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## The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Information Report to Council

**SUBJECT:** 2023 Year-End Report  
**DATE:** 2024-03-19  
**REPORT #:** FES-24-004  
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**DEPARTMENT:** Fire & Emergency Services

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

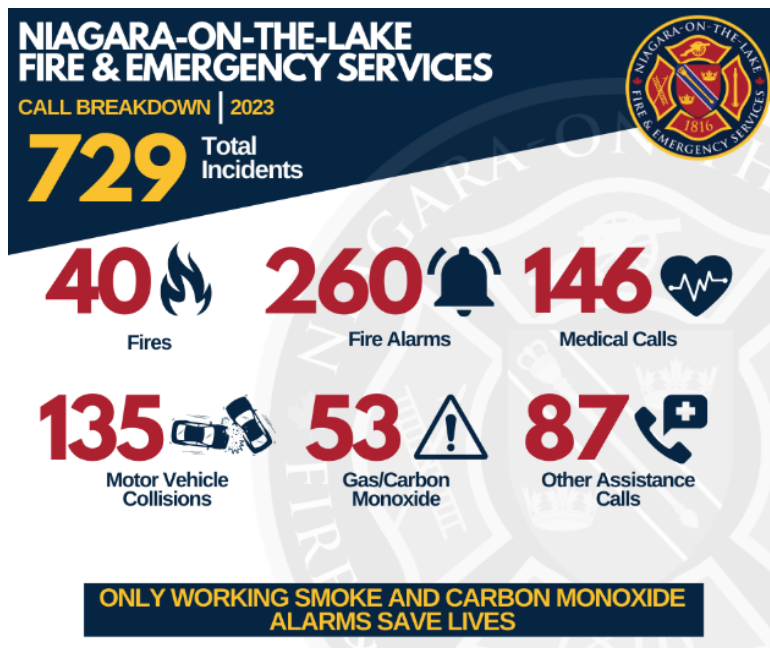
This report by Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire & Emergency Services presents an update to Council on the achievements, challenges and statistics related to the Department for 2023. The data has been presented by Division within the Fire & Emergency Services. An update on the *2021-2025 – Strategic Plan – Fire & Emergency Services* is also provided.

### NEXT STEP / CONCLUSION

Niagara-on-the-Lake Volunteer Firefighters responded to a total of 729 calls for assistance in 2023. Of these incidents, 260 were for fire alarms, 146 were responses to medical calls, 135 were responses to reported motor vehicle collisions, 87 responses were related to rescues or emergency assistance, and 53 responses were for gas or carbon monoxide-related incidents. Additionally, 40 calls were responses to reported structure, vehicle, and brush fires.

The 729 incidents responded to 2023 is 11 incidents less than 2022. The number of fire-related incidents was 30 less than in 2022.

Of significance is that the 729 represents a total incident increase of 7% over the previous five-year average. This demonstrates the increased demand on the Town's firefighters as the community grows. The graphic below was shared publicly through the Fire Department's social media platforms.



In May of 2023, 12 firefighters who were trained and accepted into the ranks within the five fire stations from the last recruitment. Active firefighter numbers were such that the Department did not need to recruit for a 2023-2024 class. Instead, the Department focused its training efforts on current firefighters and ensured they all received additional training opportunities not commonly achieved during a recruitment year. Specialized training opportunities included sending all firefighters to the Niagara Falls training facility to practice with live fire so they could work through active fire scenarios. This training was overwhelmingly well received by our firefighters. Due to its popularity, training staff are already arranging to revisit the Niagara Falls Tower in Fall 2024.

Currently, the Operations & Training Division employs 97 active volunteer firefighters. With pending retirements and the departure of some members over the last year, the department is preparing for a recruitment class to begin in Fall 2024. Graduation is scheduled for the Spring of 2025. Recruitment and retention are primary objectives that Fire & Emergency Services Administrative Staff are focused on to ensure the Town's volunteer fire service delivery model is able to perform into the future. A number of active recruitment and retention strategies, including focusing on health and safety, ensuring members are included in department decisions, and ensuring firefighters are seen as highly valued, have been working well for the Department.

These strategies have been recognized provincially with Fire Chief Jay Plato receiving the Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Award by the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs.

Maintaining a volunteer fire department in a growing community with a 50-year-old plus demographic is a challenge. The department has been successful in maintaining the volunteer model through the strategies in place.

## **Community Risk Reduction Division**

Community Risk Reduction Division Staff completed 794 fire prevention and education activities in 2022. This is an increase of 82 activities or 12% compared to 2021. This increase can be attributed to the additional staffing that was hired in 2023 within the Risk Reduction Division. This increase directly benefits the community fire safety by increasing time spent completing community inspections, speaking with the community, and reviewing applications.

Of the 794 activities, 335 were fire inspections, 152 were special event reviews, and 128 were planning reviews. The Community Risk Reduction Division was able to attend 16 Public Education events in 2023. Four fire investigations were also completed.

Working with a partner sponsor, the Community Risk Reduction Division was able again to obtain at no cost to the Town, 2500 reusable bags with the Department's crest and a fire safety message on the front. These bags were handed out at multiple events that the fire department attended. They were also incorporated into the Town's Welcome Packages provided to new residents in the community.

The recently endorsed and adopted Community Risk Assessment completed by Staff has played an intricate role in helping to understand the risks that are present within the community. This document has assisted in the creation of the Standards of Cover Document, which will be presented to Council soon. It also assisted in understanding where the newly acquired tanker-style apparatus should be located to serve the community adequately. A wholesome review of what apparatus responds to which incidents was also able to be completed based on the Risk Assessment. The Risk Assessment document is a valuable tool that will be reviewed annually and will assist the department in the future, ensuring effective fact-based decisions are made.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter of 2023, the CRR division launched a new Alarm Assistance Program (AAP). This free ongoing program is intended to assist Niagara-on-the-Lake homeowners aged 65 and over, and anyone with a disability or limited mobility, with smoke and carbon monoxide alarm safety in their homes. Since November, CRR members have visited and assisted over 55 homeowners, ensuring proper alarms are installed and assisted with changing batteries or installing Smoke and Carbon Monoxide alarms as required. Residents can sign up online through the Town's website, or by calling the Town at 905-468-3266.

The graphic below outlines tasks completed by the Community Risk Reduction Division in 2023.



## Administration

2023 saw the completion of several important initiatives by the Administrative Staff. Four fire stations were outfitted with Direct Capture Exhaust Systems, and further purchases of second sets of bunker gear were made. Both of these projects are important initiatives aimed at enhancing the Department's Cancer Prevention Program. If a firefighter or a fire investigator is diagnosed with a prescribed cancer and meets the employment duration and additional criteria for the prescribed cancer, then the disease is presumed to be an occupational disease due to the nature of the worker's employment unless the contrary is shown. The Fire Administrative staff is continually making efforts to ensure the Department is doing what it can to prevent cancers within the fire service.

The Department welcomed two new apparatus to its fleet. Both are tanker-style apparatus with the purpose of bringing large amounts of water to a fire in the areas of the Town that do not contain fire hydrants. In addition to bringing these apparatus on board, the Department was able to achieve 'Accredited Superior Tanker Shuttle Service' for our rural areas. To be accredited, a fire department must commit to maintaining a high standard of organization and practice delivering the service regularly. Through rigorous training and collaboration, the Department was able to demonstrate its ability to provide a service equivalent to hydrant-protected areas in rural areas without hydrants. The two new tankers were placed within stations 1 (Old Town) and 5 (Glendale).

Firefighter health and wellness remain at the forefront of the administrative Staff's minds. As such, fitness and mobility training were provided again for all firefighters in 2023. This initiative has been a great success and very well received by the firefighters. Through the Health and Wellness program, reusable bottles were distributed to all firefighters and bottle fill stations were installed in the two fire stations that contain gym equipment. Ensuring firefighters stay hydrated is an important part of maintaining a proper Health and Wellness Program. This program will continue into 2024, with enhancements proposed as part of the 2024 capital budgeting process.

The Department continues to work with a continuous improvement and customer service lens on all of its decisions. Multiple benefits of working towards this goal have already been realized and as the department continues to achieve this goal, further benefits will continue to be experienced and felt across the community and by its citizens.

## **Strategic Plan Update**

The *2021 – 2025 Strategic Plan – Fire & Emergency Services* outlined three (3) major initiatives: **Optimize the Volunteer Model; Achieve Service Excellence & Continuous Improvement; Create Focused Resource Management.** Within these initiatives, eight (8) primary goals were identified:

- *Optimize the Volunteer Model*
  - 1. Reduce Response Times**
  - 2. Improve Firefighter Health and Wellness**
  - 3. Enhance Firefighter Retention**
- *Achieve Service Excellence & Continuous Improvement*
  - 4. Achieve Accreditation**
  - 5. Advance Community Risk Reduction**
- *Create Focused Resource Management*
  - 6. Improve Fleet Performance**
  - 7. Increase Emergency Preparedness**
  - 8. Modernize Facilities**

Within these eight (8) primary goals, 32 clear and specific objectives have been outlined with target completion dates. Significant progress has been made toward achieving these objectives since the Strategic Plan was approved. The Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire & Emergency Services is proud to report that since the last update in March of 2023, five (5) additional objectives have been completed, with two (2) more objectives getting underway. Collectively, 29 of 32 objectives are either underway or complete. **(Appendix I)**

Continuing to work on the fire strategic plan initiatives is an item identified within Council's 2022-2027 Municipal Strategic Plan. As the Fire Strategic Plan was dated 2021-2025, Fire Administrative Staff have begun planning an updated strategic/business plan, with the aim to align with Council's current strategic plan.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- Appendix I – Fire Strategic Plan Objective Status