

COMMUNIQUÉ

du commissaire des incendies

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No. 2020-04

MITIGATING RISK TO COVID-19

Fire services personnel should be commended for their continued response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The impact is being felt provincewide and I know that the response from fire services will vary across the province depending on individual and local circumstances. Communities are counting on fire services and your members are resilient in responding to these emergencies.

This communicate is meant to be a starting point for all fire services to help mitigate the risk related to COVID-19. It is critical that we balance public health measures and the need to control the spread of the virus with appropriate flexibility to ensure that fire protection services continue to operate.

As a precaution, I would like to provide fire services with information as it relates to both organizational and operational considerations.

The response to this outbreak is fluid, however, the considerations below will support the management and mitigation of the spread of COVID-19 moving forward.

Organizational Considerations

Fire services should continue to identify, review and confirm processes regarding:

- Enhanced hygiene practices as outlined by the [Ministry of Health](#);
- Public engagements and public access to facilities;
- Ensuring core services outlined in the municipal Establishing and Regulating Bylaw are evaluated and consideration for preservation of services provided;
- Training of firefighters, including weekly general training for volunteer fire services where all staff attend at the same time, and external training services; and,
- Ensuring appropriate Fire Chief and Chief Fire Official designations and delegations of authority are in place, if required.

Fire services should continue to review their business continuity plans to address issues such as:

- Minimum staffing levels;
- Alternative work arrangements;

- Coordinating communication with local stakeholders and lead agencies (Ministry of Health, public health units, municipal and regional emergency management operations and departments);
- Following the directives and recommended protocols of lead agencies including, but not limited to the Ministry of Health, around potential personnel exposure; and,
- Administration of the fire department (human resources, financial/purchasing).

If a fire department determines that there are changes required to the delivery of core services, municipal council should be engaged and updated immediately. Current and updated information should be made available on community websites and all forms of communication in your municipality.

Operational Considerations

Municipalities must deliver their core services in accordance with the municipal Establishing and Regulating Bylaw and applicable legislated requirements. Effective and efficient delivery of fire protection services and programs need to be continually reviewed to address changes and emerging circumstances. Operations should continue to encompass the three lines of defense and be delivered according to current risk.

In order to limit staff exposure to COVID-19, alternative service delivery models should be considered for all non-essential programs and events. The following practices may be considered upon review of current fire protection services:

Line 1 - Public Education

- Any in-person public education events should be postponed until further notice as directed by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health.
- Continue to provide online programs in accordance with the community's needs and circumstances.
- Provide fire and life safety resources for any emerging local risks.
- Enhance social media campaigns on all platforms currently in use.
- Provide access to fire and life safety resources electronically.

Line 2 - Fire Safety Standards and Enforcement

- Review inspection and fire drill requirements and reschedule as necessary within the authority of the Chief Fire Official.
- Due to COVID-19 related disruption:
 - Building owners/operators may experience difficulties in retaining service providers to meet some Fire Code obligations (e.g. maintenance of fire alarm systems, sprinkler systems, portable extinguishers, etc.)
 - Service providers may have difficulty accessing buildings or parts of buildings to carry out Fire Code requirements.

- Fire safety continues to be of utmost importance, however, it is recognized that fire safety related activities that require entry into buildings (e.g. work of service providers, fire department inspections, etc.) must be balanced by steps needed to protect Ontarians against the further spread of COVID-19.
- Fire Departments should consider on a case by case basis and per local municipal policies during COVID-19 restrictions:
 - To limit fire inspection activities that require entry into buildings to fire safety matters that involve serious risk to life safety, or, fire safety matters that the Fire Chief or their delegate have assessed and deemed to be necessary.
- Fire inspection related entry into buildings should be undertaken in compliance with any COVID-19 safety protocols adopted by municipalities and in compliance with any additional protocols adopted in buildings where entry is required.

Line 3 - Emergency Response

- Review deployment models and staff allocation to emergency responses (e.g. medical, suspected false alarms, rescues) including fire protection agreements and mutual aid.
- Inform Regional Fire Coordinator of impacts to local staffing levels.
- Coordinate activities in conjunction with applicable municipal and provincial stakeholders and agencies including but not limited to Emergency Medical Services and Communications (dispatching).
- Review personal protective equipment procedures and decontamination practices for attending incidents with patients exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms.
- Review tiered medical call response and work with EMS personnel to consider whether patient contact should be made by fire when EMS is already on site.

To contain the spread of COVID-19, the Government of Canada and Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health advises that you avoid all non-essential travel outside of Canada. It is very important that all fire departments strongly consider the immediate cessation of all non-essential business travel outside of Canada. The Ministry of Health provides guidance to anyone that is returning from travel outside of Canada on its [website](#). Fire services personnel should consult their local public health unit and their manager/occupational health and safety department on all matters related to staff wellbeing during this pandemic.

In addition to the considerations outlined above, the Ministry of Health has asked the Office of the Fire Marshal to provide fire services with a link to the most current information being used by paramedic services. This information can be found by visiting the Emergency Health Services [website](#).

I want to thank all fire services for their continued response to this pandemic. If you have any questions, please reach out through your fire service adviser.

Visit Ontario's [website](#) to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.