



Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan 2019 Report—Volume 2

Chapter 22: Co-ordinating the Appropriate Provision of Helicopter Ambulance Services

The Ministry of Health is responsible for providing all air (via helicopter or airplane) ambulance services. It contracts Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service (STARS), a non-profit organization, to provide 24-hour medical transportation for critically ill and injured patients by helicopter.

Helicopter ambulance services typically offer faster transport than ground ambulance services, especially for patients located far from trauma centres. However, when equated to a per call basis, helicopter ambulance services cost more than ground ambulance services, which increases the importance of making appropriate use of helicopter services.

The audit found the Ministry needs to more actively oversee air ambulance services. Its needs to receive regular reporting on quality and timeliness of patient medical care provided during helicopter transport, qualifications of medical staff who provide those services, and helicopter maintenance. Also, to identify barriers contributing to STARS' inability to respond, it needs to obtain sufficient information on the number and reasons for when requests to use STARS are cancelled, or STARS does not fly.

The audit also found the Ministry strategically located helicopter bases for air ambulances and fuel caches to provide sufficient provincial flight coverage including as far north as La Ronge and as far south as Estevan. However, the Ministry has not formalized criteria used to support decisions about placement of new helicopter landing zones.

Furthermore, the audit found STARS is fully accredited to medically transport patients and the criteria and related processes utilized in deciding when to use STARS are reasonable. Generally the use of STARS is consistent with established processes. STARS provides quality services within Ministry-expected timeframes.

Annually, STARS transports nearly 700 patients—60% to 70% as transfers between health care facilities and 30% to 40% from accident scene calls.

The Ministry pays a flat contract rate of \$10.5 million for helicopter ambulance services annually.

When equated to a per call basis, in 2018–19, the Government paid an average \$14,876 per helicopter ambulance service, and \$756 per ground ambulance service.

Two STARS bases in Regina and Saskatoon used consistently.

Chapter 23: Providing Safe Drinking Water in Provincial Parks

The Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport provides drinking water in 25 provincial parks through 62 drinking-water systems, which vary significantly in size and complexity. Depending on the volume of drinking water provided, the Water Security Agency (WSA) or the Ministry of Health regulate the Ministry's drinking-water systems. The Ministry acts as its own regulator for water systems in two provincial parks—Buffalo Pound and Danielson.

Generally, the Ministry uses effective processes to provide safe drinking water in provincial parks. It uses certified water system operators. Ministry staff understand each regulator's requirements, obtain permits, complete bacteriological and chemical tests of water, and notify park visitors of issues with drinking water consistent with the requirements of each regulator.

However, the Ministry had not assigned responsibility for preparing or keeping procedure manuals current. As a result, it did not have documented procedures for key processes. For example, three of nine parks visited did not have documented start-up and shutdown procedures for seasonal water systems. Two of six

The Ministry operates **62 drinking-water systems**:

- 22 systems WSA-regulated
- 38 systems Health-regulated
- 2 systems Ministry-regulated

39 systems operate seasonally from May to September

10 provincial parks have both WSA- and health-regulated systems

Majority of drinking water advisories in provincial parks are short term

Nearly 4,000,000 park visitor days

.../continued



WSA-regulated systems did not have permit-required quality control procedures documented. Having documented expectations helps staff to clearly understand and know what is required.

Recommendations for improvements include formalizing key decisions and processes about minimum documentation requirements, and expected supervision.

-30-

The full Provincial Auditor's 2019 Report – Volume 2 is available online at www.auditor.sk.ca.

For more information, please contact:

Judy Ferguson, FCPA, FCA
Provincial Auditor
1500–1920 Broad Street
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3V2
Phone: 306.787.6372
info@auditor.sk.ca

April Serink, MA
Communications Specialist
1500–1920 Broad Street
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3V2
Phone: 306.531.6163
serink@auditor.sk.ca or media@auditor.sk.ca

'Additional issues highlighted in the Provincial Auditor's 2019 Report– Volume 2 include:

- Chapter 10: Provincial Capital Commission
- Chapter 21: Sustainable Fish Population Management
- Chapter 24: Treating Patients at Risk of Suicide in Northwest Saskatchewan
- Topics from 44 other chapters

Accompanying news releases give further details regarding these key topics.

/end