

# **REPORT**

## ***Fire & Rescue Services***

**To:** Mayor Cote and Members of Council      **Date:** April 25, 2022  
**From:** Acting Fire Chief Erin Williams      **File:**  
**Item #:** 2022-292  
**Subject:** **2022 Heat Response Plans and Emergency Preparedness Week**

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

That Council receive this report for information.

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### **PURPOSE**

To inform Council of the current plans for potential response to extreme heat this summer and information regarding the City's plans for Emergency Preparedness Week.

### **SUMMARY**

As we move closer to spring and summer the Emergency Management Office (EMO) is following weather patterns and trends. The current outlook, is a slower progression than we normally would observe across the province. This will bring a cooler wet spring as per Environment Canada. The EMO will continue to monitor the forecasts and advance our efforts in pre-planning for extreme heat.

Our current focus for Emergency Preparedness Week and the month of May is outreach to our vulnerable populations, residents, non-profits and faith based organizations. We will be encouraging them to create a social communication network. This ensures during an emergency they have friends, family and or neighbours they can reach out to and use if needed. As we saw last year with the heat, we all need to have a personal plan that we can mobilize. We need to continue to adapt and be more resilient as these events continue occur.

## **BACKGROUND**

Extreme Heat is a period of un-seasonally high temperatures, typically accompanied by high humidity and lack of night-time cooling. Extreme Heat can last for several days, and the severity of the situation may be further complicated if accompanied by poor air quality (e.g. during wildland fire smoke episodes or urban 'smog'). The EMO has reviewed and revised 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.

## **EXISTING POLICY AND PRACTICE**

The City has initiated a three step heat response strategy including a work plan that will be annually reviewed and updated. Key components in the preparation stage prior to an event include:

1. Provide space where people can cool off
2. Undertake extensive in-person outreach to seniors, people with disabilities and people experiencing homelessness
3. Communicate the risk that extreme heat poses to everyone in the community

The City's extreme heat monitoring and initiatives have been created based on actions from last year and the need to increase our level of pre-planning and outreach in the community. It is the EMO's goal to mobilize the community and prepare for mitigating the event if it is to occur. For Emergency Preparedness Week, May 1-7<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 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. It is our goal that by providing education those about creating a social structure within their own day to day life in the City, that we can be better prepared and more resilient during these type of climate change events.

## **ANALYSIS**

The EMO has reviewed and updated our Extreme Heat Response Plan which is divided into three stages:

- 1) Seasonal Readiness - The previous heat season is reviewed by March and actions are taken prior to June through September to prepare for and maintain a state of readiness. During this stage, threshold temperatures are not expected to be reached.
- 2) Level 1 Awareness Warm Weather in the Forecast - An Alert can be issued up to one week in advance of forecasted temperatures that are anticipated to have an actual of  $\geq 27^{\circ}\text{C}$  at YVR. The Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) will be activated to a LEVEL One or "Awareness".

- 3) Level 2 Extreme Heat Warning / Special Weather Statement in Effect - An Extreme Heat Warning / Special Weather Statement has been issued by Environment Canada when there are two days of forecasted extreme heat, and or the Health Authority or the City of New Westminster deems there to be a need for an initiated response.

During a Level 2 activation, the extreme heat criteria indicates temperatures at which the expected risk to the public is extremely high, and a larger increase in deaths in the community is expected, based on recommendations by the BCCDC. This is in addition to a Health Authority assessment of anticipated risk to health. The alert triggers additional responses from the Health Authority, local government and partner organizations as well as public messaging to strongly encourage individuals and communities to be aware of the risk and take action to stay cool.

### Extreme Weather City Response

The EMO, in consultation with internal city departments, are continuing to pre-plan for heat responses across the City should an extreme heat event occur. The following initiatives are considerations and are not limited to other types of response as they are event dependent:

- Activation of the City's EOC.
- Public Outreach and Communication (Vulnerable population, property managers, nonprofit, faith based etc.).
- Activation of Cooling Venues.
- Setup and Support of Water distribution points in the City.
- Community Action Response Staff (CARS) This initiative is currently under review - redeployment of full-time staff from their regular duties for emergency response purposes. Staff would be utilized in times of emergent need in the City. For a heat response their purpose would be to provide support in providing outreach to the vulnerable populations in our City.
- Consideration for emergency use only during an extreme heat event - Door to Door Canvassing to identify higher risk buildings (using City Fire Inspectors, supplemented with other available re-purposed City Staff / CARS).
- Possible extension of wading pool and spray park hours.
- Possible extension of hours at City Facilities.
- Monitoring Call Volumes for Fire & Police in response to heat.
- Possible use or setup of Fire Apparatus in targeted areas to set up a spray area.
- Arrangement of Transportation of the general public to the nearest cooling venue (i.e. using taxi system).
- Working with not for profits to provide them support such as extra bottled water etc.
- Consulting with neighboring jurisdictions regarding their level of response.

To be fully able to respond using these initiatives the EMO is also providing EOC training to senior management and City Staff which will increase our level of knowledge and resilience when responding to and in support of an emergency in the City.

### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

Staff continue to consult with Emergency Management BC in order to understand the impacts of climate change such as the recent atmospheric river and heatwave in 2021, and how this translates to the seasonal outlook now and in the future. Staff are also in the process of developing the City's Atmospheric Events Guide, which will guide all future climate related atmospheric events and house all plans associated with such events.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There is no expenditure at this time except the allocation of regular staff time to monitor weather conditions, assess the developing risk, and initiate preparations. There is sufficient budget allocated at this time to respond to the current level of risk. Following our transition into summer, additional financial resources may be required to implement mitigation measures depending on the further development of extreme heat conditions.

### **INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

Interdepartmental liaison to date has coordinated with the establishment of a heat strategy working group. This group consists of representatives from Parks & Recreation, Library, Anvil Centre, Police, Fire, Community & Social Planning, Finance, Corporate Communications, Engineering, Human Resources and the EMO. Interaction with other departments will be incorporated if the City & the Province activate their respective EOCs.

### **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 monitor the forecasts and continue our efforts in pre-planning for extreme heat with internal City Departments. We will also continue to mobilize and provide outreach targeting vulnerable populations, residents, faith based and non- profits and provide information on ways to prepare for and become more resilient in extreme heat.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment 1 – Summary Heat Events Data & Stats 2021
- Attachment 2 – What to do in Extreme Heat Publication
- Attachment 3 – Seniors Connections, Integrated Supports and Emergency Preparedness Overview for Winter / Spring 2022

## **APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:

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This report was reviewed by:

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This report was approved by:

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