Town Asks for Citizens Help in Reducing False Alarm Fire Calls

False Alarms Can Be Easily Prevented by Following a Few Simple Steps

(October 2, 2020 – Ponoka, Alberta) – The Town of Ponoka is asking for the help of local citizens in reducing the number of false alarm fire calls in the community. In 2019, almost half of all emergency fire calls in the Town were due to false alarms, which happens when a fire alarm is activated but there is no actual fire.

"False alarms can be a serious safety issue because we have to respond to them like a real fire," said Dennis Jones, Regional Fire Chief with Ponoka County Regional Fire Services. "We have no way of knowing if there's a real emergency or if it's just a false alarm. That means firefighters and equipment have to be sent to a situation where they aren't needed, which makes them potentially unavailable for a true emergency if one were to happen at the same time as the false alarm," he explained.

The major causes of false alarm fire calls in Ponoka are due to cooking incidents, accidental activation of the alarm and improper maintenance. A total of 77 false alarm calls were responded to by fire crews in Ponoka last year.

"We want to see those numbers reduced, so we're asking for the help of local citizens to make that happen," said Ponoka Mayor Rick Bonnett. "Reducing the number of false alarms will help protect the safety and well-being of our citizens, which is why we're launching a public safety awareness campaign during Fire Safety Week to draw attention to the problem of false alarm fire calls," he said.

How Can You Prevent False Alarms?

False alarms can be easily prevented, said Regional Chief Jones. "It just takes a little extra time to give your smoke alarms the proper care and attention they need." False alarms can be prevented by following these simple steps.

- **Regular Testing –** Smoke alarms should be tested once a month. This helps prevent a false alarm triggered by a malfunctioning smoke alarm. It also protects the safety and well-being of your family by ensuring you have properly functioning equipment.

- **Change Batteries Regularly –** It is a good habit to replace smoke alarm batteries with fresh ones in the spring and fall when you set your clocks back or ahead by one hour for daylight savings. Faulty batteries can cause smoke alarms to malfunction. "And don't forget to test your smoke alarms every time you change the batteries, to make sure they still work," said Regional Chief Jones.

- **Regular Maintenance –** Remember to clean your smoke alarms regularly as dust, cobwebs and dirt particles can cause alarms to be accidentally activated. You should replace your smoke alarm if it is more than 10 years old. "And please do not paint or cover your smoke alarm, or do anything else that can hinder its ability to function properly," said Regional Chief Jones.

- **Proper Placement –** Ensure smoke alarms are installed and placed properly. They should be placed at least three meters (10 feet) from the oven to prevent steam or smoke caused by cooking from activating the alarm. New research also shows that it's best to have an interconnected smoke alarm in every bedroom on all levels of your home. Additionally, smoke alarms should not be placed in bathrooms or garages to avoid shower steam or dust, which can trigger false alarms.

- **Call Before Testing or Doing Maintenance –** It is important to make sure that you inform your alarm monitoring company before you clean or test your smoke alarms to prevent a false alarm from being triggered. You should also make sure that your monitoring company has your up-to-date contact information so they can notify you if your monitored smoke alarm system is activated.

- **Call Your Monitoring Company Immediately to Report a False Alarm –** If your alarm system has been triggered by accident, call your alarm monitoring company immediately to cancel the false alarm and prevent fire crews from being dispatched. Some monitoring companies will try calling you before dialling 911 to ensure the alarm is a real emergency. Be sure to answer their call right away.

"We all need to do our part to help prevent false alarms and to keep our families safe," said Regional Chief Jones. He notes that municipalities can levy fines to homes or businesses that experience repeat false alarms in an effort to reduce these types of incidents.

Public Awareness

"Our Fire Protection Services Bylaw does allow the Town to issue fines for repeat false alarms. However, right now our focus is on raising awareness around the issue of false alarms and educating our citizens on how they can prevent them at their home or business, rather than issuing fines," said Mayor Bonnett. "We're hoping public awareness will solve the problem," he said.

For more information about fire safety and smoke alarms, please visit https://www.alberta.ca/fire-prevention-week.aspx#toc-3

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