



Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services

2020 Year End Review

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http://portcolborne.ca/page/fire_and_emergency_services



PortColborneFire



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Message from Chief Lawson

As the new Fire Chief of Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services, it is my pleasure to present the 2020 Annual Year End Review.

2020 was a challenging year with the COVID-19 pandemic impacting nearly every aspect of services the Fire Department provides to the citizens of Port Colborne. Despite the challenges of providing emergency and non-emergency services during a pandemic, our dedicated staff continues to deliver exceptional services when called upon.

Despite the above-mentioned challenges, our Fire Department finished 2020 strong. The two year process of getting all personnel certified to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards was completed in early December. All our suppression staff are now certified up to Fire Fighter II along with hazardous materials operations giving them the distinction of being a certified fire fighter in the Province of Ontario.

Emergency Management was a major focus in 2020 with not just our involvement in managing the City's response to the pandemic from the Emergency Operation Centre, but also a small tornado touchdown on September 4th and the windstorm of November 15th. All events highlighted a resilient Fire Department operating within a resilient City.

Our continued goal is to create a healthy community for our staff, residents and visitors. As we look forward to 2021, we see challenges on the horizon in the form of service demand and more extreme weather events. Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services is a team of dedicated professionals who are committed to providing exceptional service to our community.

I am exceptionally proud of our career and volunteer men and women that serve in all areas of Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services, they are skilled, dedicated professionals who are pushed to their physical, mental and emotional limits on a regular basis.

The following is a synopsis of Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services in 2020. We look forward to continuous improvement and a continued high level of service to our community.



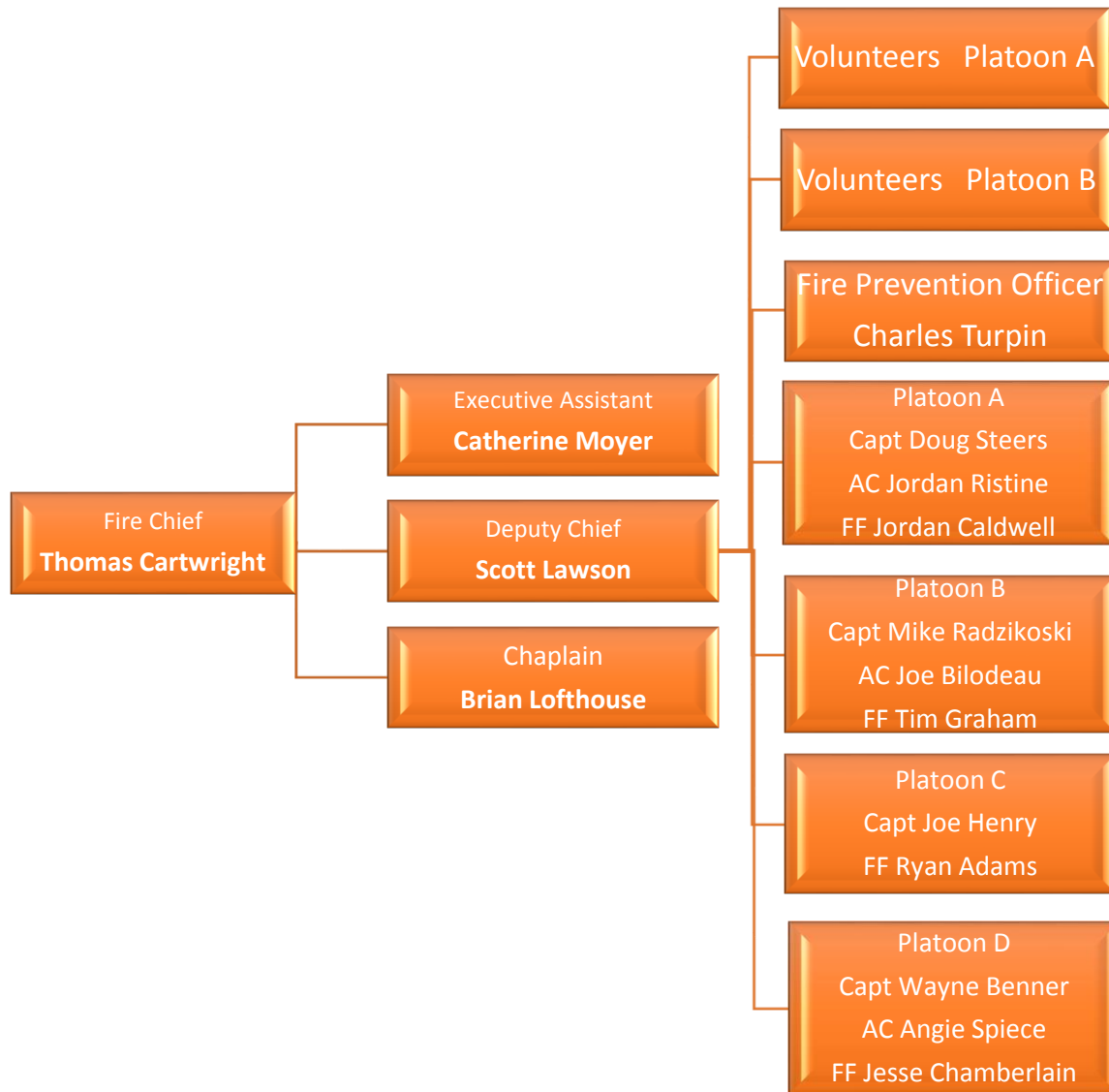
Who We Are – What We Do

Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services provides City of Port Colborne's residents, visitors, and businesses with protection against loss of life, property, and the environment from the effects of fire, illness, accidents, and all other hazards. We do this through preparedness, prevention, public education and emergency response, with an emphasis on quality services, efficiency, effectiveness, and safety. Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services is comprised of 15 full-time staff and approximately 36 volunteer fire fighters operating from one strategically located fire station.

Emergency calls are received by the St. Catharines Fire Dispatch Centre, who then dispatch crews. Depending on the call, only the duty crew responds. These calls include medicals, vehicle fires, burning complaints and assistance calls to name a few. For incidents larger in nature, the volunteers will be paged out for labor and to transport specialized apparatus on scene. Upon receiving a general alarm, the volunteer fire fighters respond to the station, don their personal protective equipment and then respond to the incident. These calls include motor vehicle accidents, structure fires and alarm systems to name a few.

In addition to providing an all-hazards response within the City of Port Colborne, Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services responds to hazardous material incidents in the Niagara Region to supply decontamination services. We also will respond to mutual aid calls in neighboring municipalities as part of an automatic aid/mutual aid agreement.

PORT COLBORNE FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES 2020 ORGINIZATIONAL CHART



Volunteers of Platoons are as follows:

Platoon A		Platoon B	
J Henry	B Meleskie	W Benner	D McCabe
A Spiece	I Roberts	R Adams	M Radzikoski
D Steers	R Smith	J Bonds	J Ristine
K Benner	T Stevenson	J Chamberlain	R Savage
M Dezenosky	K Stivorik	G Gamble	S Senyk
T Graham	S Stivorik	C Graat	B Sutherland
C Huneault	M Lannan	A Lobbezoo	C Wilcox
		J Worrall	

Focused on Community

Giving back to the community not only makes a positive impact on the lives of others but also provides the department with a fulfilling experience. Given our current environmental circumstances, the need in the community did not change, but how we engage with the community did. Events like the Easter boot drive took a hiatus to protect the health of not only our members but our generous community. In 2020, the department found new and innovative ways to assist those in our community that needed help.

Christmas Toy Drive

When Santa's Helpers closed their doors five years ago, Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services recognized a void in the community and reacted.

The 2020 toy drive changed its look with the addition of a drive-through toy drop-off at the Fire Hall. The department saw an overwhelming response from the community. The contact-free drop-off was such a success, it will become a normal event

in the Christmas seasons to come. I am confident in saying that the 2020 toy drive was the most successful we have seen in the five years of running the drive. A thanks goes out to the community; we are but a vehicle for collection, they are the generous ones.



Community Dinner

Starting with the 2016 Christmas dinner, Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services has helped sponsor and serve the Christmas dinner at the Port Cares Reach Out Centre. This event is a staple to our Safe Community Initiative allowing a vast audience to interact and develop personal relationships with the department. This year did look different with no in-person sit-down dinner. This year staff delivered meals directly to those that could not attend Port Cares to pick up their meal.



Mask Giveaway



As part of a generous donation from MedSup Canada to the Niagara Health Foundation, Niagara Region received more than five million non-medical masks for the community. These masks were distributed to various municipalities, with Port

Colborne receiving more than 60,000. City staff have already donated masks to community partners and have plans to distribute thousands of masks to residents. The fire department used the success of the drive-through toy drive system to distribute the much-needed masks to our residents. Multiple giveaways occurred through the fall and winter

Food donations were accepted on behalf of Port Cares. Three bins, along with over \$750.00 were donated by those receiving a box of masks.

Prevention

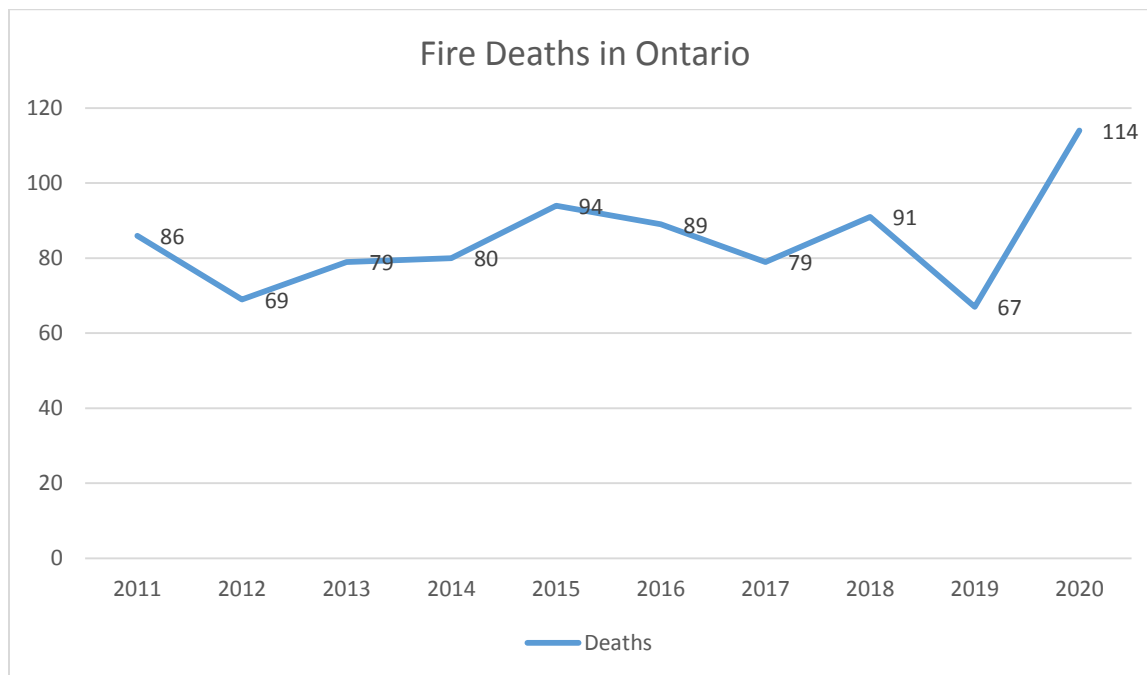
Ontario law not only requires fire prevention inspections, education and training, but it is also extremely important to the safety of the people who work, live, and play in Port Colborne. Fires are damaging to property, cause injury or death and can even eliminate jobs since many buildings destroyed by fire are not rebuilt. The way to prevent these grim outcomes is a strong Fire Prevention Program.

All Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services staff are responsible to help the Fire Prevention Division to strengthen the Fire Prevention Program each year. The Fire Prevention Division is overseen by the Deputy Chief, the Fire Prevention Officer and assisted by full-time and volunteer fire fighters who dedicate their time to assisting with fire prevention and public fire safety education programs. Fire Prevention is responsible for the following:

- Conducting fire safety inspections to ensure compliance with the Ontario Fire Code
- Initiating the prosecution of Ontario Fire Code offences
- Reviewing fire safety plans
- Reviewing and commenting on planning & development applications/plans
- Reviewing and approving special events
- Providing public fire safety education
- Conducting investigations into the cause & origin of fires

With stay at home orders, people working remotely from home, Ontario saw a significant increase in fires. More fires did equate to more fire fatalities. Below is the 10 year statistics for Ontario. Statistics exclude fire deaths in vehicle accidents.

Prevention is Responsible for Two of the Three Lines of Defense



The First Line – Public Education

Fire Prevention Week 2020 saw Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services once again host the CHCH morning show. With all 12 municipalities. Also during Fire Prevention Week,



Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services hosted CHCH personality Tim Bolen. Four segments were taped and aired during Fire Prevention Week. The CHCH morning show is enjoyed by over 3.9 million Canadians each week. The event was so well received; CHCH is scheduled to be back in the City for Fire Prevention Week 2021.

Virtual Public Education

With the barriers created by COVID, the Department had to get creative on how we continue to educate the public, specifically school-aged children in regards to fire safety. The Department has embraced the virtual world. Duty crews are now performing virtual tours and public education events, to assist our community partners. While not ideal, and we miss interacting with the people we protect, it helps us meet our provincial mandates.



The Second Line – Code Enforcement

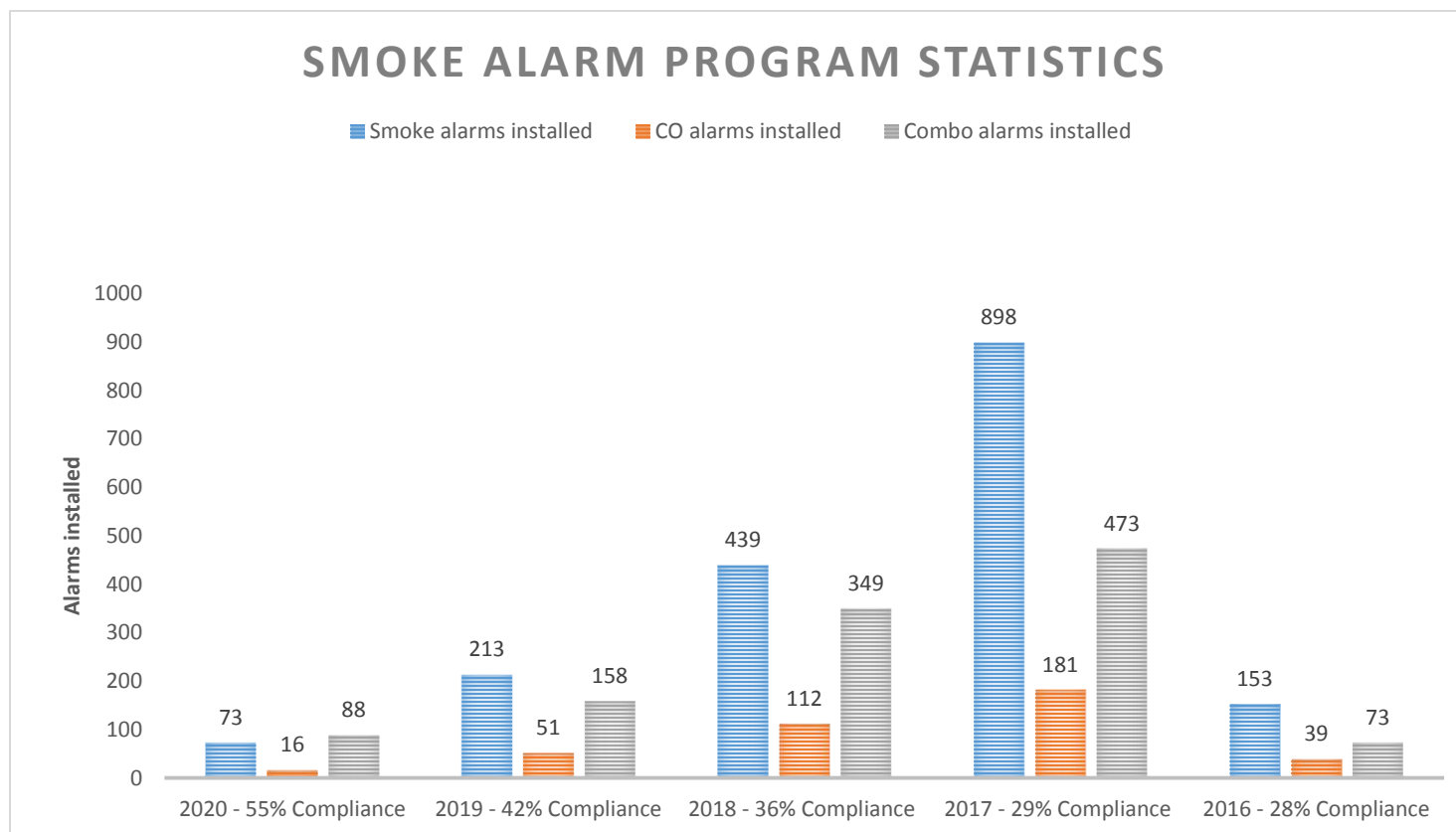
The Ontario Fire Code is a regulation made under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997 consisting of a set of minimum requirements respecting fire safety within and around existing buildings and facilities. The owner is responsible for complying with the Fire Code, and a municipal fire department enforces the Fire Code. Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services understands the importance of compliance with our codes and the effects on our community when they are not met.

Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services is widely recognized for its progressive smoke alarm program. The Fire Protection & Prevention Act under Part II mandates the following:

2 (1) Every municipality shall,

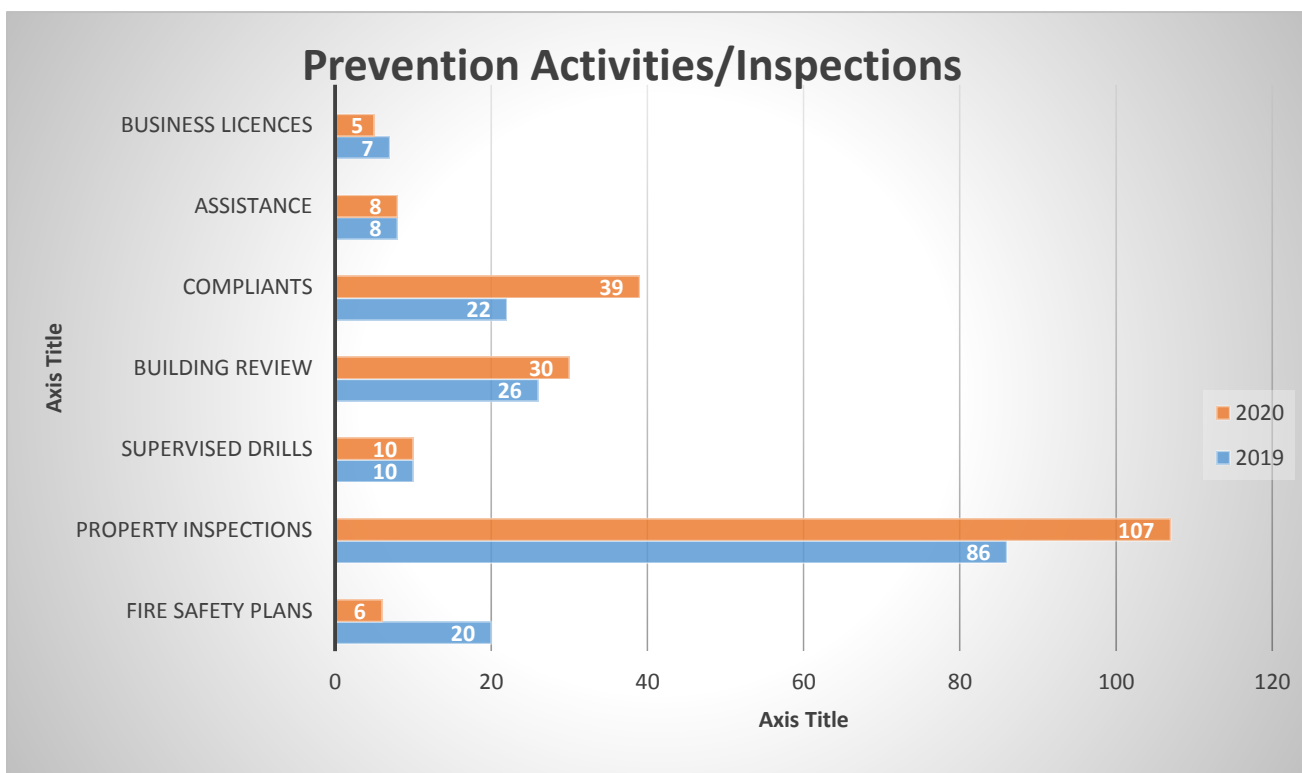
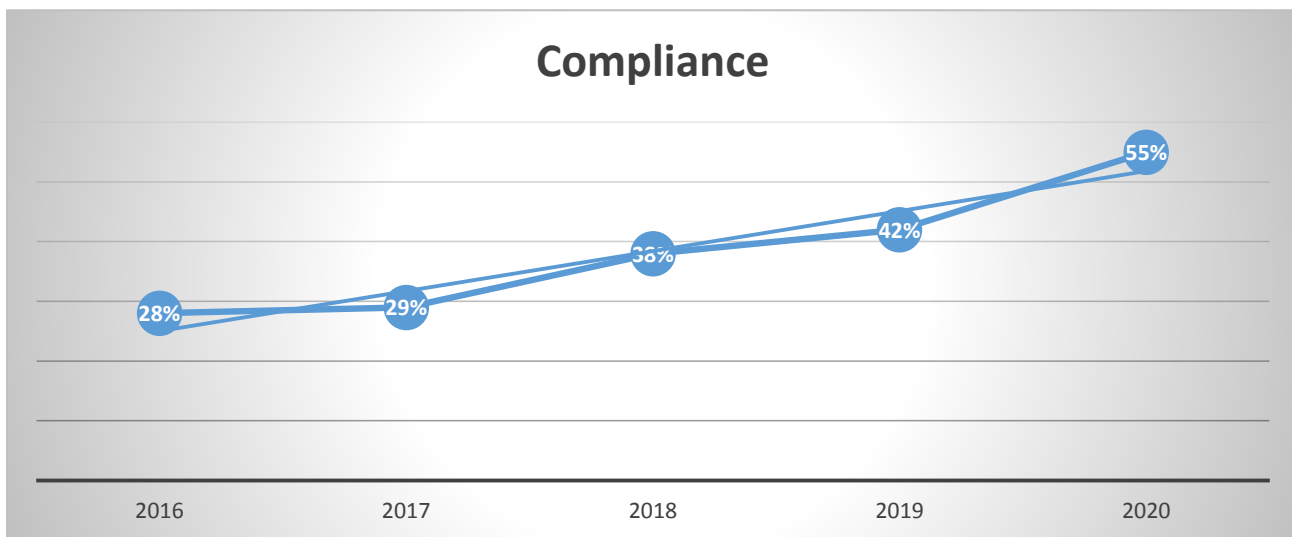
(a) establish a program in the municipality which must include public education with respect to fire safety and certain components of fire prevention.

Home visits completed by the in-service fire fighters to ensure compliance in single-family homes help the City of Port Colborne meet the required regulation. A glimpse into the program statistics are:



Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services has seen a direct correlation between smoke and carbon monoxide compliance and the reduction of loss fires. A loss fire is defined as a fire that had economic implications. Possible loss fires have been stopped at the incipient stage due to the activation of an early warning device; a smoke alarm. The activation has alarmed the occupant of a potential fire and actions, for example, turning the stove off occurred before the outbreak of a fire due to the detection of smoke. Our proactive and regulatory inspection program continues to make our community safer.

While COVID restrictions did limit the proactive portion of Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services provincially recognized program, the Department did enter 208 homes for investigations or at the request of the homeowner. Of the 208 homes entered, the Department did see a large swing towards an increase in compliance. While this upswing in compliance is positive, we acknowledge the need to remain diligent in this citizen-first program.



The Third Line – Response

The third line of defense is response. Response can be broken down in a multitude of ways; from level of service, equipment, training and of course, call response. Each is reliant on the other to ensure not only the effectiveness of the response, but the safety of the fire fighters themselves.

Level of Service

The level of service offered by Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services is set by Council with the enactment of By-law 6745/109/19. A list of services offered to the community are:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| - Interior Structural Fire Fighting | - Public Assistance Calls |
| - Grass/Brush Fires | - Carbon Monoxide Investigations |
| - Burn Complaints | - Natural Gas Emergencies |
| - Water/Ice Rescue | - Technical Rescue (rope) |
| - Elevator Rescue | - Vehicle Fires |
| - Motor Vehicle Accidents/extrication | - Medical Assistance Calls |

The level of service is the framework for the fire department. Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services uses the levels to assess current and future training needs along with the equipment to meet these needs. The department continually strives to meet and then exceed the standards that regulate the fire service to provide the best service and results to our citizens.

Equipment



Engine 1 - **2015 Spartan Metrostar**

Engine No. 2 - **2000 E-1 - Superior**

Tanker 1 - **2015 Freightliner**

Rescue 1 - **2012 Spartan Metro Star Custom Built**

Ladder 1 – **2006 Pierce – 75’ Ladder**

Training

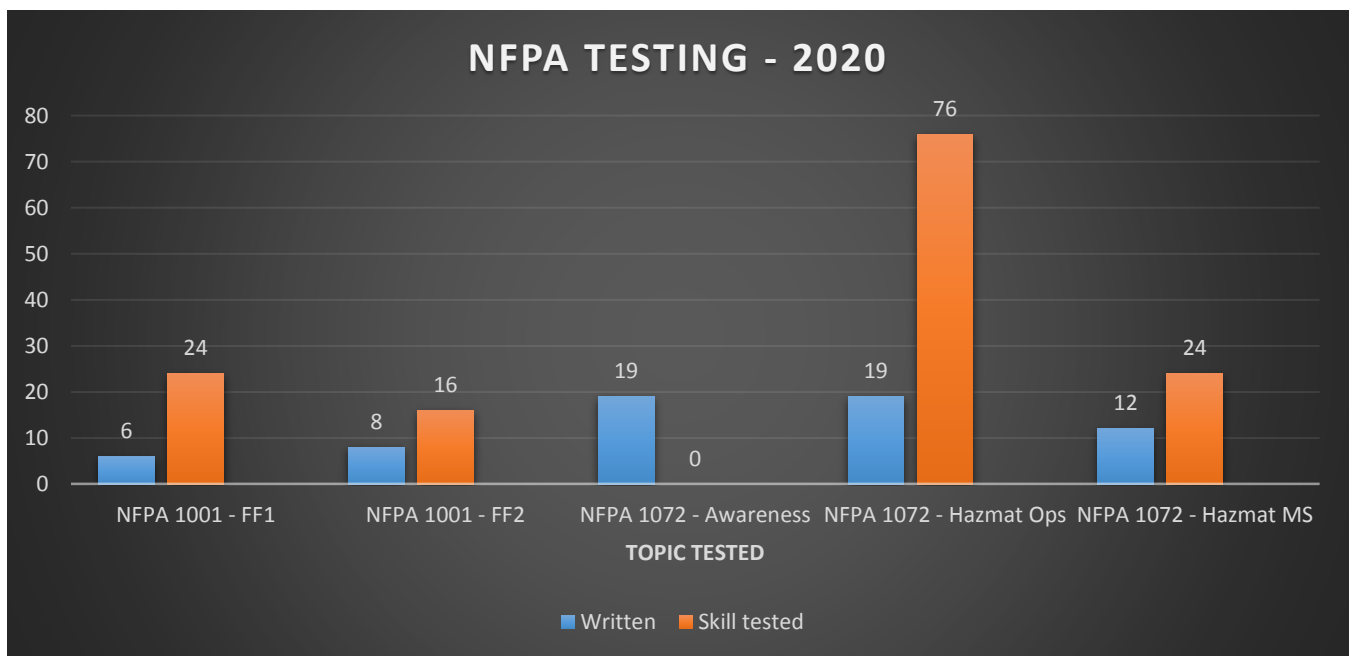
The primary focus of the Training Division is to develop and provide the highest quality training and education to the members of Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services. Compliance with Provincial standards and regulations, as well as department operating guidelines, are achieved. With the adoption of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standards in Ontario, training at Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services had to adapt to the change.

In 2013 the Office of the Fire Marshal announced the decision that Ontario would adopt the National Fire Protection Association Professional Qualifications (NFPA Pro-Qual) Standards. May 2018, Ontario saw Regulation 379/18 “Fire Fighter Certification” passed mandating all fire fighters in Ontario be certified before being allowed on the fire ground. The compliance dates that were proposed by the Province were:

1. As of July 1, 2019 - a fire fighter must have NFPA 1001 to be on the fire ground.

2. As of July 1, 2019-a fire fighter must have NFPA 1001-2 to be an interior fire fighter.
3. As of July 1, 2019 - a fire fighter must have NFPA 1002 to be a pump operator.
4. As of January 1, 2020 - a fire fighter must have NFPA 1021 to direct other fire fighters.
5. As of January 1, 2020 - a fire fighter must have NFPA 1041 to instruct other fire fighters.
6. As of January 1, 2021 - a fire fighter must have NFPA 1006 for rescue operations.

Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services is proud to announce we met our self-imposed directive of having all our current full-time and volunteers certified by the end of 2020. While test dates were canceled in April by Academic Evaluations & Standards (AS&E) training schedules were juggled multiple times to finish this in December. A total of 64 tests were written and 140 practical skills were evaluated by AS&E in 2020. All training was done in-house under the supervision and co-ordination of the Deputy Chief. Testing saw AS&E send an Evaluator to oversee both written and practical testing.



Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services started the recruitment process late in 2020. This recruitment was to boost the volunteer complement due to retirements and other vacancies. These recruits will go through a completely overhauled Recruit Training Program to meet the NFPA requirements.

Practical training on our new Scott X3 Pro Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) in the fall of 2020 started for the career and volunteer fire fighters. The new SCBA replaced the SCBA that was no longer supported by Scott. The new SCBA comes with a 15-year warranty which takes them to end-of-life expectations.



Emergency Response

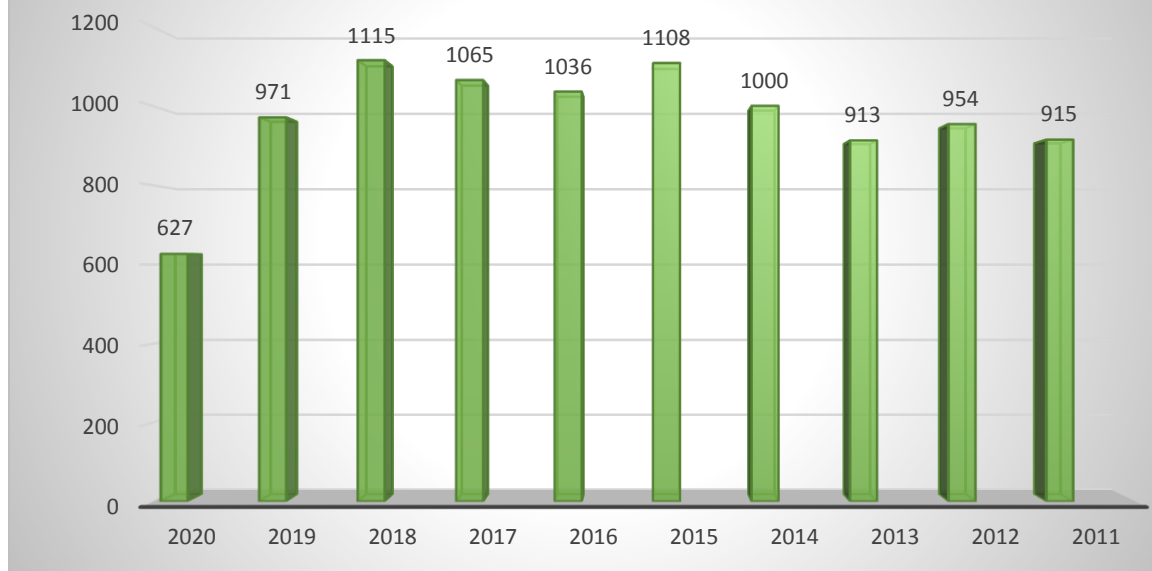
The department provides a wide range of emergency and non-emergency services to the citizens of Port Colborne.

The following data provides a brief overview of these activities. In 2020, the department experienced a decrease in the overall calls compared to the ten-year average. Medical calls during COVID-19 proved to be the main contributing factor in the reduction of calls.

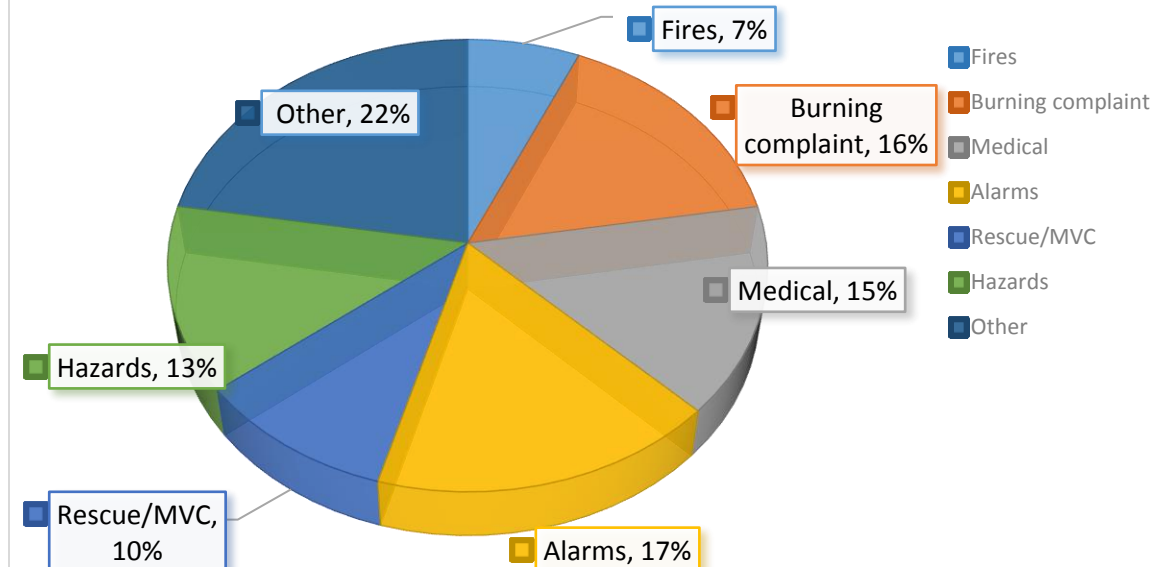
Niagara Emergency Medical Services quickly realized during the pandemic that they required Personal Protective Equipment . Fire Departments across the region gave up 50% of their stored Personal Protective Equipment to accommodate Niagara Emergency Medical Services. As a result of this and to reduce unnecessary risk, it was recommended by the Medical Director and subsequently the implementation of a COVID-19 medical tiered response. This, in turn, reduced Fire Departments medical calls across the region by over 50%.

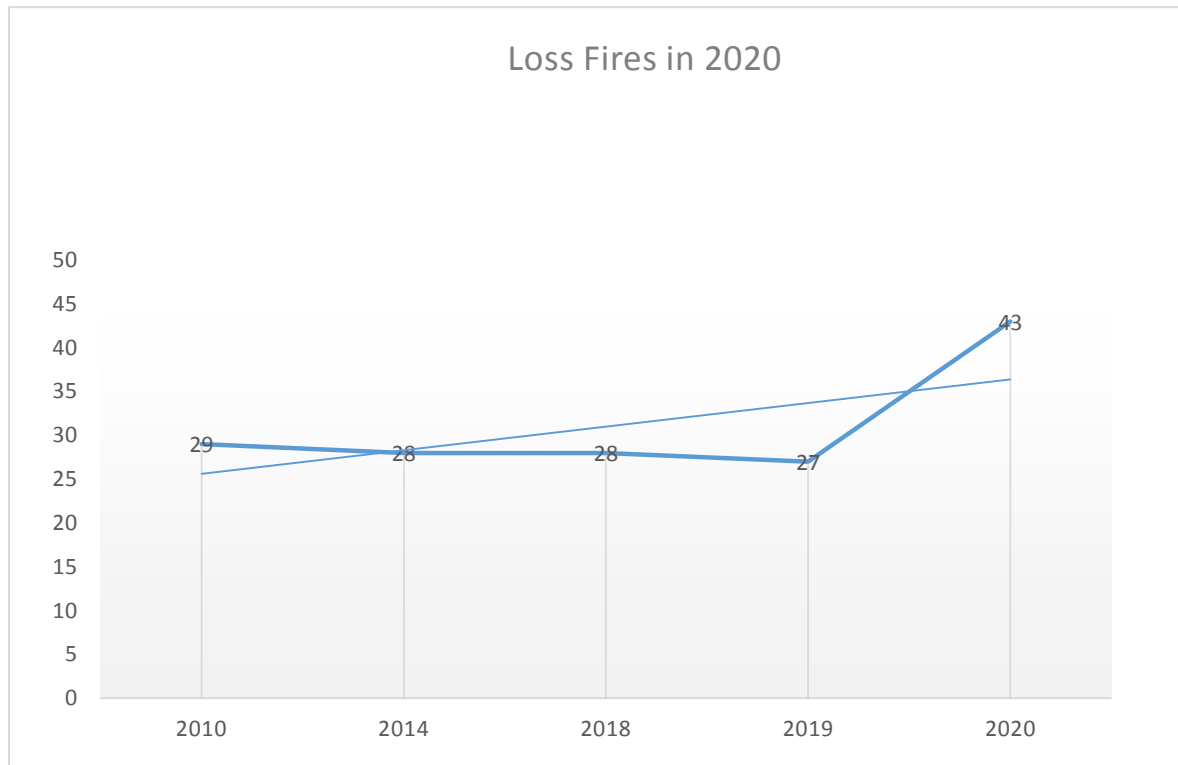
With Niagara Emergency Medical Services lowering restrictions in December 2020, we have seen a significant increase in medical calls to the normal response protocol except for Long Term Care Facilities, in which at this time, fire fighters are not permitted to respond.

Historic Call Volumes

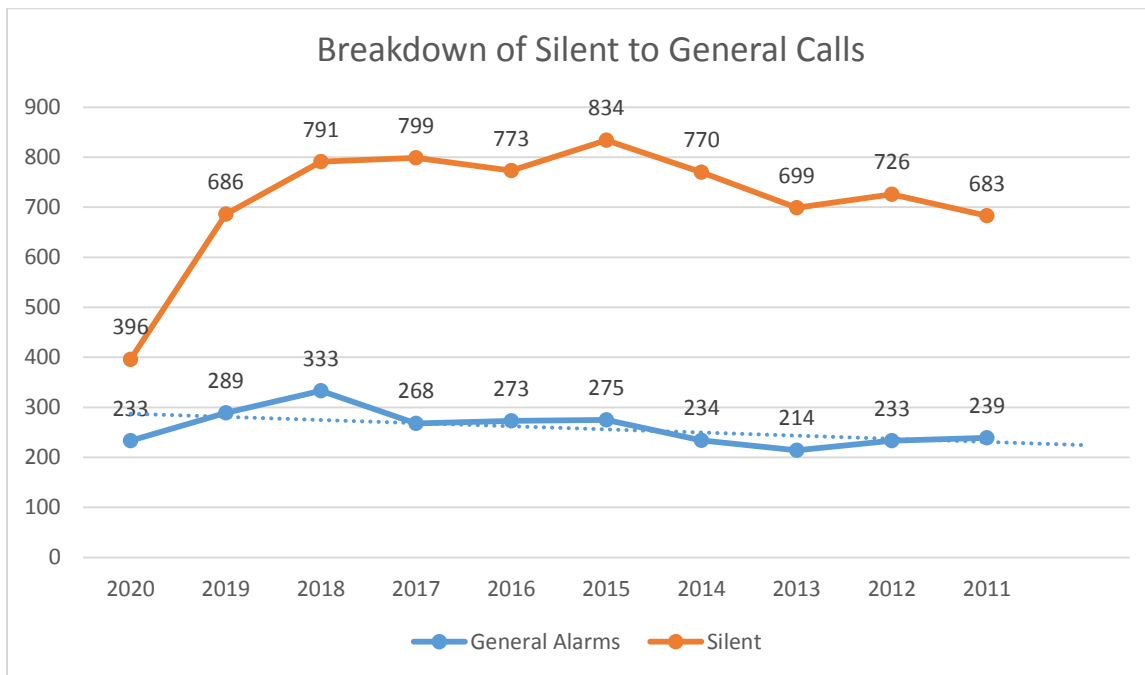
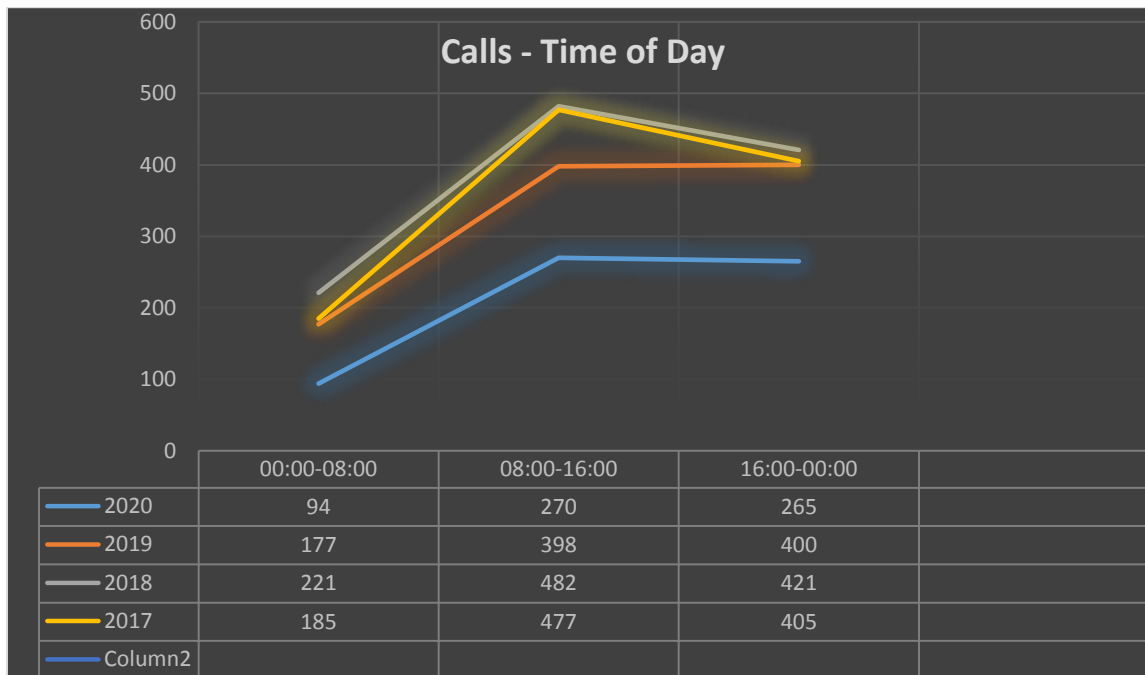


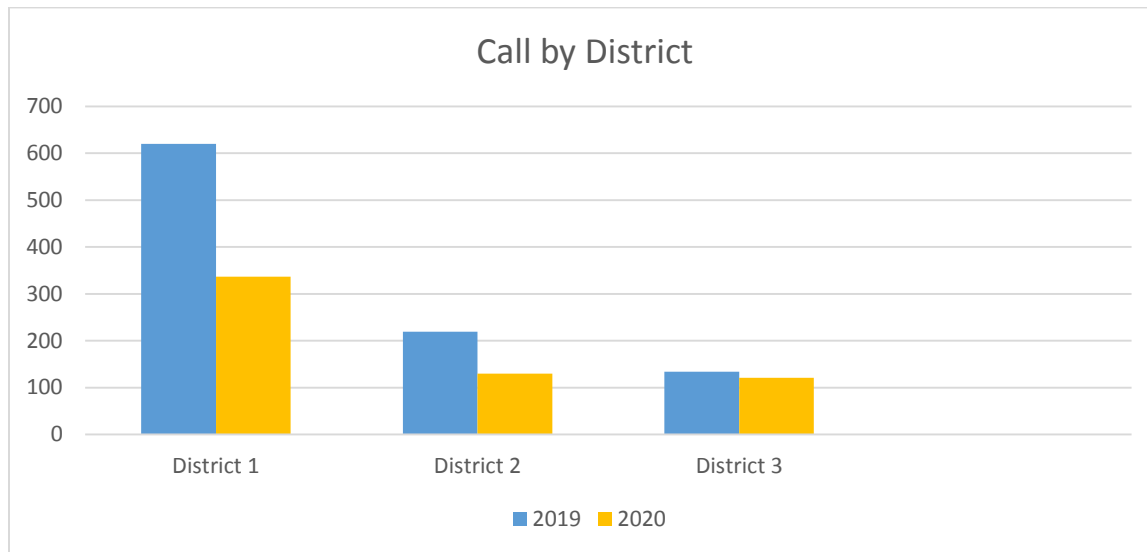
2020 RESPONSES BY TYPE





Loss fires were up significantly in 2020; an increase of 63% was realized. This is a trend seen across the Province. It is believed that due to the stay-at-home orders, more people are doing just that, staying home. The increase in time at home has had an impact on fire safety behaviors.





Successes and Challenges

Any successful Department must take the time to reflect to see what went well and should continue. As important, we must take the time to see what isn't working and must be reworked or eliminated all together. The following, while not an all encompassing list of successes and challenges, is a sample of the on-going items that are a focus of this Department.

COVID – 19

I am personally looking at our Fire Departments response to COVID-19 as a success. All levels of the organization responded quickly and adopted control measures put in place. Both Associations were flexible and worked with Senior Management to protect our ability to respond. With multiple disruptions to the training calendar, our team adjusted when needed.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that is triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event.

Most people who go through traumatic events may have temporary difficulty adjusting and coping, but with time and good self-care, they usually get better. If the symptoms get worse, last for months or even years, and interfere with your day-to-day functioning, you may have PTSD. To combat the all too real debilitating disorder, Chief Cartwright introduced The Working Mind training to all staff.

The Working Mind First Responders, formerly known as Road to Mental Readiness, is an education-based program designed to address and promote mental health and reduce the stigma of mental illness in a first-responder setting. This training program is aimed to:

- Improve short-term performance and long-term mental health outcomes
- Reduce barriers to care and encourage early access to care
- Provide the tools and resources required to manage and support employees who may be experiencing a mental illness
- Assist supervisors in maintaining their own mental health as well as promoting positive mental health in their employees

The course uses the **Mental Health Continuum Model**, which categorizes one's mental health within a continuum: green (healthy), yellow (reacting), orange (injured), and red (ill).

- Allows individuals to identify indicators of declining or poor mental health in themselves, and others (without diagnostic labels and their associated stigma)
- Stresses that individuals can move along the continuum; if one ends up in the red "ill" phase, they can move back towards the green "healthy phase"
- Teaches the appropriate action one can take for themselves and for others at each point along the continuum.



- “Big 4” — a set of evidenced-based, cognitive behavioural therapy-based techniques that help individuals cope with stress and improve their mental health and resiliency. The “Big 4” are positive self-talk, visualization, tactical breathing, and SMART goal setting.
- Research indicates that contact-based education is one of the best ways of reducing stigma. The Working Mind First Responders includes custom videos of people with mental illnesses describing some of their experiences with mental illness and stigma, as well as those who supported them and their journey to recovery.

It is estimated that 30 percent of first responders develop behavioral health conditions including, but not limited to, depression and PTSD from their time in service. The City of Port Colborne must remain diligent in providing training to recognize and combat the effects of PTSD.

Recruitment

The department continues to see an issue in attracting and retaining paid-on-call volunteer fire fighters. This trend is not just a Port Colborne issue. Other municipal fire services struggle with the same issue of retaining paid-on-call volunteer fire fighters. This turnover in fire fighters may well be the reality of running a composite fire service that is continually advertising and training recruit fire fighters annually.

While multiple articles can be found during research on the topic, no one issue can be targeted to resolve the struggle. Changes in family dynamics, competing interests and the reality of the level of commitment needed to be a volunteer are often key factors. It is noted that not only the fire service struggles to recruit and retain quality volunteers. Many of the mainstay organizations in our communities struggle to get quality help too.

An example of the struggle to attract people; Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services started recruitment for volunteers in late November 2020 for a start date in 2021. The Department received just 11 applications which are less than half of what was received in 2019. While we are happy with the six that were eventually successful, future recruits may be difficult if the trend of lower applicants continues.

Senior Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services staff will continue to research the topic and make changes where needed, when possible. It should be understood that there is not a one size fits all solution as each current or future volunteer fire fighter has different motivations in joining the service. It does appear the department should budget and plan for the annual recruitment of volunteers.

What is next?

The fire service is dynamic and constantly changing and challenging us. While we are focused on our current needs to provide a quality service to the residents, we must look up from our current tasks to look at what the future may hold.

Apparatus Replacement

Engine No. 2 is currently up for replacement for 2022. A fire engines life span is 20 years as per NFPA standards.

Updating Hose

Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services took possession of new attack and supply lines that replace out-of-date hose. Many of the old attack lines had non-locking storz fittings that no longer meet standards.

Technical Rescue

With the changes to training to meet the NFPA standards nearing completion for our more common disciplines like fire suppression and auto extrication, the Departments Technical Rescue Programs will be the next to be reviewed and if needed updated. 2021 will mark the review and then implementation of the NFPA standards.

Pre-incident Planning

Pre-incident planning facilitates the transfer of critical information to first-responders that can guide their response to a fire incident and improve their response capabilities, which may ultimately save lives and reduce property damage and business interruption. Our fire departments in-service crews will be using new technology on the trucks to update and create pre-plans for City. The information will be available to responding crews as they respond to calls to assist in making decisions that can save lives and property.

The second benefit to a solid pre-incident program is in-service inspections can be completed at the same time. Identifying safety concerns and remedying the hazard fits with the Department's pro-active approach to life safety. Crews will be able to issue orders on infractions to ensure compliance and continue our path to a fire safe community.

Residential Sprinklers

Over the past 50 years, the types of materials used in home furnishings and building construction have progressively changed from natural solids to more volatile, synthetic materials. Synthetic materials burn faster and hotter than natural materials, and when they catch on fire, can cause catastrophic results in a short period of time ; often before fire fighters can respond.

Residential sprinklers can be pivotal in extinguishing a fire or suppressing it long enough for Fire Departments to respond. Research proving the effectiveness of these systems, accompanied by an increase in incentive programs encouraging homeowners to invest in them, has led to an increase in residential sprinkler systems. Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services would like to help facilitate the discussion on any new construction being mandated to have residential sprinklers installed.