

**Tracey Cook**  
 Deputy City Manager

**Toronto Fire Services**  
 4330 Dufferin Street]  
 Toronto, ON M3H 5R9

 Tel: (416) 338-9053  
 Fax: (416) 338-9060  
 Jim.Jessop@toronto.ca  
 www.toronto.ca

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## 2021 OPERATING BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE

### Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) Absences and Costs in Toronto Fire Services (TFS)

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#### Issue/Background:

- This briefing note responds to a request from Budget Committee for the Fire Chief and General Manager, Fire Services to prepare a briefing note on:
  1. Changes over the past five years in budget allocations for Workplace Safety and Insurance Board related absences and comparing those budget allocations to actual absences under WSIB.
  2. Staffing policy and budget changes that have been made in response to increasing numbers of Workplace Safety and Insurance Board absences.
- Toronto Fire Services has experienced an increase in WSIB claims since 2015 following the addition of new cancers and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to presumptive legislation, with recent experience impacted by provisions that have typically been retroactive.
- As of July 1, 2018, there are now 17 cancers that are applicable under WSIB presumptive legislation for firefighters. In addition to coverage for identified cancers, presumptive legislation also exists for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (as of April 2016).
- As unplanned absences occur, including WSIB-approved illness and injury, the levels of frontline emergency service are impacted as on-duty staffing levels fall.
- Maintaining on-duty staffing levels has been significantly challenged as a result of rapidly increasing numbers of staff unable to be in the workplace as a result of workplace illness or injury approved by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB).
- Toronto Fire continues to achieve response times with existing staffing (Table 1), while accommodating absences as follows :

<b>Table 1: Response Times</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020 *</b>
Call Processing: 1.04	95%	96%	95%	96%	95%
Turnout: 1.20	50%	50%	46%	51%	50%
Travel Time: 4:00	75%	76%	76%	72%	70%
Total Response Time: 6:24	83%	83%	82%	81%	79%
Effective Firefighting Force: 10:24	90%	90%	88%	87%	88%

\* 2020 Actual based on Q3 projections

**Key Points:**

WSIB Absences

- A detailed analysis confirms that TFS continues to experience increases in the average daily number of operations firefighters out of the workplace as a result of WSIB-approved illness and injury since 2015:
  - 2015 – 23 firefighters out of the workplace
  - 2016 – 34 firefighters out of the workplace
  - 2017 – 46 firefighters out of the workplace
  - 2018 – 60 firefighters out of the workplace
  - 2019 – 69 firefighters out of the workplace
  - 2020 – 74 firefighters out of the workplace
  
- The number of WSIB-approved hours of off-duty time, for TFS operations staff, has increased by 320% since 2015, or 216% in the last five years. The number is expected to continue to increase in the future, as the impact of occupational stress injuries, traumatic mental stress and PTSD incidents continue to increase.

WSIB Costs

- Costs related to WSIB claims spike in years that new cancers and PTSD were added to the presumptive legislation, as these provisions are typically retroactive, and also have different requirements for the number of years of active duty to qualify. It takes time to understand where the claims will level off.
  
- In 2017, the WSIB budget increased by \$3.2 million (84.7%) to approximately \$7.0 million in an effort to reflect the actual experience. The WSIB provision remained flat until 2020 when it increased again by a further \$2.3 million (33.3%) to \$9.3 million.
  
- In 2020, the preliminary year-end actual WSIB expenditures were \$10.6 million or \$1.7 million (19.1%) higher than the 2019 experience (Table 2). No request was submitted to increase the budget again in 2021 as WSIB increases are beginning to flatten as no new provisions have been added to the legislation. TFS will continue to monitor actual experience and request funding if needed in future budget cycles.

<b>Table 2: Workers' Safety Insurance Board (WSIB)</b>					
<b>(\$000)</b>					
<b>Year</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020*</b>
WSIB Budget	3,778	6,978	6,978	6,978	9,300
Actual Expense*	12,335	13,012	12,082	8,915	10,600
Expense greater than budget	<b>8,547</b>	<b>6,435</b>	<b>3,106</b>	<b>1,936</b>	<b>1,300</b>

\* 2020 Actual Expense based on Q3 projections

### Impact of WSIB Absences

- In 2020, the average number of crews out of service on a daily basis was 10, up from 8 in 2019 and 7 in 2018. In 2020, 3-4 of the daily trucks out of service were attributed to WSIB absences (based on averages).

### Strategies to Limit WSIB Impact

- Actions were taken as part of the 2020 budget process to mitigate the impacts of staff who are out of the workplace on WSIB-approved leave.
  - The 2020 approved Operating Budget included \$2.256 million in funding to enable TFS to pilot an approach that would utilize existing staffing complement to backfill front-line vacancies.
  - Through negotiations, TFS management were unable to come to an agreement with the Association, and as such the pilot program did not proceed and associated funding is no longer included in the 2021 Operating Budget.
- Funding for the 2020 pilot program was available in part due to delays in the construction of the Downsview station, as the budget outlook had originally anticipated a Downsview fire station crew (21 FTEs), which was no longer needed in the 2020 budget.
  - The current schedule for the Downsview Fire Station expects construction to conclude, and the station to be operational, at the end of 2021.
  - The 2021 Operating Budget reflects the reallocation of an existing crew for the opening of the Downsview Station. TFS will monitor response metrics for reporting in the next budget cycle to determine if/when new positions may need to be added to the complement.
- In 2015, forty (40) additional temporary positions were approved in the Operations Division to allow TFS to recruit new staff to replace retiring staff before those staff were out of the workplace. At the time, TFS managed to "catch up" on hiring, ensuring fully staff vehicles and a minimum number of trucks out of service daily. While these positions still exist, due to COVID, TFS has not been able to keep up with this additional hiring.
- Given COVID restrictions over most of 2020 and into 2021, TFS has had difficulty with recruiting processes and the training of probationary firefighters to fill existing vacancies. As a result, trucks out of service daily are currently higher than typically experienced.
  - There is currently a class of 48 recruits in training at the Toronto Fire Academy, expected to graduate by April 2021.
  - As of January 20, 2021, a new recruitment posting has been released, and processes are in place to start an additional recruit class mid-2021. All efforts are being made to replace current vacancies as quickly as possible while overcoming barriers presented by COVID-19 at each stage in the recruitment process, including consideration of concurrent recruit classes.
- TFS has implemented a number of supports to prevent occupational stress injuries including PTSD. This includes R2MR resiliency training (Road to Mental Readiness), policy changes to minimize secondary exposures, facilitated quarterly support group

meetings to create social connection and minimize isolation for employees with an Occupational Stress Injury and the addition of a part time Employee Assistance Counselor/Psychotherapist to the TFS support team in conjunction with Corporate Employee Health and Rehabilitation.

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**Prepared by:** Debbie Higgins, Deputy Fire Chief, (416) 338-9055,  
Debbie.Higgins@toronto.ca

**Further information:** Jim Jessop, Acting Fire Chief, (416) 338-9053,  
Jim.Jessop@toronto.ca

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