

End Urged for Police Ambulances

BY DAVID SUTTON

Elimination of the Chicago Police Department's ambulance function in favor of expanded service by the Chicago Fire Department was recommended in a report released last night by the Chicago Hospital Council.

The report, entitled Emergency Medical Services in the Chicago Area, was compiled by the Center for Health Administration Studies of the University of Chicago after a two-year examination of hospital emergency departments, Cook County Hospital, transportation, communications and coordination.

Personnel Well Trained

The fire department's 36 ambulances are "excellently equipped and the personnel operating them well trained," the report states. Researchers found the police department's squadrols to be "inappropriate in design, facilities and equipment for the transportation of severely sick or injured patients, while squadrol personnel are insufficiently trained."

Fourteen ambulances should be added to the fire department fleet and the police department should cease its ambulance service "as soon as acceptable alternative arrangements can be made," the report states.

The fire department's expanded ambulance service could be supplemented by selected private companies operating under contract, according to the report.

Quinn Comments

Fire Commissioner Robert J. Quinn said yesterday that his department would find it difficult to assume the additional ambulance service. He recommended that the fire and police departments and the Board of Health maintain their current responsibilities.

The report states that the availability of ambulance vehicles in Chicago does not compare favorably with other major cities in the nation. "In addition, a substantial proportion of emergency department patients clinically rated as requiring immediate medical attention are not taken to a hospital by ambulance but, instead, have to rely on public transportation or automobile," the report says.

Suburban Service Poor

A mail questionnaire of municipal and private ambulance service in suburban Cook County revealed "severely fragmented service, well below the standards of the city, and not covering many unincorporated areas of the county." To solve this problem, the report recommends that municipal ambulance service become a function of Cook County government, supplemented, when necessary, thru contractual arrangements with political subdivisions.

The researchers found a "substantial decline" in the number of private ambulance companies operating in Chicago and the availability of vehicles to the public.