

REPORT

Fire & Rescue Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council in Regular Meeting **Date:** May 6, 2024

From: Erin Williams,
Fire Chief **File:**

Subject: **2024 Emergency Preparedness Week and Summer Heat Response Update** **Item #:** [Report Number]

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 5-11th, 2024.

SUMMARY

Each summer we are continuing to see many consecutive days with warmer than average temperatures.

The Emergency Management Office is currently focusing on updating our existing plans in preparation for the potential of increased summer temperatures and or the possibility of an extreme heat response. This includes an emphasis on preventative messaging and collaboration within the community including,

- Outreach updates, including preventative messaging with property managers, faith based and non-profits.
- “One Cool Room Air Conditioner Program” as part of the accelerated heat plan.
- Outdoor Cooling Strategy.

BACKGROUND

Since the heat dome in 2021, we have seen an increase in summer heat related events, which created the need to activate dedicated cooling venues throughout the City. The Emergency Management Office (EMO) is reviewing and updating our Heat Response Plan, which continues to 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.

Last year we installed an informational phone messaging system for these types of events. This system has allowed those that do not have access to technology or social media to have a means to listen to updated information when there is a heat related event. It was used this past winter during a cold event, we hope with further education and promotion it can 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 outreach to Building Managers, seniors, people with disabilities and people experiencing homelessness throughout the community.
3. Communication strategies to inform the public of the risk that extreme heat poses to everyone in the community.

For Emergency Preparedness Week, May 5th -11th, 2024, and the month of May, we will also be encouraging all residents of New Westminster to become better prepared and continue to reach out to their neighbors and friends to create an internal social network that can support one another in an emergency.

ANALYSIS

The EMO continues to reach out into the community providing information for extreme heat and general emergency preparedness. We are also strengthening 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 and our Fire Prevention Team will have two pop up “Get Prepared” information tables. One will be at TACC on May 7th, 2024, from 1000-1200 hrs. with the other at Century House on May 8th 2024 from 1030-1230 hrs. We will also be focusing on visiting Queensborough for a popup at the end of May or June, dates and weather permitting. With our combined efforts and collaboration the EMO and Fire Prevention will continue to provide messaging to residents that includes preparing them for any emergency or event.

As part of the kick off to Emergency Preparedness Week, EMO will also begin outreach with preventative heat messaging with property managers, faith based and non-profits. This information will also be included on our City website and posted on social media throughout the summer as a key reminder to stay cool and take the necessary precautions when temperatures start to rise.

Faith Based and Non-Profits Update

The Emergency Management Office is continuing to build both formal and informal relationships with a variety of faith based and non-profits, as they are very beneficial to the community and also in the event of an emergency.

Currently we are working with Senior Services Society and others such as the Gurdwara in Queensborough to help increase and support our community resiliency. Building these relationships is key when we have an increase in weather events, and various non-profits want to help continue to provide additional support where needed and or required. The Emergency Management Office will also be reaching out to other non-profits and faith based organizations in the community for their support in our Emergency Support Services Program later this summer.

DIY Air Cleaner in partnership with Simon Fraser University

In partnership with Simon Fraser University and our Energy and Climate Action Department, we will be offering “Build your own Free Air Cleaner” sessions. These sessions are designed to provide those most vulnerable to wildfire smoke an opportunity to learn about emergency measures to remove contaminants like fire smoke, allergens, and pathogens from their indoor air. This workshop will provide instructions and materials to build a free air cleaner using a MERV-13 filter. EMO, Fire Prevention and Climate Action staff will also be providing information regarding heat preparedness at these workshops. There are two free sessions scheduled for May 10th and 24th at Century House and residents are encouraged to register through the Active Living Guide, online. Registration can also be taken in person at Century House.

“One Cool Room” - Air Conditioner Initiative as part of the Accelerated Heat Plan

The EMO in partnership with our Fire Prevention Team last year used fire rescue data analytics, to identify high risk priority addresses in the City that meet an established criteria. There were approximately 126 properties identified. These properties have been contacted to see if they meet the criteria to participate in our “One Cool Room” initiative. Currently, we are reviewing properties that we have not been able to contact and will be reaching out to those property owners. To date we have provided 31 large air conditioner units and 3 small units to those identified at risk properties that have a common space to cool down this summer.

Last year Kambo Energy was able to quickly activate their local network to deliver additional support to the City’s residents regarding extreme heat and low-cost cooling through their Empower Me program. This additional support helped provide:

- Delivery of extreme heat preparedness messaging with 10 community groups.
- Personalized support to individuals on community cooling resources and navigating the Province’s income and vulnerability qualified air conditioner program (BC Hydro ECAP AC Program).
- Successfully assisted 15 families with language support to fill out ECAP AC Program applications.

For the 2024 summer season, the City has approached Empower Me again to provide engagement with local community groups to share information and to continue to offer support in preparation for extreme heat. EMO and Climate Action are currently working with Empower Me to also offer multilingual support at one of the upcoming DIY Air Cleaner workshops.

Outdoor Cooling Strategy Update

In response to the extreme heat advisories, staff from multiple departments (Parks & Recreation, Engineering Operations and the Emergency Management Office) continue to create awareness and provide any updated information for residents with information on where to ‘cool off’ during extreme heat events. Places to ‘cool off’ include indoor cooling centers, water stations, outdoor pools, misting stations, and spray parks and wading pool as well as green infrastructure (i.e. parks and natural areas with mature trees / forested areas that create cool shade). The Emergency Management Office and Parks and Recreation will continue outreach into the community throughout the spring and summer season, with a focus on supporting our most vulnerable.

1. In addition to planting approximately 900 new trees in parks and open spaces in 2023 towards phase one of the Urban Reforestation and Biodiversity Enhancement Initiative (URBEI), the City has been granted an additional \$1,005,300 from the Province of B.C.’s Disaster Risk Reductions – Climate Adaptation funding stream of the Community Emergency Preparedness. These funds will be allocated towards phase two of URBEI which includes installation

of 532 trees on streets and boulevards, bolstering community resilience to the impacts of climate change and moving the City closer to its goal of planting 8,500 trees on City property by 2030.

Accelerated Heat Plan - Stream 2 Update

Within the Stream 2 extreme heat response planning identified in 2023, we will initiate data collection on climate vulnerable buildings in anticipated to go forward in 2024. This information gathering will support the development of targeted building infrastructure upgrade programs which will enable long term energy conservation, emission reductions and climate resilience.

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

We are currently anticipating an underspend of approx. \$100,000 for the accelerated heat plan, due to 1) Purchased sourced air conditioners at a discount of what was expected and 2) BC Hydro program has reduced the demand for our program 3) There is more of reduced uptake for air conditioners from some of the larger buildings than anticipated.

Stream 2 funding for the accelerated heat plan will be directed towards ongoing research into legal authority to develop bylaws on business licensing for cool room requirements for existing residential rental units as previously planned.

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 partner agencies. The EMO will also continue to 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, Deputy Fire Chief
Erika Mashig, Manager Parks and Open Space Planning, Design and Construction
Leya Behra, Sr. Manager of Climate Action

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