



Corporate Report

NO: R143

COUNCIL DATE: July 10, 2006

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council

DATE: July 10, 2006

FROM: Fire Chief

FILE: 3900-20

SUBJECT: Amendment to Fire Service By-law #10771

RECOMMENDATION

The Surrey Fire Department recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report as information;
2. Approve an amendment to the Surrey Fire Services By-law No. 10771 as documented in this report; and
3. Direct the City Clerk to bring forward the necessary amendment by-law for the required readings.

INTENT

The City of Surrey Fire Service conducts approximately 7,000 safety inspections annually, of which approximately 50 % require re-inspection. The primary reason for re-inspection is due to poor workmanship applied to the servicing of fire protection equipment. It has become apparent that fire protection service companies in some cases do not employ trades qualified personal to repair or maintain fire protection equipment. We are proposing that a minimum standard of qualification be required to repair and or maintain fire protection equipment within the City of Surrey. This will provide a better assurance of an adequate level of safety to the citizens of Surrey that is currently compromised due to the lack of any required measure of competency of fire protection service technicians. This report seeks Council approval to ensure that an adequate standard of inspection and testing of fire protection equipment is conducted by Fire Protection Service Technicians by requiring the certification of the technicians to an acceptable standard.

BACKGROUND

The British Columbia Building Code determines what fire protection and life safety systems buildings require based on the intended use of the building or its size. These systems include such things as, a fire alarm, sprinkler system, emergency lighting and fire extinguishers. After construction is complete and the building is occupied, the sister document to the BC Building Code, The British Columbia Fire Code then specifies that the required fire protection equipment and life safety systems in those buildings, be inspected and tested regularly by qualified persons to ensure equipment is operational so that a reasonable level of safety is maintained.

DISCUSSION

The Fire Protection Industry has been an unregulated industry for many years with no checks and balances. Technicians were not required to have any work history or take any form of training prior to entering the Fire Protection Industry. Over the past few years the Surrey Fire Service has received concerns from owners or owner's agents regarding the "quality" of service provided by persons offering inspection and testing services. Building owners are often "caught in the middle" when fire protection service providers fail to properly test equipment or leave required test records on site for Fire Inspectors to check. When this happens a re-inspection fee (\$100.00) can be applied by the Surrey Fire Service to the owner, who must now have the service provider re-attend at an additional cost.

This situation is not unique to the City of Surrey. In 1996 the Vancouver Fire and Rescue Service established a task group to work with the Industry, the Applied Science and Technologists & Technicians of BC (ASTTBC), and the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA)

A program for the certification of Fire Protection Technicians was established as a result of the task group. The cities of Vancouver, Richmond, North Vancouver, Chilliwack, Squamish and the District of North Vancouver are some of the jurisdictions that now require Fire Protection Technicians who provide "inspection and testing" services to be certified through ASTTBC in the discipline they are "inspecting and testing". As a result of the Vancouver initiative there are approximately 500 certified Fire Protection Technicians in the Province.

The disciplines include:

- Fire Alarm Systems
- Fire Extinguishers
- Commercial Kitchen Exhaust Cleaning
- Smoke Control Systems
- Emergency Power – Unit Equipment for Emergency Lighting
- Emergency Power – Generator Systems
- Water-Based Fire Protection Systems
- Special Fire Suppression Systems

RECOMMENDED CHANGE

It is recommended that a new provision be added to Surrey Fire Services By-law No. 10771 to require the owners of buildings containing Residential or Health Care, Assembly (with an occupant load greater than 60 persons), Multi-residential, Industrial (having more than 600 m² in building area), High Hazard Industrial (F1) occupancies and buildings 18 meters or more in building height to retain persons whose competency has been certified by ASTTBC or other recognized certification agencies acceptable to the Fire Chief to perform required maintenance, inspection and testing of fire protection and life safety systems in the such buildings.

CONCLUSION

The addition of the recommended provision to the Surrey Fire Service By-law #10771 would provide a reasonable level of assurance that fire and life safety systems are being maintained, inspected and tested to a standard intended by the British Columbia Fire Code. The City's level of community fire safety would be enhanced and owners of affected buildings would be provided with service by technicians with a standard level of competency. This provision would also provide a level playing field for service companies. Each such company would know that all technicians providing maintenance, inspection and testing services would need to meet a minimum level of competency. This amendment to the by-law will require only minimal additional administration on the part of the City's staff.



Len Garis
Fire Chief