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Review Finds County of Grande Prairie Fire Service Provides High Level of Service

All residents and businesses in the County of Grande Prairie can be assured the County has a first-class fire service in place.

Earlier this year Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) initiated a safety review of the County's fire service after receiving a complaint from a former paid-on-call firefighter. The former employee publicly stated several safety concerns with the fire service and that his employment was terminated as a result of voicing these concerns. During the review, OH&S found no basis for a complaint by the former employee of unfair disciplinary action as a result of raising safety issues.

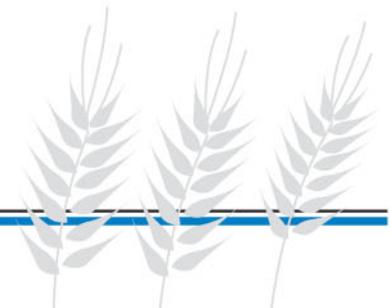
Throughout the review OH&S made several observations about the strong performance of the County's Fire Service.

"Considering our fire service has only been in place for 18 months, this is quite an accomplishment," said County of Grande Prairie Reeve Leanne Beaupre. "All firefighters in the County need to take credit for this achievement and recognize that you're all doing a good job."

OH&S reviewed and recognized that all employees maintain the required competencies in the fire service and have the ability to respond if required including the Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chief of Rural Operations and the Fire Marshall.

The County Fire Service continues to communicate with all employees about the safe operating procedures in place as a result of the hazard assessments conducted. OH&S acknowledged the County has documentation on what to do in the event of reduced staffing levels.

While four-man crews are used during a regular shift, when the fire service expanded 18 months ago, five-man crews were used for training purposes, something that continues when training occurs. If someone calls in sick another firefighter is contacted to fill in. When that's not possible, another station crew is called in and if necessary, this crew would go to the scene of an incident along with the existing crew from the other station.





OH&S recognized the County's Fire Service medical training adheres to the 2007 Alberta Code of Practice for Firefighters -- the most current designation available -- and that all firefighters work within their scope during medical calls and never perform a procedure they aren't trained to do.

While OH&S offered some recommendations and comments to further improve on the strong service already in place, no orders were made. When OH&S issues an order, it is a message to the organization affected that action needs to be immediately taken to correct the problem since it poses a potential threat to the health and safety of people.

Following are the recommendations from the review done by OH&S. Many of the recommendations had already been addressed well before the employees' complaint.

1. Review the paid-on-call procedure manual. As a result of unapproved documents being placed into the paid-on-call firefighter manuals, late last year the manual has been taken out of circulation and it is currently being reviewed. The plan is to approve all contents and then make them available for firefighters.
2. The County should clarify, define and strengthen the policy on work-related information that is designated confidential. The suggestion is that it could be included in the policy related to use of social media. The policy has now been revised and the plan is to send it to Council for final approval.
3. Review the air handling unit at the Dunes Fire Hall. The County has an effective monitoring and testing system in place at the Dunes Fire Hall given that the living quarters and exercise rooms are connected to the vehicle bay. NO₂ and CO₂ monitors are installed in the ventilation systems in the firefighters' living areas. A recommendation from OH&S to ensure the monitors are maintained and tested on a regular basis along with the ventilation system was already part of the County's building maintenance duties.
4. The County was able to accommodate people's different schedules for N95 respirator fit-testing and have achieved almost complete compliance. Only members that remain on a leave of absence for other reasons still need to be tested upon their return to active duty.



5. A concern about the lack of testing related to ladders and hoses proved to be a case of the Fire Service not maintaining records of when testing occurred. This has now been changed and records are kept. Testing of equipment continues on a regular basis.

“The County of Grande Prairie Fire Service is proud of what it has achieved in less than two years,” said Fire Chief Everett Cooke. “The skills and professionalism of all our members is exceptional. We are fortunate to have such a committed group of firefighters and I especially want to acknowledge the importance of our entry-level firefighters and our many members in our rural communities,” he pointed out.

Throughout the County Fire Service, training remains a top priority with the Deputy Fire Chief of Rural Operations focused on ensuring firefighters receive the proper training. Every firefighter receives a Competency manual signed off by a Captain annually ensuring individual competencies are maintained.

“All of us who live and do business here in the County of Grande Prairie need to know we have one of the best training programs for firefighters whether they’re fulltime, paid-on-call or volunteer,” said County Reeve Leanne Beaupre. “That should give all of us a strong sense that our safety and the safety of our loved ones is top of mind with our fire service community.”

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