



# Corporate Report

NO: R055

COUNCIL DATE: April 20, 2009

---

## REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council

DATE: April 14, 2009

FROM: Fire Chief

FILE: 0250-07

SUBJECT: 2009 UBCM Resolutions – Smoke Alarms

---

## RECOMMENDATION

The Surrey Fire Service recommends that Council:

1. receive this report as information; and
2. resolve to forward the resolutions related to smoke alarms contained in Appendix “A” and “B”, respectively, of this report to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) with the request that these resolutions be considered at the 2009 UBCM Convention.

## BACKGROUND

The BC Building Code (BCBC) regulates the fire safety and fire protection features, including smoke alarms, related to the construction and alteration of buildings in B.C. In general, the BC Fire Code applies to the operation and maintenance of the fire-related features of buildings after they are occupied. The Insurance Act of B.C. regulates the provision of insurance for buildings in the Province.

## DISCUSSION

Properly installed and maintained smoke alarms save lives. That message has been endorsed by every fire service jurisdiction in North America over the past forty years.

Almost every fire department has had some form of public education and awareness program designed to reduce the number of house fires and the tragic results of such fires, including deaths, injuries and property loss. A wide variety of well-intentioned fire prevention programs that have been developed and administered by dedicated fire service personnel have in many cases not produced evidence of success in terms of a reduction in fires.

Recently the Surrey Fire Service and the University of the Fraser Valley, School of Criminology, partnered to undertake a comprehensive analysis of 20 years (1988 – 2007) of fire history data for the City of Surrey. Two of the many findings of that analysis were that 75% of structure fires occurred in residences and, in relation to those residences, only 30% had a functioning smoke alarm in place.

Statistics published by the Province of Ontario, Office of the Fire Marshall, indicate similar smoke alarm statistics for house fires in Ontario. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reports that an estimated 890 lives could be saved each year in North America if every home had working a smoke alarm and that 65% of reported home fire deaths in between 2000 and 2004 resulted from fires in homes with no smoke alarm or no working smoke alarm. The message is obvious and consistent, working smoke alarms save lives. However, despite the reports, studies and scientific data testifying to the life-saving importance of functioning smoke alarms, currently in British Columbia the maintenance of a smoke alarm in a residential dwelling unit remains a voluntary choice of the occupant.

Without question the most significant value of a functioning smoke alarm is it's proven success in reducing injuries and deaths caused by fire. It must also be recognized, however, that properly functioning smoke alarms dramatically reduce the costs and losses associated with fires. It is estimated that fires in a dwelling unit with a functioning smoke alarm cause 50% less costs and losses than a fire in a dwelling without a functioning smoke alarm. Based on the results of the Surrey Residential Fire Study (2009), the average amount of loss from a fire with a functional smoke alarm was \$30,671.72, compared to an average loss of \$62,454.72 when there was no smoke alarm or the alarm was not functioning.

Fire services in the UK have achieved astounding results through the introduction of home fire safety visits and information distribution campaigns. Over the past decade, the rate of home fires in the UK has fallen by one-fifth, while in some jurisdictions this rate has been nearly cut in half (Audit Commission, 2008). These outcomes are the tangible results of over 2 million home fire safety checks being completed and over 2 million smoke alarms being installed. The results of the UK approach provide incentive to implement fire safety education on a targeted basis, rather than indiscriminately visiting homes. Surrey Fire Services is now directing its outreach efforts to homes at greater risk of fire.

Surrey Fire Services have significant limitations in their ability to monitor the safety of residential dwelling units and must look outside of the traditional methods to reduce fires. The Insurance industry issues millions of policies each year that provide for the replacement of property damaged or destroyed by fire. If the insurers of property were to require the completion of a home safety checklist and a signed declaration that a functioning smoke alarm was in place before the issuance of any new policy or the renewal of a fire insurance policy, research indicates there would be a marked reduction in home fires.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the above, it is recommended that Council resolve to forward the resolutions related to smoke alarms documented in Appendices "A" and "B", respectively, of this report to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) with the request that these resolutions be considered at the 2009 UBCM Convention.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Len Garis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L".

Len Garis  
Fire Chief

Attachments: - UBCM Resolution- BC Fire Code - Smoke Alarm Maintenance Requirements  
- UBCM Resolution – Fire Insurance Policy Requirements in The Insurance Act

**UBCM Resolution – BC Fire Code - Smoke Alarm Maintenance Requirements**

WHEREAS the BC Building Code requires the installation of smoke alarms conforming to CAN/ULC-S531 in each dwelling unit and in each sleeping room not within a dwelling unit; and

WHEREAS the BC Fire Code does not include reference to dwelling units in its smoke alarm maintenance requirements and, as such, Fire authorities in British Columbia cannot require the maintenance of smoke alarms in dwelling units; and

WHEREAS in absence of regular maintenance a smoke alarm will over time not function properly; and

WHEREAS studies show that the presence of a functioning smoke alarm in a dwelling unit significantly reduces the probability for deaths, injuries and losses due to a fire in that dwelling unit;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Provincial government be requested to amend Part 2 –2.1.3.3. of the BC Fire Code to require that smoke alarm(s) be properly maintained in every dwelling unit in B.C. and that interim fire code changes be introduced in this regard on or before December 31, 2009.

Submitted by  
City of Surrey

**UBCM Resolution – Fire Insurance Policy Requirements in The Insurance Act**

WHEREAS The Insurance Act of British Columbia [RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 226 applies to every insurer that carries on any business of insurance in British Columbia and to every contract of insurance made or deemed made in British Columbia; and

WHEREAS Part 5 of The Insurance Act of British Columbia that is specific to all matters pertaining to fire insurance does not require by way of a provision or statutory condition any verification or assurance that acceptable fire safety conditions exist in the insured property prior to the issuance of a fire insurance policy; and

WHEREAS the British Columbia Building Code requires that smoke alarms be installed in all dwelling units; and

WHEREAS studies show that the presence of a functioning smoke alarm in a dwelling unit significantly reduces the probability for deaths, injuries and losses due to a fire in that dwelling unit;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Provincial government be requested to amend Part 5 of The Insurance Act of British Columbia to require that the applicant for an insurance policy for a dwelling unit complete a residential fire safety checklist and sign a declaration that a functioning smoke alarm exists in the dwelling unit as a condition of the issuance of a new or renewed insurance policy for such a dwelling unit.

Submitted by  
City of Surrey