

Noise and Emergency Vehicle Sirens

Date: November 19, 2019

To: City Council

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide additional information to City Council on the topic of sirens used by emergency vehicles. Provincial legislation identifies the types of vehicles that can operate sirens and when they must be used.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

On October 28, 2019 the Board of Health adopted a report from the Medical Officer of Health on a Noise Action Plan.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.HL10.5>

On April 16, 2019, City Council adopted EC3.6 Noise By-law Review - Proposed Amendments to Chapter 591, Noise.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EC3.6>

COMMENTS

The Board of Health recently discussed the Noise Action Plan and considered information from a resident about the use of sirens by fire department vehicles. Assessment of discretionary siren use such as through a community risk assessment was also raised as part of the discussion. The Medical Officer of Health has consulted

with Toronto Fire Services (TFS) and first responders. This report provides additional information on the topic of siren use for consideration by City Council for its review of item HL 10.5.

The Highway Traffic Act (HTA), 1990 outlines transportation-related legislation in Ontario, and includes requirements related to siren use. The HTA specifies that sirens can only be used by emergency vehicles such as ambulances, fire or police department vehicles, or public utility emergency vehicles. The HTA requires siren use by emergency vehicles when responding to an emergency and proceeding through traffic and intersections. Requirements for the use of sirens apply to police vehicles, fire department vehicles - "while proceeding to a fire or responding to, but not while returning from, a fire alarm or other emergency call", and ambulances - "while responding to an emergency call or being used to transport a patient or injured person in an emergency situation". Sirens function to alert other motorists and pedestrians that emergency services are responding to an emergency situation, thereby support the safety of members of the public and first responders.

Toronto Police Services, Toronto Fire Services and Toronto Paramedic Service review new technologies and incorporate these into their fleet procurements as appropriate. These technologies must be balanced with vehicle standards, for example, such as those that outline decibel levels. For TFS, the design of apparatus, including sirens, is a requirement of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Under the Ontario *Ambulance Act*, Toronto Paramedic Services' emergency vehicles must also meet mandated minimum decibel levels for sirens

In Toronto, Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS) is responsible for the enforcement of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 591, Noise (Noise Bylaw). The Noise Bylaw provides specific standards for noise within the city of Toronto, including decibel limits and time restrictions. Emergency sirens are exempt from the Noise Bylaw, in keeping with the provincial Highway Traffic Act.

Further information regarding legislation and procedures of emergency vehicle siren use, in addition to the application of community risk assessments should be directed to Toronto Fire Services, Toronto Police Services or Toronto Paramedic Services.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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