



Corporate Report

NO: R243

COUNCIL DATE: December 15, 2008

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: December 12, 2008
FROM: Fire Chief FILE: 3900-20
SUBJECT: Fee Adjustment in Controlled Substance Bylaw No. 15820

RECOMMENDATION

The Fire Services Department recommends that Council:

1. approve an amendment to Schedule "A" of the Controlled Substance Bylaw No. 15820 by adjusting the fee stipulated as item 1. under the Section titled "Fees" from \$2,100 to \$3,520; and
2. authorize the City Clerk to take all necessary actions to bring such a By-law amendment into effect.

BACKGROUND

The Electrical Fire Safety Initiative (EFSI) began in Surrey, in March 2005 as a pilot project under the Safety Standards Act, with a focus on reducing the incidence of house fires and other public safety hazards caused by grow-ops. A team, known as the EFSI Team, was formed, which was comprised of an Electrical Safety Officer, a Fire Safety Officer and RCMP members. The EFSI Team conducts Electrical Safety inspections on addresses that were suspected of having electrical safety hazards.

With the introduction of Bill 25 in the fall of 2006, BC Hydro data became more available to local governments and as a result of the workload of the EFSI team increased significantly. A second EFSI team was introduced in January of 2007, to handle the more than 1,000 addresses identified for safety inspection based on BC Hydro consumption data. By December of 2007, approximately 700 homes had been inspected and made safe through the EFSI Program.

The EFSI program is operated on a cost recovery basis with Council having adopted the Control Substance Bylaw No. 15820, which allows the City to invoice the owner of any property that the EFSI team inspects and confirms that an electrical safety hazard exists as a result of unauthorized electrical work.

DISCUSSION

As of October 2008 the EFSI program has received approximately 8,000 addresses from BC Hydro with electrical consumption over the threshold considered reasonable for a single-family home. The preparation and inspection work associated with this information from BC Hydro has produced the following statistics since March 2005:

- 144 weeks of EFSI operation
- a total of 1,226 sites have been inspected
- 828 locations had power disconnected due to electrical safety concerns
- 153 locations were given a “7 day notice to repair”
- 981 locations were determined to have electrical safety problems and the owners were required to undertake remedial actions
- 118 residences that were determined to have electrical safety hazards contained 227 children
- 245 residences were found to be safe during the initial inspection
- 84% locations inspected had electrical safety violations

In the spring of 2008, the Province and the City of Surrey were challenged by a homeowner in the BC Supreme Court on validity of Bill 25 (allowing for BC Hydro to release hydro consumption information on residential addresses to local governments). The decision by the Court, released in October 2008, confirmed that the Safety Standard Act of British Columbia is constitutionally valid provincial legislation with its dominant purpose being the protection of public safety.

Due to the fact that the grow operators continue to adapt to the pressures and scrutiny of Surrey’s EFSI inspections by becoming more innovative in how they acquire electrical power, it is taking longer to prepare for and investigate a file to the point where a decision can be made to inspect a residence. As such, the EFSI team spends more time with fieldwork to build support for each inspection and spends more time in the office on data analysis to support the undertaking of an inspection. This has caused the costs of the work of the EFSI team to increase per property inspected. To ensure that the EFSI program remains “self funded”, the fees, as contained in By-law No. 15820, charged for inspections needs to be increased from \$2,100 to \$3,520. This fee is only charged if the EFSI team determines through inspection that there is a significant electrical safety hazard on the property that was caused by unauthorized electrical work.

The comparable fee charged by the City of Richmond is \$3,800, by the City of Mission is \$5,200 and by the City of Port Coquitlam is \$6,800.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, it is recommended that Council:

- approve an amendment to Schedule “A” of the Controlled Substance Bylaw No. 15820 by adjusting the fee stipulated as item 1. under the Section titled “Fees” from \$2,100 to \$3,520; and
- authorize the City Clerk to take all necessary actions to bring such a By-law amendment into effect.



Len Garis
Fire Chief