

It is common for associations and citizen groups to canvass municipal candidates for their opinions and positions prior to an election. Fire fighters are no exception. However, it can be a challenge for municipal candidates to respond to these inquiries given the technical nature of the questions, particularly for those who are running for office for the first time. With this in mind, AMO offers the following perspectives on some key sector-wide issues regarding fire services in Ontario.

Fire fighters are valued municipal employees. They deserve fair compensation for performing dangerous services that keep our communities safe. That's why they're some of the highest paid municipal employees. They can retire earlier and they receive more workplace benefits.

However, the wage gap between emergency service workers and other municipal employees is growing. Many municipal emergency service budgets have been growing at three times the rate of inflation for the last ten years or more. For many communities, emergency services are simply becoming unaffordable. Between 2006 and 2011 these costs have grown by 30% across Ontario. Ontarians already pay the highest property taxes in Canada.

Cutting other municipal services to pay for emergency services is rarely easy and is often unwise. Municipal employees also provide safe drinking water, safe roads and bridges, winter maintenance, long-term care, and child care. They all play a role in providing safe and healthy communities.

### **Adding paramedics to fire trucks**

About 50 years ago, nearly half of the calls coming into fire departments were fires. Today, in the City of Toronto for example, less than 1% of calls are fires.<sup>1</sup> These days fire trucks rush to the scene of many medical emergencies. But only, very rarely, are fire fighters in a position to provide life-saving medical assistance before a paramedic can.

One idea to address this redundancy is to add a paramedic to a fire truck. Experts have studied this idea carefully. They have concluded, "to place a paramedic on every, or most, responding fire apparatus would likely not result in improved clinical outcomes for patients."<sup>2</sup> Only a small portion of paramedic calls are truly sensitive to time in minutes and seconds, and where they can help, firefighters are already being dispatched to those calls.

Demand for fire suppression has been declining for many years across Ontario despite a growing population. This reflects the reality of better building standards, sprinklers, and alarms. Enhancing fire prevention and education efforts may reduce demand even further over the long term.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Megan O'Toole, "We're in a war with the fire department", *The National Post*, July 16, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Source: *A Service and Organizational Study of Toronto's Emergency Medical Services and Fire Services, Executive Summary*, June 2013, Pomax, Page 3.

By contrast, call volume for paramedic services have been increasing. This reflects demographic realities of a growing and aging population. Public expenditures on these services should match public needs.

### **Interest arbitration**

When municipalities and emergency service workers cannot agree on wage and benefit increases, interest arbitration is used to settle their collective agreements. Emergency service workers can't go on strike and, like all workers, they deserve to get fair increases over time.

However, wage and benefit increase for emergency workers are growing faster than increases for other public sector employees in Ontario and faster than Canada's rate of inflation. AMO is concerned about the fairness of this and its impact on other municipal programs and services. AMO is urging the Ontario Legislature to restore balance to interest arbitration.

[Click here for a video and more information on AMO's position.](#)

### **Presumptive Diseases for Firefighters**

The health and safety of municipal employees is a top priority for all municipal governments. Municipalities invest in the best equipment and training available to maximize employee safety. In addition, special provisions for WSIB coverage apply to firefighters. No other occupation in Ontario has such coverage.

In April 2014, the Ontario Government expanded the current regulations to include six additional cancers presumed to be work-related for firefighters under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act*. The presumptions apply to full-time, part-time and volunteer firefighters and are retroactive to January 1, 1960. Phased in over the next few years, they include Multiple Myeloma, Testicular, Breast, Prostate, Lung, and Skin cancers. As a result, WSIB premiums for some municipalities will increase by 28% in 2015.

In 2007 and 2009, the government established a list of eight cancers and associated service criteria, as well as the circumstances respecting heart injuries, as presumed to be work related for firefighters and fire investigators. These changes are a significant ongoing financial impact for municipal employers.

For more information, search "presumptive" on the AMO website.

### **Presumptive Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

As their employers, municipal governments, value our police, fire and EMS workers. Their health, safety and well-being are a top priority for municipal governments in Ontario. In recent years, bills have been tabled in Ontario's Legislature to presume any Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among emergency service workers (police, fire, EMS) occurred in the workplace. This would ensure automatic entitlement to WSIB benefits.

AMO fully supports emergency service workers receiving prompt medical treatment if they suffer PTSD arising from their work. However, proper diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and effective back-to-work programs are also essential components in addressing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). A presumption, in and of itself, is not a remedy for such a serious condition.

For more information, search "PTSD" on the AMO website.