



Photos by Eliot Duke

Lt. Maggie Finnerin takes the new UV light from St. James Fire Department Public Information Office Jim Carey, along with the warning sign.

## St. James Fire Department Tool added in fight against COVID

By Eliot Duke  
Staff Writer

The St. James Fire Department (SJFD) recently added a weapon in its ongoing fight against COVID-19.

The department has purchased an ultraviolet germicidal irradiation portable room sanitizer with the ability to disinfect one of SJFD's two ambulances in just 30 minutes.

Designed to kill virtually all living organisms, the UV light sanitizes its surroundings of molds, virus and bacteria. The device can sterilize masks as well, should the department ever run out.

"It does everything that is has to do," said SJFD Public Information Officer Jim Carey. "It's deadly to plants, animals and people."

Carey added that the sanitizer puts out an ultra-violet light that is cancer causing, and can also kill MRSA germs.

SJFD purchased the sanitizer for \$700, and has already seen a return on its investment.

A recent EMS transport of an individual suspected of having COVID-19 that took more than eight hours spurred the department to find a way to avoid such lengthy situations.

"We needed it," said Lt. Maggie Finnerin, the department's supply officer who ordered the device. "With the resurgence of Omicron and the increased number of calls we were getting, it just got to the point where it was time to purchase our own."

One reason for the long delay was a visit to Brunswick County EMS headquarters to wait in line to use the county's ultraviolet sanitizer on the ambulance. This, following an already long emergency call, added to what is a difficult job on a good day.

"They had a five-hour wait because the (emergency department) was full and they couldn't offload the patient until a bed opened up," Carey said. "Our EMS volunteers get very overworked."

Carey said the EMS crew found out about the UV sanitizer when they went to sterilize the ambulance with the county.

Having the device at the ready, he said, frees up volunteers to multi-task, and it saves valuable time.

"If they think they have had a Covid patient, when they come back to the station all the EMTs have to fill out their reports," said Carey. "They can turn (the sanitizer) on and by the time they're done the UV has taken care of the ambulance. It's very portable and doesn't take a rocket scientist to attach it."

The first time EMS volunteers put the device to use confirmed the department's decision to go ahead with the purchase.

"We've already got our money's worth," Carey said. "The investment wasn't that great and the return is we don't have to stand in line."

"It's another weapon in our Covid arsenal."

Due to the potential harm caused by exposure to a powered-up turbo-UV sanitizer, warning signs are posted around the ambulance while it's running, and staff have been made aware of the dangers. Once turned off, the device is harmless - the UV rays cannot penetrate glass and the light only sanitizes exposed objects and surfaces.



Lt. Maggie Finnerin sets up the powerful new UV light the St. James Fire Department purchased to sanitize its ambulances.



When the new sanitizer is operational inside an ambulance, the St. James Fire Department posts signs outside to keep anyone from getting exposed to the harmful UV lights.