



TOWN OF MINTO

DATE: June 1, 2017
REPORT TO: Mayor and Council
FROM: Chris Harrow
SUBJECT: Minto Fire PTSD Plan

STRATEGIC PLAN:

6.4 Maintain and enhance the local volunteer fire fighter model in Minto, and take a leadership role in setting standards for municipalities this size by ensuring training, equipment and vehicles available to volunteers compares with a full time fire service.

BACKGROUND:

April 2016 the Province passed Bill 163 Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) aimed at ensuring all municipalities have a plan in place to deal with PTSD amongst emergency responders. The bill required a plan be filed with the Ministry of Labour by the end of April outlining our procedures for preventing and intervening occurrences of PTSD in the fire department.

Fire Departments in Wellington County, through the Fire Chief's Association, began discussing a plan in 2016. Numerous training providers and other organizations provided advice on how they were constructing a plan. Public Services Health and Safety Association (PHSHA) wrote a workbook to help users write a plan. The workbook and resources from other fire services helped prepare a plan to work specifically for Minto Fire.

The Minister of Labour made it clear in statements about the legislation that plans had to be different and templates were not to be used. The reason is to ensure each municipality writes a plan to meet local needs and circumstances. Copying someone else's plan or using an existing template will not result in a plan that works specifically for Minto Fire.

COMMENTS:

Starting last year, the Wellington County Fire Chiefs discussed the framework on a strategic plan to implement a critical incident stress program across the County. Each municipality would write their own PTSD plan tailored to their department ensuring the items placed in the plan is appropriate for their needs. The Chiefs also agreed to implement a Peer Support Team across the County to be available to assist all departments at any time.

The plan for Minto Fire details measures for our personnel in the event of a traumatic incident or PTSD injury to any member. It outlines training to be offered each Firefighter, Officer/Chief as well as the Spouses/Partners of the organization. This will ensure all members of the organization are covered by the plan and get the education needed.

Training for each group will begin with an awareness seminar lasting 2 - 4 hours. The Officers/Chiefs will follow up with a 3 - 4 hour session training to help each Officer deal with situations arising in the department. At the same time, all of Spouses/Partners who wish to participate will be given an awareness session to look for signs and symptoms of PTSD. Volunteer Firefighters return to work or home shortly after a call. It is important families and co-workers know how to recognize and deal with the signs of PTSD.

The training noted, except for the Spousal/Partner session, is mandatory under the Legislation. County departments secured the services of Renee Jarvis and her team from the Critical Incident Stress Foundation to complete all mandated training. She has a great deal of experience treating critical incident stress. She completed her last session with all Supervisors May 17th. We are now complete and in compliance with the new Legislation.

The next step is to establish the Peer Support Team consisting of a couple of members from each Station throughout the County. The Team will train and work together to write policies and guidelines for their deployment. Having all fire departments represented is similar to the existing Mutual Aid Plan. If a department has a significant event, most of their members will be involved one way or another. The Peer Support team will be deployed by calling another department in the County to ask that their Team lead any critical incident programs needed. If the incident was large enough to involve numerous departments in the County, there are enough Peer Support Team members to draw on to ensure proper response.

The Plan also implements an Employee Assistance Program for all Firefighters. While all Minto full time employees are covered by an EAP provided by Aspira, Minto Fire only used the program as needed. However, with implementation of the PTSD program and training that occurred, the next important step is to include all of the Firefighters in an EAP program.

Minto Fire's Volunteer insurance company VFIS, offers a very good program designed specifically for firefighters. The program contains many of the aspects the Minto's Aspira program. The major difference is VFIS has a partnership with Homewood Health who has specialized PTSD program for first responders. Homewood has a location in Guelph and their program is new and the first in Canada. Minto Fire is fortunate to have this specialized program so close by and affordable with a quoted price of \$24/year per firefighter, which is less than the Aspira quote.

Minto Fire is excited about the new plan and what it has to offer Firefighters. The emerging issue of PTSD is a topic to be taken very seriously. Our personnel accepted the training very well, with many positive comments coming forward. The PTSD Plan will be a very fluid document, constantly being updated more is learned about processes and issues that accompany PTSD. The more effort placed into prevention and training, the more Minto Fire hopes to decrease PTSD occurrences in our people. However, as the plan states, if an injury

occurs, all Firefighter are to receive treatment with the hopes of a full recovery.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The training described is included in the 2017 training budget. The cost per firefighter was \$35 for each session offered, and spousal training was completed by the Foundation for a donation. The final cost will be confirmed

The cost for the VFIS Employee Assistance Program is about \$1920 per year. Enrollment should occur in 2017, and the premium included in the 2018 budget.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Council accepts the Fire Chief's June 1 report regarding Minto Fire PTSD Plan, and approves the Minto Fire PTSD Plan as currently written, and enrollment of Minto Firefighters into the Volunteer Firefighter Insurance Services at an annual cost of \$24 per firefighter.

Chris Harrow
Fire Chief