



Reliable Kenworth T660 Offers Work and Rest Space for Minnesota Mobile Medical Unit

BROOKLYN PARK, Minn. – If a natural disaster or other event closes local medical facilities or brings them to their limits, Minnesota operates a mobile medical unit that can be used as a backup emergency room and critical care facility.

The Minnesota Mobile Medical Unit is a tractor-trailer unit that, when deployed, expands into a fully functional 1,000-square-foot medical treatment center. The 53-foot trailer has three pods that extend out using a complex hydraulic system. The trailer is pulled by a Kenworth T660, equipped with a 485 hp Cummins ISX engine, a 10-speed manual transmission, full locking rear differentials and a 72-inch AeroCab® AERODYNE® sleeper.



The trailer and its three pods house eight patient bays with room for up to 16 patients, mechanical ventilators, a portable x-ray machine, a nurse's station, a pharmacy and a small laboratory for limited medical testing. A large platform extends out and a ramp unfolds in back giving patients and emergency personnel easy access, and an inflated entryway keeps the center protected from the wind and elements.



While other regions in the country have set up tent-based facilities, state and local health officials determined that such facilities wouldn't work with Minnesota's weather.

The tractor-trailer unit, plus a supply truck, medical supplies and staff training, cost \$1.6 million, with much of the cost going to the trailer and its supplies and components. The medical unit was paid for through a federal grant obtained by the Metropolitan Region Healthcare Preparedness Program, a coalition of local health care professionals and officials from healthcare institutions and response agencies. The program then donated the mobile unit to the Minnesota Department of Health, which administers it through its Office of Emergency Preparedness.



“The Minnesota Mobile Medical Unit can be fully enclosed and heated and has the full capacity of a typical emergency room as far as supplies and resources go,” said Mark Lappe, administrative manager of the Metropolitan Region Healthcare Preparedness Program. Lappe also serves as director of safety, security and emergency preparedness for the Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis.

Lappe said when it came time to choose what specifications they wanted in the mobile unit's truck, members of the program's committee responsible for developing a list talked with officials from fire departments, leasing companies, and Hennepin Technical College, which has a commercial truck driving and maintenance program.

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“We knew we would be going into areas that had suffered catastrophic disasters,” Lappe said. “So, we knew what we needed in a truck for it to be reliable and durable. When we looked at the bids from the different truck manufacturers, we knew Kenworth was the right choice.”

Lappe said once the program chose the Kenworth T660, committee members worked with the local Kenworth dealer, Rihm Kenworth, to equip the truck with different components that made it ideal for the mobile unit’s operation.

“Kenworth made sure the tractor’s sleeper was built with a number of electronic connections so that it could also serve as a mini command center,” Lappe added. “When our personnel are deployed on disasters, they see a lot of patients in the emergency room trailer. They really need a space to conduct telephone conference calls with state and federal officials and do the necessary paperwork. The Kenworth T660 sleeper provides a well-lit and insulated work area, and the sofa and bed offer a comfortable place to rest in between shifts.”

Lappe said the folks at Rihm Kenworth and Cooper Kenworth in North Carolina also coordinated with Kenworth to make sure that the T660 could be delivered to the Special Vehicles Company (Spevco) factory in North Carolina where the trailer was being built.

“We were working on a really tight timeframe because the mobile unit had to be ready and equipped for the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minn., last September,” Lappe said. “It was really important for us to deal with a company that could build the tractor with the amenities we needed and could deliver it in the tight timeframe we had. Kenworth and its dealers certainly delivered.”

During the 2008 Republican National Convention in downtown St. Paul, the mobile unit served as an on-site medical care facility for law enforcement. The unit was deployed two more times for training events in St. Cloud and St. Paul. Last spring, emergency officials called up the unit for disaster duty when the Red River overflowed its banks and flooded the Moorhead, Minn. – Fargo, N.D., area. The flood threatened to cut off access for residents in the area to the only hospital with an emergency room within a 50-mile radius. While the unit’s reserve personnel prepared to treat patients, the

flood eventually subsided and circumstances didn’t require the unit’s use.

When not deployed, the mobile medical unit and an accompanying supply vehicle are stored at the Hennepin Technical College in Brooklyn Park. Occasionally, the unit is used as a training facility for the technical college’s bioelectronics training program, the regional health preparedness program and the Minnesota Responds Medical Reserve Corps. Eventually, Lappe said the unit will go on more training and demonstration tours.

Core teams of reserve personnel are assigned on a rotating schedule and trained to set up the unit and provide patient care, Lappe said. Additional trained health care volunteers, registered with the reserve corps, make up the majority of the mobile unit’s staff while it is deployed for extended emergency duties.

The mobile medical unit is primarily intended for use in Minnesota, but can be called upon at the request of any local jurisdiction in the lower 48 states through the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. The local jurisdiction is then responsible for its deployment and operating costs.

“Since the unit can be called up for duty anywhere in the lower 48 states, we also needed to buy the truck from a manufacturer that could offer us a large number of service locations,” Lappe added. “Kenworth certainly fit the bill in that regard with an extensive network of dealers throughout the U.S. to back it up.”

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