

From: "Levitt, Karen" <karen.levitt@vancouver.ca>
To: "Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"
Date: 8/9/2023 12:46:13 PM
Subject: Information bulletin: VFRS Urgent Call For Public Awareness And Vigilance (August 8, 2023)

Dear Mayor and Council,

I am writing to share with you the information bulletin that Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services have issued this morning, regarding an urgent call for public awareness and vigilance as the city is faced with a record-breaking number of fire incidents.

VFRS has posted this information on [social media](#) as well.

Thanks,

Karen

**Vancouver Fire Rescue Services
Information Bulletin
August 8, 2023**

VFRS Urgent Call for Public Awareness and Vigilance

Vancouver Fire Rescue Service has experienced the most fires in the first half of 2023 than anytime in our history during the same period.

We are asking the public to ensure every home has a working smoke alarm on each level and outside each sleeping area, to ensure any smoking material is discarded in only water or sand, charge and maintain all rechargeable batteries in accordance with manufacturers recommendations and not to hesitate to call 911 if smoke or flames are seen in or around a building or green spaces.

Record-Breaking Fire Incidents:

Vancouver, BC 08/08/2023 - Vancouver Fire Rescue Service (VFRS) regrets to inform the public of an alarming increase in fire incidents during the current year. We are deeply concerned to report that in 2023, we have surpassed the number of fire responses from Q1/Q2 of 2022 by an unprecedented 31%, marking another unfortunate record for most fires in our history.

Leading Cause of Fires and Preventive Measures:

Regrettably, carelessly discarded smokers' materials, which include matches, lighters, torches, candles, cigarettes, and drug-related materials, continue to be the leading cause of fires, accounting for a staggering 57% of all incidents. We urgently appeal to everyone in the community to exercise extreme caution while handling and disposing of these materials. A small oversight can lead to catastrophic consequences.

Escalation of Structure, SRO, and Outdoor Fires:

In addition to the surge in total fire incidents, we have witnessed a worrying increase in structure fires, SRO (Single Room Occupancy) fires, and outdoor fires. While tent fires have significantly decreased, the most alarming spike has been observed in outdoor fires, which have risen by a significant 42.3% from Q1 /Q2 of 2022. It is crucial for everyone to remain vigilant when engaging in outdoor activities that involve open flames or flammable materials.

Fatalities and Impairment Concerns:

Tragically, we have already lost four lives due to fires this year. Three of these fatalities involved smokers' materials, highlighting the urgent need for responsible disposal practices and safe use. Furthermore, two of the fire victims were suspected to be impaired by substances, underlining the risks associated with handling fire-related items when using substances or using substances alone.

Arson/Incendiary Fires on the Rise:

Perhaps the most concerning trend we are currently witnessing is the increasing number of arson /incendiary fires. As of now, 26% of all fire incidents in 2023 have been concluded to be caused deliberately, marking a continuous upward trend in suspicious cases. Our partners at Vancouver Police (VPD) are working diligently with VFRS and the community to identify and address the root causes of such acts.

Public Safety and Collaboration:

VFRS appeals to every member of the community to prioritize fire safety in their daily lives. Simple actions like properly extinguishing cigarettes, using battery lights instead of candles and keeping flammable items away from ignition sources can make a significant difference in preventing fires. Additionally, we urge everyone to report any suspicious activities or potential fire hazards right away. During dry conditions fires will spread quickly, call 911 right away if smoke or flames are seen.

We are urging residents to ensure they have a working smoke alarm and to check them today. Replace batteries according to the manufacturer and replace smoke alarms every 10 years. They are critical safety components and required in all residential units.

We acknowledge that combating this escalating trend requires collective efforts. Collaboration between the fire service, law enforcement, community organizations, and citizens is vital to create a safer environment for all.

VFRS remains committed to protecting lives, property, and the environment. We are working tirelessly to address these challenges and will continue to implement public awareness campaigns, educational programs, and community outreach initiatives to promote fire safety.

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