at [www.gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca).