

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Vancouver mulls fines for chronic false alarms

Firefighters respond to
7,000 of them a year

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VANCOUVER SUN

Vancouver city council will consider charging chronic false fire alarm perpetrators \$200 every time their buildings send out more than two false alarms a year.

A report from Vancouver Fire Chief John McKearney, to be considered by council next week, notes his department responds to about 7,000 false alarms every year. About 1,300 city addresses have two or more false alarms a year while 700 buildings have three or more.

"This is considered to be an unnecessary use of resources and an unnecessary exposure of risk of a motor vehicle accident involving a fire truck responding in emergency mode," McKearney's report stated.

He recommends a \$200 "fee" be charged to building owners for every false alarm beyond two in a calendar year, a measure that would generate an estimated \$70,000 in annual revenue.

Vancouver fire department officials responded to more than 50,000 calls last year and with more multi-family buildings being built, the number of false fire alarms is expected to increase.

Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services representative Jonathan Gormick said a certain number of false alarms are inevitable but officials want to reduce the number of buildings that routinely send out three or more false alarms every year.

"That usually comes down to things that aren't being rectified or taken care of right away and that is a waste of resources," he said. "If we're going back to the same place again and again, they're just not getting it looked after."

Gormick said it can cost nearly \$200 in wages for four firemen to respond to a false alarm that takes an hour to investigate and dismiss.

"It's not so much that it's costing a ton of money to go to these," Gormick said. "But with the huge increase in call volume in the city — with medical calls, fire calls, everything — we need to use our resources in a better way."

The report to council notes Vancouver would join several other Metro Vancouver cities that also charge building owners for false alarms.

Surrey charges \$114 for every false alarm, North Vancouver District charges \$130 for every false alarm beyond three in a calendar year and Burnaby charges from \$100 to \$300 for every false alarm beyond three in one year.

DNV charges for every false alarm beyond ONE in a calendar year. - cjk

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