



April 2, 2020

Dear Fire Chiefs, Fire Service Coordinators and Protective Services Managers,

With all that is rapidly evolving in respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, this letter outlines how the Office of the Fire Commissioner and fire services across the province can support communities right now.

There are a variety of issues coming up that fire services must adjust to in order to continue to respond effectively to the challenges presented by this pandemic. Public safety requires that the health and welfare of our first responders be kept as top-of-mind for a sustained response to this pandemic. As part of Emergency Management BC, the Office of the Fire Commissioner is a committed part of the coordination of the provincial response to the fight against the impacts of COVID-19.

It is important that we continue to focus on the essential, life-saving work we do every day to keep British Columbia's communities safe from the threat of fire. In the early days of this pandemic, we heard concerns with respect to fire inspections and compliance, and I want to emphasize that maintaining safety under our legislation, codes, and bylaws is our priority. I realize that there may be cases where contractors, local authorities, and building owners cannot comply with inspection schedules and may be facing non-compliance. We are requesting that you develop a plan to address these inspections once the situation allows.

Sadly, I need to highlight that over the past three months, BC has had more than 15 fire deaths — a very unfortunate example of how vital these inspections are to public safety. We understand that service companies may need to amend processes and procedures in order to carry out their work to remain within existing COVID-19 precautions. Fire and life-safety system inspections and servicing should continue to ensure that fire protection systems remain functional in buildings that house some of our most vulnerable populations.

Throughout this time, I've been having daily conference calls with many stakeholders; this includes daily meetings with the Fire Chiefs' Association of British Columbia (FCABC). I certainly understand there has been and continues to be staffing challenges which emphasizes the importance of fire service business continuity planning by all departments. That planning includes the following:

- consulting with neighboring communities regarding amending or creating mutual aid agreements that help ensure the necessary support and resources are available to respond to emergencies, and
- working in cooperation with building owners to help them identify and carry out appropriate fire prevention measures to mitigate the risk of fire, while they are also complying with the COVID-19 orders.

These are challenging times; we will most effectively respond to it by working together. Together, we can do our part to help British Columbians throughout the province.

Sincerely,

Brian Godlonton | Fire Commissioner

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