

Councillor Request Inquiry

35-2018

2018

Strathcona County Emergency Services provides its members with training to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) professional standards 1001 (fire fighter) and 1021 (fire officer). During this training our fire fighters develop the knowledge and skills in the areas of access and forcible entry. Fire fighters are trained to prioritize:

1. Safety of the public and of responders
2. Protection and conservation of property
3. Minimizing environmental impact

Training in forcible entry begins by instilling the idea to “try before you pry” to all situations. Fire fighters are taught to consider the path of least resistance when accessing buildings and compounds including fenced in areas.

Fire fighters are also taught to secure and make safe all entry points that they create. This may include situations where forcible entry is necessary, such as:

- Clearing broken glass from a window frame before people crawl through it
- Completely removing a door or roof and covering sharp edges from a damaged vehicle before entering and/or removing a patient
- Securing cut wire from a fence when entering an enclosure

The urgency of the situation dictates the methods that are utilized. Some situations call for rapid access while others may afford the fire fighters the ability to take their time and minimize damage.

During a fire there are often things that occur that do not make sense when viewed in the light of day. Fire fighters have perished inside of burning buildings, reporting that they are lost or trapped. Once the fire is out they are usually found just feet away from doors and windows that could have easily been reached had it not been for conditions of zero visibility. Wildland fire fighters have become disoriented and walked into a fire when visibility was reduced to near zero. The public gained a new appreciation for this with when social media videos of people fleeing Fort McMurray showing portions of the highway with zero visibility went viral.

During the first three days of the 2018 Northern Strathcona County Wildfire, there were many times when rapid access through fenced areas was necessary. There were also times when crews were working or moving through areas of zero visibility. Under these circumstances safe, yet urgent, tactics were utilized to gain access to burning areas. Once the fire was contained, Emergency Services began the long and arduous process of fully extinguishing the fire. During this “overhaul” phase there were several periods when the fire “flared up” and crews reverted back to “emergency response” mode.

Emergency Services will always make time to meet with residents who have questions or concerns about the strategies and tactics we utilize when suppressing fires. Additionally, we are always looking for opportunities for improvement and, if a perceived error in judgement occurs, we want to learn from it. We appreciate when members of the public are directed to us by Council so that we can answer their questions, provide context and have a conversation about the specifics of the issue.

Emergency Services remains eager to serve residents, businesses and visitors in Strathcona County. We continue to work with our community to find best practices that lead Strathcona County to become the safest community in Canada.