



March 20, 2020

Fire Prevention Officers' Association of British Columbia
9312 - 93rd Avenue
Fort St. John, BC
V1J6T4

Dear President Marco D'Agostino:

With all that is rapidly evolving in respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, you can begin to expect a variety of issues and challenges to come up daily that we, as fire services personnel, are having to adjust and address along with our response. Public safety requires that the health and welfare of our first responders is paramount for a sustained response to this pandemic.

It is important to remember that the *Fire Services Act*, the BC Fire Code, and your local bylaws have been written to reduce risk, promote safety, and allow us to act as needed not just for fire prevention and life safety, but also in our collective response to a variety of emergencies.

In the early days of this pandemic, we have been hearing concerns with respect to fire inspections and compliance. As mentioned, the legislation, codes, and bylaws must be taken together in order to provide the full picture of what is required in order to maintain fire and life safety measures. The BC Fire Code (Div. C, Section 2.2) requires the owner of a building to carry out the provisions of the code, which includes doing the fire inspection. While the BC Fire Code does not require the owner to use a third party to do fire inspections, fire service companies are often hired by the owner to do work on the owner's behalf. They are not yet an essential service, but fire service companies will have need to review any contracts they have with building owners.

If a local government has a bylaw that requires that fire inspections be done by a contracted fire inspection company, the company will need to consult with the local government directly to find out if the bylaw can be amended by the council or board. In a similar vein, local authority fire officials must work under their bylaws using a risk-based approach, taking into account all of the COVID-19 precautions and protocols that have been promulgated by health officials.

In cases where contractors, local authorities, and building owners cannot comply with inspection schedules and may be facing non-compliance, a plan to address the inspection once the situation allows must be put in place, and the inspections must be conducted at the earliest opportunity while following all current COVID-19 precautions. In an emergency where a primary life-safety system is defective or not working as designed in a high-hazard occupancy, emergency repairs and maintenance should be completed immediately and/or a fire watch should be ordered until such a time as the repairs are completed.

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It is imperative to remember that local bylaws, the Fire Code, and the *Fire Services Act* are intended to provide the Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) the leeway to maintain the highest standard of public safety suitable for each AHJ.

I would ask moving forward that if there are any other related questions or concerns, to please communicate these through the Fire Chiefs' Association of BC (FCABC). Over the last few days, we have received multiple calls from chief officers related to this matter. Streaming these through the FCABC will ensure that there is consistent communication.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Godlonton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Brian Godlonton | Fire Commissioner

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