

REPORT

Fire & Rescue Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of
Council in Regular Meeting

Date: April 24, 2023

From: Erin Williams
Acting Fire Chief

File:

Item #: 2023-285

Subject: 2023 Summer Heat Response Update

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receive this report for information.

PURPOSE

This report is to inform Council of the current initiatives in response to heat related events and information regarding Emergency Preparedness Week, May 7-13th, 2023.

SUMMARY

During the summer of 2022, we saw many consecutive days with warmer than average temperatures.

Our primary focus at this time is updating our existing plans in preparation for the potential of an extreme heat response, with an emphasis on preventative messaging and collaboration within the community including,

- Outreach Updates, including direct contact with property managers
- Fraser Health Home Health Air Conditioner Loan Pilot Program
- Outdoor Cooling Strategy Update
- Social Connectedness and Emergency Preparedness at Ross Tower

BACKGROUND

Last year saw an increase of 10 degrees in temperature during several heat related events, which created the need to activate dedicated cooling venues throughout the City. The Emergency Management Office (EMO) has reviewed and updated the Heat Response Plan which will be invoked annually to ensure that risk of extreme heat in the City of New Westminster is managed by a series of temporary mitigation strategies and initiatives. Moving forward we will be installing an informational phone messaging system for these types of events using the new Twilio system.. This system has been in use by the City Electrical Utility during localized power outages and has proven to be an effective community messaging platform.

EXISTING POLICY AND PRACTICE

The EMO, in collaboration with other City Departments and community organizations, continues to develop and implement mitigation strategies and continues to follow its three step response strategy put in place in early 2022.

1. Provide accessible public spaces where people can cool off
2. Undertake extensive in-person outreach to Building Managers, seniors, people with disabilities and people experiencing homelessness
3. Communication strategy to inform the public of the risk that extreme heat poses to everyone in the community

The EMO's goal is to mobilize the community and prepare and manage the events when they occur. For Emergency Preparedness Week, May 7-13th, 2023, and the month of May, we will be encouraging all residents of New Westminster to come together and reach out to their neighbors and friends to create an internal social network that can better support one another in an emergency or even in day to day life.

ANALYSIS

The EMO continues to reach out into the community providing information for extreme heat and general emergency preparedness. We continue to actively engage with our faith based and nonprofit community members, and are working to secure other partnerships to help ensure information is received into the community. We are also focusing our collaboration and coordination efforts with other City Departments to ensure communication and planning efforts are aligned.

RESOURCES

Emergency Preparedness Week

The Emergency Management Office will be working with our Fire Prevention Team to create two pop up “Get Prepared” experiences. One will be at the Queensborough Community Center on May 5th 2023 from 1430-1600 hrs, with another at Royal City Centre on Tuesday May 9th, 2023 between 0900 and 1200 hrs.. The EMO and Fire Prevention have a common goal of preparing residents for an emergency, whether it being creating an emergency kit or ensuring residents are aware of how to evacuate their dwelling.

Fraser Health Home Health and Monitoring Site

In partnership with Fraser Health Home Health, the Fire & Rescue Service, CNW Parks & Recreation and the EMO have developed and trialed a dedicated heat Emergency Monitoring Centre at Century House when needed. This heat strategy was developed last year and is designed to be activated during extreme heat events within the city that produce high-demand for services from emergency responders. This initiative will give the ability for First responders to evacuate low acuity patients to a location staffed by medical professionals where they can be treated and monitored on an ongoing basis.

During the first week of May, a review with Fraser Health Home Health, Health Emergency Management and Climate Readiness BC, New West Fire & Rescue Services, the Emergency Management Office and CNW Parks & Recreation will be conducted. This will ensure that plans are solidified and updated in the event we need to move to a monitoring site activation during an extreme heat event.

Fraser Health Home Health Air Conditioner Loan Pilot Program

The Fire Prevention Office, CNW Community Planning and the EMO in partnership with Fraser Health Home Health are working together again for the 2023 summer season to administer a Home Health Air Conditioner Loan Pilot Program. City staff are reviewing, using Fire Rescue data analytics, high risk priority addresses in the city that meet an established criteria to be a part of this pilot project again. The property representative’s contact information is then provided to Fraser Health Home Health for further processing upon confirming interest and consent to share. Currently, we are reviewing properties that fit the established criteria and have forwarded several buildings contact information to Fraser Health Home Health for consideration.

Outdoor Cooling Strategy (2023 Update)

In response to the extreme heat advisories, staff from multiple departments (Parks & Recreation, Engineering Operations and the Emergency Management Office) have

developed information for residents indicating where to 'cool off' which includes locations for indoor cooling centres, water stations, outdoor pools, misting stations, and spray parks as well as green infrastructure (i.e. parks and natural areas with mature trees/ forested areas that create cool shade). In addition to launching the Outdoor Cooling Map in 2022, staff intend to install up to 15 temporary misting stations in priority neighbourhoods by June 30th, 2023. The misting stations will be installed in various locations such as parks, plazas, near community facilities, bus stops and retail areas.

Social Connectedness and Emergency Preparedness at Ross Tower

In 2022, the City entered into a partnership the Seniors Services Society of BC to deliver the Connect and Prepare Program as part of the Ross Tower Integrated Support Pilot Project. This preferred pilot project site is managed by BC Housing, includes 96 units of subsidized housing, and serves a highly vulnerable population, including a high proportion of frail and live-alone seniors with observed low levels of social connectedness and interaction.

Connect and Prepare is an innovative approach to building community emergency preparedness and resilience by strengthening social connections between neighbours. The Ross Tower pilot is underway, with partners working in collaboration to support respective Connect and Prepare initiatives over a one year period. Currently there are two other buildings with similar challenges that have been approached to take part in this program and staff is awaiting responses to begin a similar program at these locations.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Staff continue to consult with Emergency Management and Climate Readiness BC and other municipalities in order to continue to build upon its resiliency efforts within the City.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no additional expenditure at this time except the allocation of regular staff time to monitor weather conditions, assess the developing risk, and initiate preparations. Following an emergency activation and the need for additional resources was identified, Emergency Management and Climate Readiness BC would support the City within their financial reimbursement structure when certain criteria are met and a provincial task number has been requested at the beginning of the event.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Interdepartmental liaison has coordinated with the ongoing work of the Interdepartmental Extreme Heat Working Group. This group consists of representatives from EMO, Fire & Rescue Services, and Community Planning. Collaboration with other Departments will be incorporated into this Working Group as needed.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. That Council receive this report for information; or
2. That Council provide alternative direction to staff.

Staff recommends Option 1.

CONCLUSION

The EMO will continue to monitor the forecasted weather and focus our efforts in finalizing our heat response updates for the summer season with internal City Departments and outside Agencies. The EMO will also continue to mobilize and provide outreach to vulnerable populations, residents, faith based and non-profit organizations and provide information on ways the community can become more resilient during an emergency.

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
Cory Hansen, Emergency Management Coordinator

This report was reviewed by:
Brad Davie, Assistant Deputy Chief
Erika Mashig, Manager Parks and Open Space Planning, Design and Construction
Anur Mehdic, Social Planner

This report was approved by:
Erin Williams, Acting Fire Chief
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer