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## Bad behaviour targeted in St. Catharines' new zero-tolerance sports and rec policy

News Sep 25, 2019 by [Karena Walter \(/stcatharines-on-author/karena-walter/A51414DF-8A62-4D5C-983C-150BA3470C1C/\)](#) [✉](#)  
(<mailto:karena.walter@niagaradailies.com>) The St. Catharines Standard

Verbally abusive parents, violent players and intoxicated spectators are some of the targets of a new zero-tolerance behaviour policy at St. Catharines recreational facilities.

The Rzone Policy endorsed by city council this week is aimed at fostering a respectful environment at city-owned arenas, ball diamonds, pools, soccer fields, parks and other city-owned recreation facilities.

"The goal of Rzone is to promote a safe, positive, enjoyable, supportive environment for all of our attendees," said Eric Lamothe, city manager of strategic and business services.

"So whether you're a coach, a fan, a parent, a player, a ref, whoever it might be, we're really looking to encompass all of our attendees at our facilities."

Story continues below▼

The policy outlines behaviours that are unacceptable, such as verbal assaults, threats, harassment and racial and ethnic slurs, and lays out procedures for user groups to de-escalate incidents. An individual who engages in unacceptable behaviour could be barred immediately from the premises or banned from coming back for a period of time. In heightened situations, police are called.

Lamothe said an Rzone Policy is used in 12 municipalities in Ontario. St. Catharines will implement its policy this fall.

Graham Coun. Bill Phillips said he saw some pretty negative reactions by parents to referees and kids on other teams when his children were small and similar incidents continue to be reported nationally. The policy will help stop that, he said.

"I don't want the residents out there to think that Seymour Hannah is the Wild Wild West right now and we have fights and everything going on every day, that's not happening, but we have to ensure the safety of the kids and the good parents out there."

The recreation master plan committee made a motion in February asking city staff to prepare a report on the best practices of a zero tolerance behaviour policy for all recreation facilities. Phillips brought the motion forward to council a few days later.

Director of parks, recreation and culture services Phil Cristi said user groups were looking for a city policy they can lean on to help enforce their own rules.

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"We believe that they are trying to enforce it, it's just that they need a policy they can fall back on so that they can point to something," Cristi said. "When things need to be escalated they have a little bit of language and backup."

A staff report to council Monday recommended spending \$30,000 for 175 Rzone education signs at recreational facilities throughout the city, an amount that can be accommodated in the 2019 operating budget.

Council approved the signage but delayed spending \$61,500 for "facility monitors" to provide increased part-time staffing in arenas in 2020. The additional staffing recommendation will be considered in 2021 budget deliberations.

St. Andrew's Coun. Joe Kushner said instead of hiring more staff, the city should place more responsibility on adults involved and have user groups sign agreements with the city.

"If they can't control their spectators then I think we have to take a look at them and give them appropriate warnings," he said, adding he was in favour of signage.

Merriton Coun. Lori Littleton echoed that sentiment saying clubs need to take care of their own homes and get coaches and parents under control.

"The problem is, nobody wants to be the heavy. I understand that because people don't like confrontation and what have you, but it's time we stand up and say you're ruining the sporting events for our kids."

St. Patrick's Coun. Mat Siscoe said he's volunteered with organizations that are willing to enforce policies but it's difficult. In one case, he said, a person related to a player was shouting from a bar area at spectators but there was no penalty that applied to someone who wasn't the player, parent or sibling.

He said putting the impetus on volunteer organizations to ensure all members are trained in de-escalation techniques may not be possible and the Rzone policy offers backup for them.

"At the end of the day, the purpose of this is to make sure that people on the ice, on the field, on the pitch are having the experience we hope."

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