



Habersham County Emergency Services, Clarkesville, GA

Employees and volunteers with Habersham County Emergency Services provide 24/7 fire suppression, emergency medical, technical rescue, hazardous material, water rescue, education, and arson investigation services. The department was created in 2018 after the county assumed oversight of Habersham Medical Center's ambulance service. Soon after, the ambulance service and the county's fire department were merged to create the new agency.

Director Chad Black has had a variety of assignments during his 33 years as a flight paramedic and Deputy Fire Chief of Operations for the 372-member Hall County Fire Service, but he'd never helped execute a department merger.

"One of the challenges we had was scheduling. There wasn't a good system in place with either (agency) when we merged, so we created a Word document that had to be changed every day. It listed the shift commander, the captains, and each apparatus and who was assigned. It had to be updated daily and e-mailed out for the next shift. It was constantly a change-process, and it was not a good, reliable system," said Black.

"We'd just gotten the hospital to purchase Kronos for us to schedule. Now, a month after we implemented Kronos, they decided to merge -- so that went away," Black said. He was determined to find a tool to assist the shift commanders with scheduling chores. "Of course, we looked at Kronos because we'd just gone through three months of learning how to operate it. We also looked at Telestaff, and just in Googling, I found Aladtec."

After several conversations and a customized demo, Black and his staff decided it would be a good fit.

Black and others were already familiar with digital scheduling so that transition was smooth. The bigger "wow" for command staff and members was the way Aladtec streamlined time-off approvals and eliminated the paper shuffle.

"Everything was being done by paper. If you wanted to be off or have a time-swap, you had to fill out a (form), get it to the battalion chief, battalion chief had to get it to headquarters and be approved. We had people who were not getting approved for a vacation in a timely manner. Our whole process was just the 1970s and Eighties. We had to fix that."



Department Info:

Roster: 75 FT and paid on-call firefighters, paramedics & EMTs, operating from nine stations.

Mission: Providing EMS, fire, and rescue services to some 45,000 residents, across 279 sq. miles in northeast Georgia. Habersham County, about 90 miles north of Atlanta, includes part of the Chattahoochee National Forest and shares a portion of 4,430-foot Tray Mountain, which hosts part of the storied Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

Apparatus: 11 engines, 9 tankers, 1 ladder, 5 ambulances, a UTV and other special equipment.

Unique skills: Staff includes two community paramedics

Aladtec users since early 2019.

www.habershamga.com/emergencyservices

Neighboring agencies also using Aladtec:

Demorest Fire Dept., Towns County EMS, Hiawassee; Clay County EMS, Hayesville, NC; and Lenoir Community College, Sylva, NC

“When we started (using Aladtec), we had no idea of the other assets and resources that it provided -- making your own forms. We’ve been very robust with that and continue to strengthen (our selection),” said Black, explaining new forms he just created to track damaged, out-of-service, and missing equipment.

“I’ll give you a success story: Before I took over as EMS Director, they’d been trying for five years to add an additional fifth, 24-hour ambulance. As soon as we got (Aladtec), we created a form (to be completed) when we run out of ambulances. It includes a date, which agency was summoned to respond, how long we were out of ambulances, and what did we miss?”

“We do patient transfers, which is revenue for us -- so it tracks how long the county didn’t have an ambulance. Number one, there’s a delay in response, and number two, that’s money not going to Habersham County for every call we don’t run.

“What I love is, it’s the only business I’ve ever called that IT (Support) answers the phone...” -- Director Chad Black

“When budget time started this year, we only had a little over two months of data because we’d just started using Aladtec, but if I remember right, the first month we were out of ambulances 11 or 12 times in the month, a total of eight or ten hours. The second month we were out about the same amount. When I showed the commissioners and my boss that, they went -- ‘You mean we were out of ambulances this long, and this many times this month?’ I said ‘Yes.’ I was then told -- ‘You don’t have to present this again.’”

“We got six new people and a fifth ambulance. Showing them that data, it took one meeting, five minutes, and they said ‘that’s a done deal,’” said Black. “We should have been keeping up with that on paper or something over the years. Aladtec gave us a simple way.”

Habersham has 22 different forms in their system. A newer one is a “Press Release” information form that battalion chiefs or captains complete after a major call. “They come back in, fill out the press release, and as soon as they hit ‘save,’ I get an alert on my phone.” Black then uses the information to answer reporters’ questions or issue a written release himself.

Black is also a big fan of the flexibility offered within Aladtec’s Member Database and the accountability brought about with the Required Message tool.

While he was at Hall County, Black once had a fire lieutenant who suffered a seizure and passed out while mowing the grass outside a station house.

“We transported him to the hospital. We had no clue as to whether he’d ever had a seizure before. We went to his emergency contact information, and he and his wife had changed phones a year prior and not updated it. It took us two hours to find his wife. Now, that’s not

good, especially if something happens and it’s serious.

”In our business, unfortunately, there are injuries and fatalities from fires and things like that. If that happens, we want to make sure we get in touch with who you want us to get in touch with. And if it’s a worst-case scenario -- who do you want us to notify? Your wife? Your mother? And do you have a preference from our department? Who you want to go? Some may want me. Some may want their partner. Some may want one of our chaplains. So we let them pick.”

“We also keep all of our policies, our medical protocols, our rules and regulations -- everything is in the Documents folder. So when we update a new policy, we’ll send it out by e-mail, but we also do a Required Message -- ‘Hey. New policy.’ If something comes down four months later and they’d acknowledged that and they say, ‘Well, I didn’t know it...’, I’m sorry. You acknowledged it on Aladtec. You should have read it.”

The next big goal for Habersham’s Aladtec use is to develop a seamless process to export the Scheduled Time report in a format the county’s payroll system can decipher. It will cost Habersham EMS several thousand dollars upfront, but Black knows it will pay for itself quickly.

“And when we get that, I can’t tell you how much work that is taking off the battalion chiefs. They had to go around Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of payroll week -- every two weeks. I added up how much gas we used driving around, and then I showed (county officials). There’s the return-on-investment. We’ll be saving \$10,000 a year on gas, driving around this county picking up payroll sheets.”

Black has become an Aladtec champion in Georgia.

“I’m a big believer, if you can have one system that can do the majority of tasks, it makes it a lot better. With Aladtec, for the cost, with the scheduling and everything else it’s done -- you’re an easy sell,” said Black, who has recommended Aladtec to at least four other Georgia EMS services. “It’s been a dream for us. We’re still learning it, just scratching the surface, but it’s been one of the best programs, investments, in my 36 years that I’ve ever done.

“What I love is, it’s the only business I’ve ever called that IT (Support) answers the phone. If I’ve got an IT problem, that’s who you want to talk to. If I want to speak to the bosses, they have to transfer me from IT to administration. And I’ve never seen a business that does that.”



Chad Black

Chad Black was named Director at the newly formed Habersham County Emergency Services in 2018. A licensed National Registry paramedic, Black holds instructor certificates in Basic and Advanced Cardiac Life Support, International Trauma Life Support, Pediatric Advanced Life Support, and Paramedic Preceptor. He has completed more than 15,000 training hours in both Fire and EMS (Ground/Air) related topics. He currently serves as Chairman of the Georgia EMS Association.