

DATE: May 15, 2024

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Eric Depenau, Acting Director of Administrative Services

SUBJECT: Provincial Open Burning Categories and PG Fire Rescue Local Response.

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Category 1 campfire poster
2. Category 2 open fire poster
3. Category 3 open fire poster

RECOMMENDATION(S):

THAT Council RECEIVE FOR INFORMATION the report dated May 15, 2024, from the Acting Director of Administrative Services titled “Provincial Open Burning Categories and PG Fire Rescue Local Response”.

PURPOSE:

The following report is provided to share information on provincial open burning categories, restrictions within those categories, and interaction with the City of Prince George Clean Air Bylaw.

BACKGROUND:

For the purpose of administering services and issuing restrictions the BC Wildfire Service divides the province into 6 fire centres. The Prince George Fire Centre is a very large region encompassing the Northeast area of the province and is further divided into 7 fire zones. The City of Prince George is within the Prince George Fire Zone.

Three categories of open burning are identified by the BC Wildfire Service, that the public, businesses and industry are required to adhere to:

- Category 1 campfire: This category is defined as any fire no larger than .5 m high by .5 m wide, used by any person for recreational purposes or by a First Nation for a ceremonial purpose.
- Category 2 open fire: This category is defined as material in one pile not exceeding 2 m high by 3 m wide; material concurrently in two piles each not exceeding 2 m high by 3 m wide, or stubble or grass over an area that does not exceed .2 hectares.
- Category 3 open fire: This category is defined as material concurrently in three or more piles each not exceeding 2 m high by 3 m wide; material in two or more piles exceeding 2 m high by 3 m wide; one or more windrows, none of which exceed 200 m in length or 15 m wide, or

stubble or grass over an area exceeding .2 hectares. Typically, Category 2 and 3 burning prohibitions include the restriction of fireworks, sky lanterns, burn barrels and binary exploding targets.

The BC Wildfire Service may issue burning bans within the various fire centers around the province and may also restrict burning within specific areas of a certain fire centre by zone. For instance, it is possible that a directive be issued in the Fort Nelson Fire Zone, however open burning is permitted in the Prince George Fire Zone.

Due to the potential for confusion arising from similar names applying to different geographies (the Prince George Fire Centre, Prince George Fire Zone and the City of Prince George), The City of Prince George Fire Chief will normally release a burning ban specific to the City of Prince George, following the provincial bans put in place, to reduce the potential for confusion. Again, this is viewed as necessary as there may be a ban on an area of the Prince George Fire Centre that does or does not impact the City of Prince George.

The City of Prince George Clean Air Bylaw includes language that closely matches the Provincial open burn categories. As example, within the Clean Air Bylaw, a City of Prince George recreational fire is comparable to a provincial category 1 campfire, and open burning in the City of Prince George is comparable to provincial category 2 and 3 fires.

It is important to consider the difference between campfires/recreational fires, open burning, and burning within wood burning appliances. Part 2 of the Clean Air Bylaw specifically speaks to burning within wood burning appliances, and that permission exists, even during burning bans or air quality advisories, for the purpose of heating, where no other means of producing heat is available within that structure.

Related to open burning is the matter of air quality. An air quality advisory is an alert that is issued when air quality is expected to directly impact residents within city limits. Within the Clean Air Bylaw, an air quality advisory results in the prohibition of open burning, including recreational fires, however, not fires within wood burning appliances.

A smokey skies bulletin may be released because of wildfire smoke migrating from other areas. This bulletin provides tips and recommendations for those who have respiratory illnesses. A smokey skies bulletin does not trigger a burning ban. The bulletin may be released at the same time as a Provincial burning ban or Air Quality Advisory, which has triggered the burning ban.

Most of the fires occurring downtown and at the Lower Patricia Boulevard Encampment (LPBE) are not compliant and enforcement action is being taken to stem non-compliant open burning. Enforcement currently includes Fire Services attending the scene, explaining the Clean Air Bylaw and extinguishing the fire.

The management of burning by those unsheltered in the community can be viewed in three streams, open burning internal to structures which occurs at the LPBE and external fires which occur across downtown and at the LPBE.

Where fire is occurring internal to a structure at the LPBE, PG Fire Rescue and PG Bylaw do not enter an individual's shelter to determine the type of fire and its use. This is in part due to safety considerations and legal restrictions on entering a person's shelter. Due to ongoing concerns stemming from individuals burning internal to nonconforming structures and using nonconforming appliances, the department is reviewing options with other agencies to manage these occurrences. A

joint response between the RCMP and the PG Fire Service may be required, and staff are engaged in exploring this option.

Where fire is occurring externally to structures downtown: the criteria to meet compliance is high. Excerpts from the Clean Air Bylaw demonstrate that fires in the downtown area are in almost every instance non-compliant and support enforcement against these instances:

- *Open Burning - means the combustion in the open air of yard and garden waste, land clearing debris, or any other material, including burning of any of these materials in a container, but does not include a recreational fire or the combustion of gas, propane, or charcoal in a barbecue or hibachi for the purpose of cooking food.*
- *3.1 No person shall conduct open burning at any time within the City of Prince George.*
- *Recreational Fire - means the burning of seasoned firewood for recreational purposes in a permanent outdoor fireplace, barbecue or fire pit not larger than 60 centimeters in diameter that is designed and constructed to confine the fire and is suitable for such a purpose, or within a fully enclosed burner or similar device.*
- *3.5 No person shall cause or allow any garbage, yard and garden waste or noxious material to be burned in a recreational fire.*
- *3.6 All persons maintaining a recreational fire shall:*
 - (a) be competent to control the recreational fire;*
 - (b) continuously control and supervise the recreational fire;*
 - (c) possess at the site of the recreational fire extinguishing equipment appropriate to the size and type of recreational fire;*
 - (d) use only seasoned firewood, and;*
 - (e) not cause, permit or allow the recreational fire to come within three (3) meters of any property line, fence, standing timber, brush or building.*

Where fire is occurring externally to structures in the LPBE: When PG Fire Service staff respond to burning fires at the LPBE, fire fighters are expected to consider the Clean Air Bylaw and the immediate need of individuals for warmth and cooking and use professional judgment to manage the situation.

When provincial category bans are in place these restrictions are enforced on the encampment. For instance, during the most restrictive provincial measures, a Category 1 Open fire prohibition (campfire prohibition), only a CSA-approved or ULC-approved portable campfire apparatus may be used, and the flame height must not exceed 15 centimeters. In these circumstances, where unsheltered individuals are using these tools for the purposes of cooking and heating, they would be allowed to continue to do so. In all other instances, during a category 1 ban, open fires would be noncompliant and enforcement action would be taken.

Generally, during times when category one fire prohibitions are in place, heating is not a significant concern (hot, dry, summer months) and the prohibition reflects a reduction in the tools available for unsheltered individuals to cook food. While this does limit options for those within the encampment, the number of fires witnessed for the purpose of cooking food is assessed as limited and it is further assessed that other options are available within the community for individuals to acquire nourishment during the periods these restrictions may be in place.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Managing open burning within the community can be viewed in relation to the priority of Social Health and Well-being, specifically, ensuring a safe, healthy and clean community for all.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

No financial considerations are arising from this report's recommendation as presented.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

In summary:

- Fires occurring downtown are in nearly all instances noncompliant and enforcement action is being taken to address these occurrences.
- Fires internal to structures at the LPBE are in nearly all instances noncompliant and options to manage these occurrences are being explored with appropriate authorities.
- Fires external to structures at the LPBE may occur if in compliance with the Clean Air Bylaw and a degree of discretion is used to help individuals meet their immediate heating and cooking needs. Where non-compliant, enforcement is being undertaken.
- During a Category 1 ban campfires for cooking and heating are prohibited by the province. In these circumstances only CSA-approved or ULC-approved portable campfire apparatus may be used. It is generally assessed that this is not a significant barrier for those unsheltered in the community to receive nourishment based on other services operating in the community and local authorities will help to enforce the provincial ban on all segments within the community.

The majority of fires that occur downtown and at the LPBE are viewed as not compliant with municipal bylaw and will also contravene provincial category one bans should they be put in place. Enforcement action is currently being taken to stem non-compliant burning and further actions are being considered to manage fires internal to structures within the court protected encampment.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

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APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting Date: 27 May 2024