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May 8, 2018

As Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, it is my responsibility to ensure that the framework for the delivery of municipal fire services meets the needs and circumstances of the communities they serve across the province.

Ontario's firefighters – both career and volunteer – are among the best in the world. Our government is committed to the safety of our firefighters and of the communities they serve. An important part of my responsibilities is to work with municipalities to identify and address emerging gaps and challenges related to the delivery of fire protection services.

The ministry established the Fire Safety Technical Table (the Table) in January 2017 to provide recommendations on the enhancement of fire safety in Ontario.

The Table meets on a monthly basis and includes municipal representation (the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Town of Aurora), representatives from firefighter associations and representatives from career, composite, and volunteer fire departments.

I want to thank the members of the Table for their dedication and for their work with my ministry on the development of three new fire safety regulations under the *Fire Protection and Prevention Act (FPPA)*. The regulations relate to:

- Certification of firefighters
- Risk assessments to inform the delivery of fire protection services
- Public reporting on fire department response times

These regulations respond to a number of coroner's inquest recommendations, enhance the consistency of fire safety across the province, increase transparency and accountability, and ensure that fire protection services meet the unique needs of communities.

The regulations were posted for comment on the regulatory registry in early 2018, and a great deal of valuable commentary was received. A number of changes have been made to reflect the thoughtful feedback.

I want to thank municipalities for their participation in this process and I am pleased to provide an update on the outcome of the regulatory consultation.

Mandatory Certification

The mandatory certification of firefighters, based on internationally recognized National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards, is a key step forward in building safer communities.

I want to emphasize that mandatory certification for four firefighter roles – including basic fire suppression – would only apply to new hires.

As such, the majority of existing suppression firefighters in Ontario – including those that work in volunteer departments – will not need to certify to maintain their jobs in their current positions. To progress to more senior positions in the fire service, certification would be required.

Some fire services in Ontario already train to NFPA standards – and over 80 have already begun certifying their firefighters. Province-wide certification would help ensure firefighters have a consistent level of knowledge and skill to safely provide fire protection services.

We recognize that some municipalities may require more time to comply with the mandatory certification of their firefighters. In response to feedback from the public posting of this regulation, we are delaying the in-force date for several roles to July 1st, 2019 and for others to January 1, 2020 and January 1, 2021.

For firefighters who have made best efforts to complete the certification in 24 months but were not able to do so, we are allowing an additional 12 months for completion, if the extension is approved by the Fire Marshal. This program would allow firefighters to work while completing their training and certification.

The internship program will also be expanded to include in-service fire instructors and fire inspectors for an initial 6-month internship. These participants will also benefit from a potential 6-month extension, if the extension is approved by the Fire Marshal. Firefighters who are certified and deemed-to-be certified (i.e., grandfathered) will have the ability to supervise firefighters in the internship program.

We believe the training and certification process for fire services across the province should be convenient and straightforward – particularly for small and rural municipalities who may face challenges in recruiting new volunteer firefighters.

We also recognize that firefighters will need a straightforward way to access testing services – and we will provide an online testing system that will be available free of charge. Where high-speed internet is not available, paper testing will continue to be available to fire services, also free of charge.

To ensure any challenges small or rural fire services may have adapting to the new requirements are mitigated, we will work with these municipalities to assess their current state of readiness and we will provide funding to cover all additional costs associated with this initiative.

In collaboration with our partners, MCSCS will be setting up an implementation table with a specific focus on small and rural communities to address their unique challenges throughout the implementation process.

Community Risk Assessments

Most communities undertake a risk assessment of some sort to help inform local decisions on the provision of fire protection services.

This regulation requires that all municipalities undertake a standardized risk assessment that will be used to inform the development of municipal fire protection services. A full risk assessment must be conducted every five years, with monitoring and reviewing conducted annually.

Undertaking a risk assessment will ensure that the delivery of fire protection services, including the development of public education and fire prevention programs, are based on consideration of key profiles of the community.

Public Reporting

Fire services across Ontario report their response times to the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management (OFMEM) using varying definitions. The result is inconsistent data that may be misinterpreted. There is no requirement to share this data with municipal governments or to make the information public. The public reporting regulation will create consistent reporting, and will increase transparency and accountability by providing the public with a clear understanding of what they can expect from the fire department in terms of response times.

This regulation is consistent with the Ontario Government's "open-by-default" approach to data sharing, and it is in line with the public's expectation that key information be available about their fire services.

Conclusion

My most important priority as Minister is the safety and security of every Ontarian. That is why we are requiring firefighters to certify, fire departments to develop risk assessments, and fire department response time data to be publicly reported – it will help to improve community safety across our province.

We will work closely with communities to ensure a smooth transition to the new regulations that will begin to come into force on July 1, 2019.

I want to thank all of our partners who worked with us on these regulations, and the municipal governments who submitted comments to the public registry.

If you have further questions about next steps, please contact mcscsinput@ontario.ca.

Warm regards,



Marie-France Lalonde
Minister