

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

DATE: 2017 Dec 14

FROM: DIRECTOR PUBLIC SAFETY AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT: CITY OF BURNABY 2017 WILDFIRE SUPPORT

PURPOSE: To provide a summary of City of Burnaby 2017 Wildfires Emergency Deployment.

RECOMMENDATION

1. **THAT** this report be received and forwarded to Council for information purposes.

REPORT

1.0 BACKGROUND

In early 2017, warm temperatures throughout the province combined with minimal rainfall resulted in significantly dried out vegetation and soil. In addition, pine forests containing large amounts of dead pine trees due to the mountain pine beetle, provided optimal fuel for fires. These conditions resulted in most areas of British Columbia being rated at an extreme or high risk of fire danger.

Due to these unusual conditions, the BC Wildfire Management Branch subsequently received 147 reports of fire starts from the beginning of 2017 April up to the end of 2017 June. The intensity and number of fires being reported, increased significantly with 42 fires igniting from 2017 June 26 to 2017 July 3.

On 2017 July 6, a two-hectare wildfire began west of 100 Mile House, British Columbia and on 2017 July 7, 56 new fires started throughout the province leading to the issuance of several Evacuation Alerts, Orders and the declaration of a Provincial State of Emergency by the Government of British Columbia. The wildfires quickly grew in size due to significant weather patterns including strong winds with some regions reaching wind speeds of up to 70 km/h.

Over 45,000 residents and thousands of tourists were evacuated under the numerous Evacuation Alerts (precautionary) and Evacuation Orders (issued by either the local authorities or the

regional districts) in which the fires threatened life safety. There were also over 30,000 cattle, horses and other farm animals included in the evacuations.

1.1 Provincial State of Emergency

The Provincial State of Emergency was declared by Todd Stone, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, on behalf of the Government of British Columbia on 2017 July 7 and was extended four times; July 19, August 4, August 18 and September 1. The State of Emergency expired at midnight on 2017 September 15 and was the first State of Emergency for British Columbia in 14 years, the last being during the 2003 Firestorm. The 2017 Provincial State of Emergency is the longest State of Emergency in the province's history.

1.2 Response Activities throughout the Province

Over 15 Reception Centres were opened province wide by Emergency Social Services (ESS). These facilities were located in five cities; Surrey, Chilliwack, Kamloops, Prince George and Williams Lake. The Reception Centres activities included registration of evacuees, needs assessment, service referrals and group lodging facilities consisting of temporary barrack-style accommodations. The ESS facilities were managed by the local government's emergency management programs and staffed primarily with volunteers. Volunteers serving at the Chilliwack ESS facility, as an example, logged in excess of 5,000 volunteer hours.

The Red Cross supported the various Emergency Social Services Centres, and activated their family reunification Call Centre. Red Cross also distributed financial assistance to those who had been evacuated and provided Support and Resilience Centres in 8 communities, where Red Cross staff teams assisted evacuees as they returned home.

2.0 CITY OF BURNABY SUPPORT TO PROVINCIAL EMERGENCY

The City of Burnaby contributed significant resources of personnel and equipment during the wildfire crisis and Provincial State of Emergency. The City's contribution was from three City programs; Burnaby Fire Department, Burnaby RCMP Detachment, and Emergency Management.

2.1 Burnaby Fire Department

On July 14 the City of Burnaby received a formal request from the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) to assist with the wildfires. The City immediately responded to the call for assistance by providing Burnaby Fire Department (BFD) personnel and equipment for deployment to Williams Lake. In just over 6 hours, BFD had personnel and equipment ready for deployment. Ten BFD personnel consisting of a Deputy Chief, two Captains and seven firefighters commenced the deployment with a Command vehicle, two Fire Engines, Fire Support vehicle (a pickup truck and trailer with assorted equipment).

While enroute to Williams Lake the OFC rerouted BFD to Cache Creek to assist with the Elephant Hill fire. BFD crews arrived at an area north of Cache Creek at approximately 0100

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hours and were immediately put to work. The Deputy Chief was assigned command of night operations, which included oversight of structural fire department units from several other fire departments. BFD crews remained on night operations for not only this deployment, but also for the five subsequent deployments made during the Elephant Hill fire. Each operational period was a minimum of 12 hours and sometimes resulted in over 24 hours for BFD Command Staff. BFD was honored to work alongside the BC Wildfire forestry crews and proud to provide them with a level of life safety for which they were extremely grateful.

In addition to the forestry crews, BFD also worked in conjunction with, and was in command of many structural fire departments consisting of both career and volunteer firefighters. These departments included Vancouver, Coquitlam, Sidney, Duncan, Qualicum Beach, Clinton, Quesnel, Sooke and numerous others. From the moment BFD arrived, the BFD Deputy Fire Chiefs were quickly integrated into the Incident Management Team as the Branch Directors in charge of structural night operations. The relationships established in the field and at the command level resulted in mutual respect and extremely positive working relationships. Comments were often made verbally and in writing stating that the Burnaby crews were extremely professional, and brought a high level of comfort to all involved knowing that Burnaby was in command.

BFD firefighting crews worked on a 7 day rotation until mid-August with the locations and/or base of operations changing as the fire grew. The Operational theatres BFD worked in were; Cache Creek, Loon Lake, Clinton and 100 Mile House. Chief Officers worked out a rotation that best suited the operational needs of the deployment but more importantly maintained our responsibility to the citizens of Burnaby as a priority.

The bonds formed with the communities we became part of were also special, and the way BFD was treated by the volunteers in Cache Creek humbled BFD personnel. BFD firefighters were greeted by signs of gratitude posted by the residents of 16 Mile and Clinton which made it easier for BFD personnel to leave their own families. While BFD was protecting the Chasm Mill north of Clinton, the management team of the mill made the decision to remain on site despite the Evacuation Order. Their families visited occasionally to bring them food and it was during one these visits that plastic Burnaby Fire Department hats were given to some of the children and we experienced one of the more touching moments of our deployment (one of the pictures attached shows how appreciative the children were for us taking care of their dads).

There were a total of 6 BFD deployments consisting of 54 Firefighters and 3 Deputy Chiefs providing 5500 hours of professional firefighting service combatting the provincial Wildfires. In all the deployments, BFD proudly achieved all their assigned objectives by protecting all structures, not allowing the fire to cross the highway and not incurring any significant injuries.

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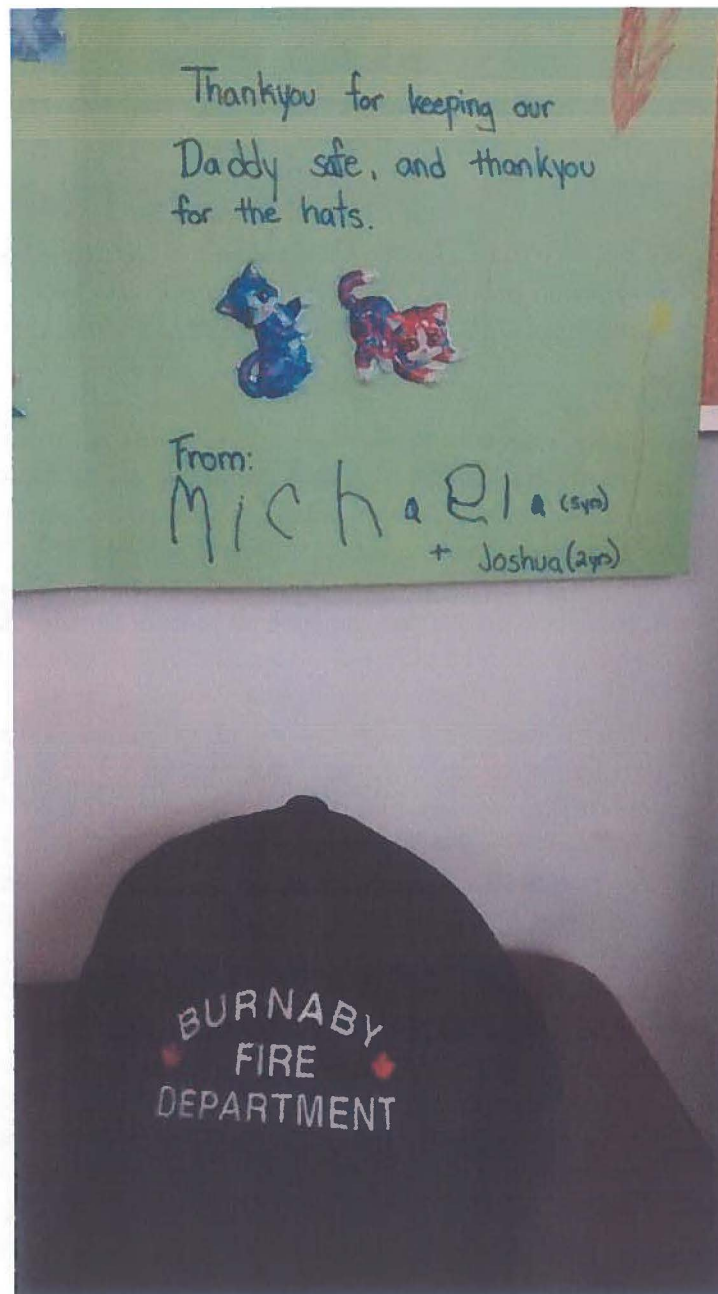


BFD on night operations on highway 97 between Cache Creek and Loon Lake Rd



BFD on night operations protecting a ranch on Loon Lake Rd

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2.2 RCMP Burnaby Detachment

The City of Burnaby RCMP detachment was also tasked to respond the Provincial State of Emergency once it had been declared by Minister Stone. The Burnaby RCMP deployed police

officers to numerous areas in the province stricken by the wildfires. The police officers were tasked with numerous responsibilities including;

- Evacuating threatened areas both pursuant to Evacuation Orders and as a tactical (emergency) evacuation in order to protect lives
- Securing the evacuated areas to protect property
- Repatriation of citizens once the Orders were lifted
- Staffing key positions in the Emergency Incident Command Structure
- Coordinating with the Province, Local Government, First Nations, Canadian Armed Forces
- Contingency Operations (criminal investigations, mental health matters, spot firefighting)

The RCMP Division Emergency Operation Centre (DEOC) was responsible for the overall RCMP deployment and Burnaby RCMP Detachment deployed police officers on a rotational basis, twice weekly for a period of two months. The Detachment focused on deploying non-General Duty members as first response in the City remained the priority.

Burnaby Detachment police officers displayed the highest level of professionalism throughout their duties to not only assist citizens in need but also to maintain the rule of law. An example of this is when Burnaby officers recovered heavy equipment valued at over 65 thousand dollars in Williams Lake. The Burnaby officers were experienced investigators and during their patrols became aware of a property thief who was working in the area. After receiving information that this individual may be committing crimes, the Burnaby officers set up surveillance on the suspect and located property where the suspect was storing stolen equipment. A search warrant was obtained and the Burnaby officers with the assistance of the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit (CFSEU) recovered property and gained invaluable information regarding criminal activity in the area.

The deployed Burnaby police officers at times participated in fighting the wildfires and preventing further devastation. In one situation, a Burnaby police officer observed a camper van catch on fire and begin to spread to nearby vehicles. The Burnaby officer had no radio reception and no cellular service. The Burnaby officer fought the fire and was assisted by other RCMP officers at the location. They fought the fire and managed to contain it and prevent the fire from reaching a nearby gas line until a BC Wildfire Crew happened to arrive at the scene. The BC Wildfire Crew had inadvertently made a wrong turn and luckily came across the officers fighting the fire.

A total of 109 Burnaby Detachment police officers were deployed on 153 separate deployments and contributed over 12,852 person hours. Some of the Burnaby RCMP members were placed in active leadership roles such as Site Commanders, Bronze Team Commanders and in charge of Logistics and Planning Team members in the EOC. At no time during the wildfire deployments, was public safety or the level of service provided to the citizens of Burnaby by the Burnaby RCMP detachment compromised.

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2.3 City of Burnaby Emergency Management Program

In response to a request for assistance received by Emergency Management from the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre, City of Burnaby Emergency Management coordinated the deployment of one (1) staff member from Records Management to the Northeast Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre (NEA PREOC) in Prince George. The deployment began on July 19 and ended on August 8. During the deployment, staff worked a total of 20 days over a 21-day period for a total of 243.41 hours worked. Burnaby staff worked in the NEA PREOC Planning Section. Reports back from the NEW PREOC Director expressed great thanks and appreciation for Burnaby staff being well trained, highly skilled and very capable during a very dynamic and ever changing emergency event.

A request for Emergency Support Services (ESS) personnel support was received from the Southwest Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (SWE PREOC) to support the Southwest Regional Emergency Support Services Reception Centre and Group Lodging Facility (SWE ESS RC/GL) established in Chilliwack and Surrey. Emergency Management identified available Burnaby Emergency Volunteers trained in ESS, and deployed two volunteers to the Chilliwack Regional ESS facility. Deployment was for a 7 day period which began Wednesday, July 19. These generous and dedicated volunteers gave 48.75 hours of their personal time to assist in

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greeting, registering, feeding, referring to services, and most importantly listening to the wildfire evacuees that came into the ESS facility. Estimated cost of their in-kind contribution: \$1,218.75.

A separate request for ESS personnel support was received from the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre (PECC) to support the Central Regional Emergency Support Services Reception Centre and Group Lodging Facility (CTL ESS RC/GL) established in Kamloops. Emergency Management identified available Burnaby Emergency Volunteers trained in ESS, and deployed one volunteer to the Kamloops Regional ESS facility. Deployment was for a 7 day period which began Sunday, July 30. This generous and dedicated volunteer gave 70 hours of personal time to assist the wildfire evacuees that came into the ESS facility. Estimated cost of their in-kind contribution: \$1,750.00.

3.0 SUMMARY

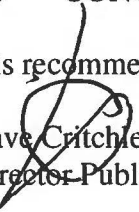
The 2017 fire season is notable for three reasons; first, for the largest total area burnt in a fire season in recorded history; secondly for the largest number of total evacuees in a fire season; and thirdly for the largest single fire ever in British Columbia – the Elephant Hill fire. Close to 4,000 firefighters were deployed to fight the wildfires including 647 out of province personnel and 1,606 contractors fighting the fires with assistance of 233 helicopters and airplanes.

The wildfires destroyed over 300 buildings ranging from homes and barns to commercial structures and resulted in the destruction of the habitats of many thousands of wildlife. According to BC Wildfire Service statistics, 1,282 fires burned 1,212,351 hectares (or 12,123.51 square kilometers). For context, Central Park is 90 hectares (or 0.9 of a square kilometer).

It is critical to note that all costs associated to the contributions by the City of personnel and equipment towards the Provincial State of Emergency and the wildfire effort, are recoverable from the Province. Of additional note, at no time during the wildfire deployments, was the delivery of services to the citizens of Burnaby by the Fire Department, Police Services or Emergency Management compromised or hampered in any way. This was due to comprehensive and detailed planning, dedicated staff and City capacity to respond to emergencies when required. The Departments also appreciate the support of Mayor and Council to contribute significant resources during the 2017 Wildfire crisis.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is recommended this report be received and forwarded to Council for information purposes.


Dave Critchley
Director Public Safety and Community Services

DC:cp
Copied to: City Manager
Director Finance
Fire Chief
OIC Burnaby RCMP