

"I may not agree with what you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it" -VOLTAIRE

Publisher's Notes

DOES ANCHORAGE'S PUBLIC SAFETY SYSTEM NEED EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE OR AN OVERHAUL?

Earlier this year, literally hundreds of concerned citizens called mayor Tony Knowles office and Anchorage Police Department with questions about the circumstances which led to the death of Francis Trader.

In a report released just last week, by Mayor Knowles, the facts about Trader's death, some of which were already known, were finally made official. Francis Trader died from a heart attack brought on by hypothermia and chronic alcoholism.

We know, at least those of us who read newspapers and watch the news on television, that Francis Trader was a man suffering from that dread disease alcoholism and that he made his home, some of the time, on the streets of Anchorage where cold, hunger, and violence are a part of the pattern of living for the three hundred or so people who shared his misery.

What we did not know but some of us suspected is that the Public Safety System in Anchorage was not prepared, at least one night last January to handle the circumstances which led to Trader's death.

According to a report made to the Anchorage Assembly by Commissioner of Public Safety John Franklin, more training will be given police officers in recognizing the symptoms of hypothermia. How much training has been given if any, and will more training fix the problem?

A dispatcher who set aside the calls for "911" emergency help/has been reprimanded. Will a reprimand prevent this dispatcher and any other dispatcher from making the same mistake in the future? How often has this same mistake been made and more importantly why?

Police dispatchers who are the first to hear of the problems that could make the difference between life and death should be professionals who are sensitive and alert and well trained in handling all emergency calls. The general public needs assurance that this was an isolated situation that does not occur frequently or even occasionally. What does a reprimand mean and what will be the result?

Because of the Trader incident, Anchorage's Public Safety System will now have a "Quick Care Center" for those who are in need of help, and we will also have a "Cold Alert" mechanism, which means that those who are in charge of providing assistance will know when they are supposed to get people off the streets during extremely cold temperatures.

The report, although it was long in coming, was about what we expected it to be, and we are satisfied that some attention has been given to the matter. But it does leave feelings of misgiving about the Public Safety system and how well it works in Anchorage.

Did the Trader incident initiate emergency assistance for Anchorage's public safety system, in other words were "band aids" put on in order to respond to the public's concern, or does the system need an overhaul?