

For Information Only

Fire Services - Firefighter Training

Presented To: Emergency Services Committee

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Resolution

For Information Only

Relationship to the Strategic Plan / Health Impact Assessment

This report refers to operational matters.

Report Summary

As directed by Resolution ES2019-07, moved by Councillor Vagnini at the October 23rd, 2019 meeting of the Emergency Services Committee, this information report and presentation provide an overview of the training requirements for firefighter and fire officer development, both volunteer and career. The additional challenge of delivering an annual physical abilities test for all volunteer firefighters and the impact that can have on core training delivery is also discussed. Opportunities for enhancement of training are identified.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Signed By

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Background

By-law 2014-84, to Establish and Regulate the City of Greater Sudbury Fire Services, sets out the fire protection service offered across the municipality. The Training Section staff has the responsibility for firefighter training of career, volunteer, recruits, ongoing maintenance of core skills, technical rescue, and officer training and development. A Chief Training Officer supported by four Training Officers and one Office Clerk, directly deliver or facilitate the delivery of this training to 108 career suppression firefighters working four platoons in five stations, and approximately 250 volunteer firefighters responding from 19 stations.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is the North American standard for fire services. It establishes the training standards for most fire disciplines. In addition to NFPA standards, Firefighter Guidance Notes under Section 21 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act are best practices for protecting the health and safety of fire service workers in Ontario. Guidance Notes help firefighters understand potential health and safety issues, as well as assist employers in identifying hazards and preventing injury and illnesses unique to fire services. The Ministry of Labour can reference Section 21 Guidance Notes when conducting investigations or issuing Orders.

Medical evidence supports that the chances of a firefighter having a cardiac event while firefighting grows exponentially after age 60. Presumptive legislation under the Ontario's Workplace Safety Insurance Act (O. Reg 253/07) stipulates that if a heart injury occurs or is sustained within 24 hours of attending a fire scene or training exercise, it is presumed to be related to the duties as a firefighter whether full-time, part-time or volunteer. Under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, Part IX, career firefighters assigned to fire suppression duties must retire at age 60. This section of the Act does not apply to volunteer firefighters.

In 2011, CGS Human Resources and Organizational Development introduced annual Functional Capacity Evaluations (FCE) for volunteer firefighters over the age of 60. Prior to 2011, volunteer firefighters past the age of 60 were required to provide a medical slip verifying medical fitness.

In the initial recruitment of firefighters (both career and volunteer), the successful completion of a physical test has always been mandatory. Testing has evolved to ensure that it meets the "bona fide occupational requirement" for the position of firefighter.

The Ontario Volunteer Firefighters Association, CLAC Local 920 is the exclusive bargaining agent for all volunteer firefighters employed by CGS. In an arbitrated Minutes of Settlement concerning the physical testing of volunteer firefighters over 60 years of age, it was agreed that the Employer would cease physical testing of "over 60" firefighters, and that during "live fire training" and continuing thereafter, the Employer could test the physical and medical abilities of all volunteer firefighters. The physical testing would be consistent with the testing performed on volunteer firefighter recruits. The tests were to be administered in a "reasonable time period" as opposed to the

strict time requirement associated with recruit testing. Testing will include vital signs measured by a qualified individual before, during and after the physical testing. Greater Sudbury is the only municipality to conduct annual physical fitness testing in this manner. Other municipalities have various measures/systems to determine physical fitness.

Combining the physical testing and live fire training was significant as Fire Services had implemented an annual, mandatory "live fire" training session for all volunteer firefighters, and initially all career firefighters in 2014. Training was to ensure that firefighters had an opportunity to train under controlled "live fire" conditions. Career firefighters attended "live fire" in 2014 and 2015; however, the requirement to train on-duty and respond to emergency calls in the city core from the training grounds in Azilda made this impractical, especially considering they receive regular exposure to live fire incidents. For the volunteer firefighters, the annual "live fire" training sessions provided an agreed upon solution to deliver the physical testing as outlined in the arbitrated Minutes of Settlement.

The Sudbury Professional Fire Fighters Association, IAFF Local 527 Collective Agreement, provides direction on the delivery of career firefighter mandatory training such as: when off duty, not on weekends or scheduled vacation. Career Captains deliver core training programs in career stations while firefighters are on duty. The training curriculum and schedule is established by the Chief Training Officer. Technical rescue training is delivered by the Training Officers, supported by a number of instructor certified career firefighters.

Current Delivery of Physical Testing and "Live Fire" Training, Volunteer Firefighters

Since the implementation of the volunteer annual physical testing and "live fire" training, very little has changed in program delivery. The "live fire" training varies from year to year based on observations of firefighter skills during the previous year's training, firefighter course evaluations after each "live fire" session, observations of firefighter competencies on actual fire scenes and discussions with CLAC.

The physical test portion is overseen by CGS Human Resources and Organizational Development. Since the fall of 2017, a Deputy Chief, or designate, has attended to provide management oversight. Firefighters unable to complete the physical testing are placed on a leave of absence and if determined to be medical, are advised to seek physician follow up.

The Training Section has identified that combining physical testing with "live fire" training creates significant time challenges. This can result in the "live fire" training portion being reduced due to time constraints following physical testing. Some mandatory training nights have exceeded the allotted three hours. The Training Section works hard to replicate the "live fire" evolutions for all volunteer firefighters through the entire year; however, training may be affected by class size, equipment challenges, and weather.

Separation of the physical testing from the “live fire” training is an option, but will require revisiting the Arbitrated Minutes of Settlement with CLAC. Additional opportunity to schedule use of the training grounds is provided in the CLAC Collective Agreement.

The specifics of the physical testing are outlined in the attached Appendix A.

Officer Development

Frontline Officers (Captains) have responsibility for supervision of firefighters in all aspects of fire service delivery. The Collective Agreements for both career and volunteer firefighters have differing language for the promotional process. In 2018, a new promotional process was introduced for the selection of volunteer Captains to ensure competency and development of skills as “Officer in Command” (OIC). Because of the nature of incident response, volunteer Captains have less opportunity to observe and be mentored by an existing Officer in the manner that a career firefighter has.

The steps in the selection and training of Captains are as follows:

Career

- Fire administration determines the number of acting captains required per platoon (process approximately every 4-5 years).
- Firefighters must have achieved First Class Firefighter status to enter process.
- Officer candidates receive study materials and are provided 90 days to study.
- Written examination, oral examination (whole process within two weeks), no repeat testing, and 70% score required on each.
- Promoted to rank of acting captain (referred to as Captain), expectation they will perform as a captain when relieving or field promoted (significant event).

Volunteer

- Fire administration determines the number of Captains required based on existing captains, possible retirements and station transfers.
- On-line study (19 modules), 35 hours direct instructional delivery (four 8-hour sessions with a Training Officer and one 3-hour Human Resources session).
- Three written examinations and two oral examinations. One re-write allowed for each written examination. 70% required on each examination with remedial training opportunities required for candidates scoring 50-69% and who wished to continue in the process.
- Trial period of 12 consecutive months that commenced once candidates were selected.

With respect to the processes outlined above, the career process is detailed in the Collective Agreement; any changes would be required to be negotiated. The volunteer process is outlined in the Collective Agreement through broad parameters, therefore can be changed outside the bargaining process. Since the promotional process for volunteer Captains was just introduced in 2018, Fire Services will be reviewing the framework for future promotions.

Historically, Fire Services has not continued to develop officers (career and volunteer) once promoted. In an effort to address this educational gap, the Training Section is developing an ongoing officer development program for both career and volunteers. Office of the Fire Marshal staff recently conducted written examinations of NFPA 1021(1) Company Officer One, for career and volunteer officer candidates having completed the requisite knowledge components. The ability to do testing locally to ensure proficiency at the provincial level is a first for Sudbury Fire Services.

Challenges Impacting Firefighter Training

Service levels dictate annual ongoing training requirements.

Volunteer training, whether in station or on the fire training grounds, is generally held on a weeknight. Career training occurs during the day while firefighters are on shift and working in the city core. The Training Officers have the ability to flex their work schedules in order to deliver training. Volunteer firefighters, by Collective Agreement, are required to attend a minimum of 12 training sessions per year, receive six hours of payment per month to attend training and, with the exception of the mandatory "live fire", attend at their discretion. It can be challenging to conduct training in the volunteer stations as not all firefighters may have the ability to attend the scheduled session. Firefighters do have the option to attend training at another station.

In 2018, the Ontario government legislated mandatory certification and training standards for all firefighters in the province, with established dates for compliance. This created an immediate and significant workload for the Training Section. Although this legislation has since been rescinded, the Training Section continues to conduct all training in compliance with NFPA Standards and delivered through standardized training curriculums. Fire Services continues to work with colleagues in the Information Technology Division to allow better deployment of training through electronic/digital technology.

In order to manage the risk created by the need to meet the needs and circumstance of the community and comply with NFPA Standards, Fire Services is migrating from teaching all career firefighters in every technical discipline to station specific skill sets, supported at the awareness level by volunteer firefighters.

APPENDIX "A"

Annual Volunteer Firefighter Physical Testing Criteria

- Sign in, vital signs taken prior to donning full gear or weighted vest. Blood pressure above the threshold (150/100), sit for five minutes, vital signs taken again. A third attempt has been common practice. If blood pressure is still above the threshold, firefighter cannot continue and is required to seek medical

attention. Firefighter placed on a medical leave by the ADC and relieved from firefighter duties.

- Don gear, including Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA), go on air and commence walking to the fire training grounds. Firefighters may choose to wear a weighted vest (Grievance Minutes of Settlement).
- At the training grounds, shoulder a specified, folded length of hose (approximate weight 20 kilograms), walk up the burn tower stairs to the fourth floor, touch the door marked "4" and walk back down. No skipping of stairs permitted to ensure firefighter safety.
- Drop the hose, remove a 24-foot ladder suspended on hooks at standard apparatus level, lower it to the ground and then replace it on the hooks. Technique demonstrated by the Human Resources staff member to ensure proper lifting techniques.
- Drag a weighted sled that simulates the effort required to drag an injured firefighter a distance of 15 meters. A recently settled Grievance requires that firefighters pull the sled in the same manner as pulling an injured firefighter (backwards).
- Once completed, second set of vital signs taken. If blood pressure readings are above the threshold, the same procedure used pretest will occur. If blood pressure remains above the threshold, the firefighter will not continue to the "live fire" scenario and will be placed on a medical leave by the Deputy Chief or designate.
- Test is not timed. Firefighters walk at a purposeful pace and complete all tasks in a sequential order. The Human Resources staff member or the Deputy Chief, or designate, will accompany the firefighters and observe each task. Generally, two firefighters walk together in order to keep the testing process fluid and provide encouragement for each other.