

NEWS RELEASE

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City works to reduce fire and other safety risks at homeless camp

Nanaimo Fire Rescue issued a new provincial fire safety order today at the homeless encampment at 1 Port Drive. At the same time, City lawyers updated the courts on the increased fire and public safety risks on the site.

Fire risks from propane tanks, empty and full gasoline cans, tarps, wood, upholstered furniture and mattresses, trash and other flammable materials in and around tents have increased since August 13, 2018 when the BC Supreme Court denied the City of Nanaimo the enforcement order it requested.

The number of tents has increased, inhibiting access and egress from the site.

On Wednesday night, camp occupants responded to the growth in their numbers by moving fences surrounding the property, pushing onto Seaspans right of way. City Bylaw officers and RCMP were able to get cooperation from campers in restoring the perimeter on Thursday morning.

"The growing number of tents on the site, continuing problems with getting residents there to comply with our Fire Safety Order, and the presence of propane tanks and other fuels is a fire and public safety hazard for people on the site and for residents, businesses and industrial operations nearby," said Karen Fry, Fire Chief and interim Director of Public Safety for City of Nanaimo, "We have already seen one serious injury at the site from an explosion in a tent. We will continue to raise awareness of public safety risks within the camp and the broader community."

Mayor Bill McKay has reached out to Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Selina Robinson to alert her to the growth and changes on the site, asking for immediate assistance.

"The City will be asking the province to recognize that we are facing a serious public safety crisis and to provide us with the help we need, and we need that help now," said, Mayor McKay.

City staff are working to develop strategies with provincial government agencies to provide assistance to camp residents and to find immediate and long-term solutions so the camp can be closed. To stay up to with actions the City has taken to date on the encampment visit: www.nanaimo.ca/goto/Port-Drive-Camp

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