



Council approves changes to fire services response level

Friday, May 20, 2022 (Wetaskiwin, Alberta) – In response to the growing call volume and concern over firefighter burnout, Wetaskiwin City Council has approved a reduction in service levels for Wetaskiwin Fire Services (WFS).

“Though this is being called a reduction of services levels, it is primarily a reduction of redundancies,” said Deputy Chief Plant. “To be clear: the health and safety of Wetaskiwinites is of paramount concern to us. For more than 100 years, the fire department has had a strong tradition of quality community service and we will not compromise that. A reduction in service levels will not see us reduce our standards.”

During its May 9, 2022 regular meeting, council voted unanimously to change the response protocols for the fire department after seeing a steady rise in call volume over the last several years. In 2021, firefighters rolled out to 690 calls – a substantial increase from the 456, 562, and 515 calls respectively for 2018–2020. This has put an incredible strain on the department’s paid-on-call members.

To achieve a reduction in calls, administration identified and council approved changes in response protocol to three types of calls:

- **Medical calls**

- *Currently:* WFS is paged out to medical calls at the Delta and Echo level.
- *Change:* The fire department will be called out by *request only*.
- *What this means for residents:* WFS responds to medical calls often to find paramedics have the situation under control or even have the ambulance leaving the scene. Moving to a *request only* model will still see WFS respond if there is an imminent need or if there are no ambulances available in the area.

- **Motor vehicle collision calls**

- *Currently:* The fire department is paged out to collisions of a wide variety, from fender benders to multi-car pileups.
- *Change:* WFS will only roll out to high velocity impacts and collisions involving entrapment.
- *What this means for residents:* Firefighters will respond to collisions of a high severity where their rescue capabilities are required. Smaller incidents, requiring no more than traffic control or debris clean-up, can be handled by other resources.

- **Fire alarm calls**

- *Currently:* WFS responds to alarm calls for a variety of residential and commercial properties.
- *Change:* Multiple false alarms will trigger an invoicing process with the aim of reducing false alarm calls.
- *What this means for residents:* While command units will continue to respond to and verify the false alarm, two or more false alarms within a six-month period will prompt an invoice to the property owner, as outlined in the [Fire Bylaw](#).





“As our call volume has increased, we have had firefighter mental health at the forefront of our minds,” said WFS Deputy Chief Alex Plant. “Burnout and turnover are a concern. We are a paid-on-call department; our members have other full-time work and their families to take care of, as well as fulfilling their duties as firefighters to the community. Emergency responders are put under a lot of stress, so we’ve had to look for mitigation strategies to avoid burnout and turnover.”

As of May 18, the fire department has responded to 233 calls for service. This is a rate of approximately one-and-a-half (1.5) calls per day. At this pace, WFS could easily eclipse 600 calls by the end of the year. These calls include coverage of County of Wetaskiwin Rural Fire Protection Zone 2.

A firefighter recruitment drive is underway for Wetaskiwin Fire Services. Anyone interested in becoming a paid-on-call member of WFS is invited to [complete an online application form](#) by July 5, 2022 or contact the Fire Services office at 780.361.4429 for more information.

About the City of Wetaskiwin

Wetaskiwin is a secure, connected, and inclusive community, home to a diverse population of nearly 13,000 people. Located only 30 minutes south of Edmonton International Airport, the City of Wetaskiwin provides a high quality of life through ample recreation opportunities, diverse cultural activities, and a modernized, business-friendly downtown.

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