

*City of Alexandria, Virginia*

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 8, 2004

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 32: NUMBER OF BILINGUAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE TECHNICIANS

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This memorandum is in response to Councilman Smedberg's request for the number of bilingual Emergency Response Technicians (ERTs) in the City's Fire Department.

Of the 52 ERTs approved for FY 2004, five are bilingual (fluently speaking another language in addition to English). Two speak Spanish; one speaks French; and one speaks Korean.

ERTs along with other Fire staff, are trained to handle incidents in which there is a language barrier between a non-English speaking patient and a Fire employee in the following manner:

1. Use a family member or other party at the scene to translate;
2. Summon a Police Officer, Fire Marshal or firefighter to the scene who is able to translate or utilize one who may already be on the scene;
3. Call back through the Fire Communications Center and utilize the "Language Line" service to secure a translator by phone.

In general, this is not a major EMS issue. Staff are skilled in using the resources as stated above. Also, in the event that the use of these resources is not practical, staff are able to use many non-verbal methods to obtain and convey information.

The Communicators Group, made up of Public Information Officers (PIO) from various departments, is currently working on expanding the resources to assist staff in handling these types of situations. One such idea is to identify City employees and contact numbers that are available to translate certain languages. However, in the medical field this is of limited value due to privacy law considerations.