

Litchfield ambulance 'unsafe'

By BETTY ADAMS
Staff Writer

LITCHFIELD — The Litchfield rescue vehicle is going nowhere.

The town's fire and rescue chiefs grounded the ambulance Monday night because it failed inspection and needs numerous repairs.

Until it's repaired or replaced, rescue personnel will respond to emergencies in their own vehicles instead of using the 1985 red-and-white box-style rig.

"The fire chief and I determined last night it was unsafe," Tina Gowell, Litchfield Rescue director, said. "It was a safety issue for my guys."

Now, the six members of the squad will have their personal jump kits to treat people who are injured, but will lack the equipment carried by the res-

cue vehicle. Patients can be treated in the back of the vehicle, but Gardiner Ambulance is contracted to carry patients to the hospital.

The rescue vehicle will not pass inspection in its current state, said Gowell, who has estimated it needs \$1,500 in mechanical work and \$1,500 for air conditioning. She has no estimate yet for the body work.

On Monday night, Gowell asked the Board of Selectmen to consider replacing the vehicle rather than repairing it. The vehicle was purchased used three years ago and now has 76,000 miles on it.

She showed photos and information on used rescue vehicles from around the New England area, including a used vehicle that may be available from Gardiner Ambulance.

Selectman Mark Russell also asked Gowell to provide quotes

on repairing and upgrading the current vehicle so it could be used for the next three years.

Gowell said rescue personnel will be using their personal vehicles and their own insurance. They also have to pay the deductible amounts for any accidents they're involved in while on rescue work.

Gowell said 10 people are in a training class to become rescue members. She said selectmen authorized \$3,000 to pay for that training.

"Now I'm going in circles trying to get a vehicle," she said Tuesday. "It's discouraging. We will have fully trained rescue people but without a vehicle."

Gowell, who has directed Litchfield Rescue for eight years, said the unit is so small that it rarely qualifies for substantial grants.

Gowell said a rescue vehicle should be used on all calls, in-

cluding those that Litchfield responds to on the Maine Turnpike. She said it's heavier, well-marked and can carry several rescue personnel.

Gowell said the used ambulance from Gardiner would cost about \$18,000.

"I'm hoping the selectmen make a decision by the next meeting on March 8," said Gowell. "I don't want guys responding in their own personal vehicles. I would prefer that they take the rescue rig. It means fewer cars on the road, and the equipment is available in rig."

Part of that equipment, she said, is an automatic electronic defibrillator that the unit purchased with \$3,500 it raised with the help of various town organizations.