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Volunteer firefighters given emergency vehicle status (Add your comments!)

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The Government of Saskatchewan announced today that municipalities will be allowed to designate volunteer firefighters and first responders' vehicles as emergency vehicles when responding to emergencies, beginning in April 2009.

Currently, Saskatchewan volunteer firefighters and first responders are required to obey all traffic rules while enroute to an emergency and are subject to traffic convictions and penalties if they break the law.

The Traffic Safety Act is being amended to allow municipalities to designate volunteer firefighter and first responder vehicles as emergency vehicles provided the driver completes the required driver training.

"This designation is a way for us to recognize the importance of volunteer firefighters and first responders in Saskatchewan," Crown Corporations Minister Ken Cheveldayoff said.

"The service these volunteers provide to communities within our province is invaluable. When responding to an emergency, they will be recognized as being on the job as soon as they leave their home."

If designated by their municipality, volunteer firefighters and first responders may now use flashing red lights and sirens on their vehicles and may drive contrary to the rules of the road when attending to or responding to an emergency if it is safe to do so. Prior to receiving this designation, they must complete emergency defensive driving training.

"It is obvious that this government has an interest in making changes, which will help volunteer emergency responders fulfil their duties," Saskatchewan Volunteer Firefighters Association president Dale Wagner said.

"This in turn will provide an assurance of protective services for the people of Saskatchewan."

Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities president David Marit said this is a necessary change.

"It's great to see the government responding to the needs of smaller communities who rely on volunteers to address firefighting and emergency services needs," he said.

The authority to designate emergency vehicles is given to municipal leaders because they best know their communities and their specific needs. The cost of providing the vehicles with lights and sirens, and ensuring volunteer drivers are adequately trained and their vehicles are mechanically fit, will be up to municipalities and/or the volunteer firefighter or first responder.

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