

DISCUSSION

There is a strong correlation between excessive power consumption in a single family dwelling and the presence of a marijuana grow operation (a “grow-op”) in that dwelling. There is also a strong correlation between grow-ops and unauthorized and unsafe electrical wiring used in support of the grow-op (i.e., lighting and ventilation). On this basis, grow-ops introduce unacceptable risk to the occupants of buildings within which they are located, to the immediate neighbourhood and to emergency responders through fire and electrocution hazards.

In 2005, the Ministry of Public Safety and the Solicitor General formally recognized the success of the City and its EFSI Team and related Program.

Currently, the EFSIT consists of 5 members – an electrical inspector, a Fire Officer, two RCMP Constables and a Clerk. A Fire Department Chief Officer provides advice, guidance and addresses policy issues with the Team on a part time basis.

The EFSIT has been operational for approximately 1 year. During the year it has been established that the EFSIT can undertake the work associated with preparing for and inspecting approximately 60 single family dwellings per month. This capacity is limited primarily by constraints inherent in the Freedom of Information process and the requirements of the *Safety Standards Act*.

Since the inception of the EFSIT, two major changes have occurred. Firstly, City Council has adopted the *Controlled Substance Property Bylaw No. 15820* that is focussed on creating significant disincentives for grow-operators. This includes the authority for staff to post “no occupancy orders” on dwellings and to levy fees and service costs for inspections and the requirement for the property owner to undertake an expensive remediation process using a certified remediation expert where it is determined through an inspection that a house contains mould or other contamination. It is common for any house that has contained a grow-op to develop a mould or other contamination problem.

Secondly, the Provincial Government has adopted amendments to the *Safety Standards Amendment Act*, which allows local government the right to request residential electrical consumption records for all houses that exceed a prescribed consumption level (**3 times the normal average daily residential rate**) and that further requires the electrical distributor (BC Hydro) provide the records to the local government in a reasonable period of time. This second change effectively removes the constraints of the Freedom of Information legislation for the purposes of the EFSI Program. Under this new legislation, the City has requested the addresses and electrical consumption records of all such houses in Surrey and has since received these consumption records, which includes approximately 1,600 locations in the City. It is important to note that some of these locations have higher than average electrical consumption for

legitimate reasons. Based on experience, it is estimated that about 1100 of these houses/locations will warrant an inspection by the EFSIT. Given this number of inspections, the benefits to the City of creating a safer environment for its citizens and the fact that the EFSI program is self funded, it is considered reasonable to expand the EFSIT capacity by placing 6 additional staff in the program. With this additional staff, the inspection capacity of the EFSIT will increase from 60 houses a month to approximately 144 houses a month, which will allow the EFSIT to complete the backlog of 1100 houses in approximately 7 to 8 months. Additional staff will be hired by the Fire Department to allow appropriate Fire Department staff to be seconded to the EFSIT. When the backlog has been cleared, the seconded staff will return to regular full time roles and the new staff will be placed in permanent full time positions that have been become vacant during the 7 to 8 month roll out of the expanded EFSI program. The Fire Department is aware that several of its members will be retiring over the next 8 to 9 months and these positions will need to be refilled. The RCMP will also second appropriate staff to the program and the Electrical Division will hire an additional electrical inspector on a temporary full time basis to support the expanded EFSIT. The expanded EFSIT will be fully operational within the next month to 6 weeks.

Crime Reduction Strategy Initiative:

The expansion of the EFSI program is also clearly consistent with the City's Crime Reduction Strategy initiative.

Funding Implications:

The EFSI Program is self funded through fees and charges collected from the owners of properties found to be in violation of the Electrical Code.

SUMMARY

The EFSI Program has been successful in improving the safety of the City by eliminating grow-ops. A new opportunity has arisen due to recent changes in legislation that will allow the benefits of the program to be realized more quickly if the City expands the capacity of EFSIT to undertake inspections of houses that have a record of high electrical consumption. Staff is taking the necessary actions to expand such capacity. There will be no adverse effects on the City's operating budget since the program is self-funded. Further reports on the expanded EFSI program will be forwarded to Council as warranted.



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