

NO: R075 COUNCIL DATE: April 12, 2010

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **April 12, 2010**

FROM: **Fire Chief**

FILE: **0360-20**

SUBJECT: **Update on the Surrey Electrical Fire Safety Inspection Program (EFSI)**

RECOMMENDATION

The Fire Services Department recommends that Council receive this report as information.

INTENT

This report provides information on the results for 2009 of the EFSI Program and the general status and direction of the Program for 2010.

BACKGROUND

The City of Surrey has been a leader in developing and implementing alternative solutions to address public safety risks associated with marijuana grow operations. A Controlled Substance Bylaw was adopted by the City in 2005 and the City's Electrical Fire Safety Inspection (EFSI) Program was initiated in 2005 as a demonstration project. This Program was one of British Columbia's earliest examples of applying an administrative solution to a problem that had previously been addressed only through the criminal justice system.

DISCUSSION

The success of the EFSI demonstration project and the fact that the program was financially self sufficient led to the formation of the City's first EFSI Team. The Team includes representation either directly or indirectly from Fire Services, RCMP, Electrical Inspections and By-law Enforcement.

Bill 25 that was adopted and took effect in April 2006, involved amendments to the Safety Standards Act and enabled local governments to request consumption data from BC Hydro for residential properties that exceeded a given consumption threshold. This resulted in an increased volume of files for the EFSI Team to inspect. As a result, the Program was expanded to two teams in January of 2007 with the Program remaining financially self sufficient.

By February of 2008, the program had made a significant impact on the number of "grow ops" operating in residential settings in Surrey. This was evidenced by a significant decrease in the number of high-consumption hydro files which enabled the Program to drop back to a single team. There was also a marked decrease in the number of children present in homes where there was evidence that an illegal "grow op" had been present. Between 2005 and 2008 a total of 234

children were found in 121 residences where there was evidence that a “grow op” had been operating. In 2009 there were no children found in such residences. The Program continues to operate with one team in 2010.

Since its inception in March 2005 through to December of 2009 the EFSI Program has generated the following:

- 1144 locations were rendered safe;
- 912 locations had the power terminated;
- 232 locations required electrical repair notices only;
- 121 residences where there was unsafe electrical wiring contained 234 children; however, there were no children present in those types of residences in 2009; and
- 55% reduction in electrical safety violations.

The Surrey EFSI Program has gained considerable interest from other governments, police Departments and Fire Departments provincially, nationally and internationally. The City continues to host training sessions for visiting agencies in an effort to share the Program concepts and operational experiences.

In an effort to deter a resurgence in “grow ops” in Surrey and to reduce the displacement of the problem to other communities, the City has been active in promoting the following four strategies:

1. An increase tax audits of illegal drug production income through the sharing of information between local and federal authorities;
2. Regulation of the sale of the sophisticated high-wattage hydroponics equipment used in most grow operations;
3. Provision in legislation for local monitoring of licensed medical marijuana grow operations, which share the same public safety risks as illegal grow operations; and
4. Support for research focused on eliminating illegal narcotics production, including the development of new detection technology, the assessment of regional programs and the completion of baseline studies of Canada’s marijuana trade.

The challenge is maintaining momentum and keeping up with marijuana grow operator’s efforts to conceal their operations. An advertising campaign is being developed to better inform the public on recognizing signs of a “grow op” as well as messaging to inform the grow operators of the City’s goal to make Surrey a “grow op free city”. The City of Surrey is also supporting research work related to the development of detection equipment that would assist in detecting illegal “grow ops”.

An audit of the program by University of the Fraser Valley in 2008 demonstrated the EFSI Program in Surrey had produced positive results, including a marked decrease of 81% in the number of complaints received by the RCMP regarding grow-ops. The occurrence of children in grow op homes has dropped dramatically to zero. There has been a sharp decrease in the number of files generated through hydro consumption data provided to the City. There has also been a dramatic decrease in the instances of residential fires associated with grow ops.

The EFSI Program will continue to operate in 2010 with one team processing 10-15 files per week, generated from Hydro consumption data or through RCMP Crime Stopper Tips. The program remains completely self sufficient, being funded though the fees that are generated through the administration of the provisions of the Controlled Substance Bylaw.

CONCLUSION

The EFSI Program has been operating for almost 5 years and has demonstrated its effectiveness in significantly reducing the number of “grow ops” within Surrey. The Program is recognized locally, nationally and internationally and is contributing significantly to a safer City.

Len Garis
Fire Chief