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**To:** ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)  
**Date:** 6/23/2023 3:55:33 PM  
**Subject:** FW: News release: BC Hydro taking immediate action after completing investigation into downtown vault fire and explosion

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Good afternoon Mayor and Council,

As you may have seen reported yesterday, BC Hydro has concluded its investigation into the explosion and fire that occurred in an underground electrical vault adjacent in February of this year. The incident injured two passersby and damaged the adjacent Marine Building.

BC Hydro has disclosed the results of their investigation, along with the actions the corporation is taking in response. Of note, Hydro has confirmed that all installations of the specific type of equipment involved in the February incident have been decommissioned. The corporation is also undertaking a comprehensive review of its underground street vaults, involving third-party experts.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this matter, please let me know. I am happy to seek additional information from BC Hydro leadership as may be useful.

Best,  
Paul

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From: BC Hydro Media Relations, <[BCHydroMediaRelations@bchydro.com](mailto:BCHydroMediaRelations@bchydro.com)>

Sent: Thursday, June 22, 2023 1:46 PM

To: [media@bchydro.ca](mailto:media@bchydro.ca)

Subject: [EXT] News release: BC Hydro taking immediate action after completing investigation into downtown vault fire and explosion

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**News release**

 **BC Hydro**  
Power smart

June 22, 2023

**BC Hydro taking immediate action after completing investigation into downtown vault fire and explosion**

VANCOUVER: BC Hydro has completed its investigation into the cause of an underground electrical vault fire and explosion that happened in downtown Vancouver in February, and is taking several immediate actions to prevent a similar incident from happening again.

On Feb. 24, 2023, a fire and explosion occurred in an underground vault on Burrard Street near West Cordova Street. The incident injured two members of the public and damaged nearby businesses.

To review the incident, BC Hydro retained a third-party expert whose investigation determined the fire and explosion were caused by a build-up of combustible gases from a leaking gasket in the lid of an oil-filled switch. The leak was caused by the use of incompatible materials when the gasket was repaired and maintained over time.

While reviewing documentation for this specific equipment as part of the investigation, it was also discovered that serious risks had been previously identified. In 2016, BC Hydro conducted an assessment of underground street vaults. It found 14 vaults, including the vault on Burrard Street, were classified as being a high risk to the public in the event of a failure. The assessment warned if the vaults were not properly maintained or replaced, the result could be severe injury or death. It recommended replacing equipment in the Burrard Street vault by 2018.

BC Hydro moved forward to replace the equipment in the vaults, but the Burrard Street vault was removed from the immediate project scope in favour of replacing the equipment in another vault in Gastown. The expectation was the Burrard Street vault would undergo maintenance; however, crews had difficulties performing the maintenance despite their best efforts because they did not have the proper information and instructions or the correct material to complete the work.

“I sincerely apologize to the individuals and businesses that were affected, as well as to those who live or work nearby and our employees. We let you down and this should have never happened,” says Chris O’Riley, President and CEO of BC Hydro. “Public and worker safety is our top priority. While I recognize that this incident does not reflect that, I am personally committed – along with the entire team at BC Hydro – to ensuring that safety comes first every day.”

In response to this incident and the results of the investigation, BC Hydro is taking several immediate actions:

- Underground vaults with oil-filled equipment that were identified as risks in 2016 have been decommissioned and no longer present a risk.
- A program review of other distribution street vault equipment is underway and will involve an independent third-party expert. The first phase will be complete by the end of the summer and the second phase complete by March 2024.
- BC Hydro is engaging fully and transparently with its regulators, including WorkSafeBC and the British Columbia Utilities Commission, and will share learnings with other utilities.

Over the past decade, BC Hydro has invested approximately \$195 million towards improving the downtown Vancouver electrical infrastructure, including the installation of new feeders, voltage conversions, and replacing end-of-life equipment. BC Hydro will work diligently to ensure its system continues to operate safely and reliably, taking proactive measures wherever necessary.

**More information:**

- [Full statement from Chris O'Riley \[bchydro.com\]](#)
- [BC Utilities Commission filing \[bchydro.com\]](#)
- [Senez Consulting Ltd. report \[bchydro.com\]](#)
- [2016 assessment \[bchydro.com\]](#)

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