

Update on COVID-19

Chief Pegg, Fire Chief & General Manager of Emergency Management

May 15, 2020 at 3:45 p.m.

Members' Lounge, Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W

Good afternoon.

You may recall that on May 1st, Toronto Fire Services responded to a fatal fire in an encampment in the Mount Pleasant Road and Bloor Street East area of Toronto. And first and foremost, on behalf of all of us, I extend our sincere condolences to the family and friends and all those impacted by that tragic loss.

The risks that are encountered in encampments are very real. It is all too common for us to encounter numerous propane cylinders, gas cans, and other major hazards, while performing search and rescue and firefighting operations in encampments.

We have responded to 55 encampment fires this year alone and 212 since 2017. What is even more concerning is that we have responded to 15 of these fires in the last two weeks.

For context, following the most recent fatal encampment fire on Glenn Road, which occurred on May 1st, we took the necessary steps to clear this site of hazards. It took our staff a week and half to clear the hazards and debris that were present on this site alone.

On Wednesday of this week, we cleared the hazards from another encampment located under the Gardiner Expressway, where we removed more than 100 litres of gasoline and 17 propane tanks from that site.

This is just one example of the extraordinary hazards that are often present in the encampments.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the City of Toronto has monitored encampment sites and has continued to do all that we can to remove these types of major fire and life safety hazards.

Our streets to Homes outreach teams continue to be out, checking on people living outside and offering services, including viable and safe housing options.

We have multi-disciplinary encampment assessment teams in place that include staff from Fire, Police and Paramedic Services, Municipal Licensing, and Shelter, Support &

Housing. These teams are continuing to visit encampment sites to proactively identify and address life safety issues that may exist.

Further, our Streets to Homes outreach teams provide important information on preventing the spread of COVID-19, and make referrals to shelter, healthcare, and other social services as required.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, 97 people have been moved into spaces that provide three meals per day, access to washrooms, showers and clean drinking water, and that also include 24/7 staff support, security, and case management services that are focussed on long-term housing and other needs, including harm reduction supports.

When someone is moved from an encampment to an indoor space, the City provides transport for both them and their belongings. Anything that is left behind at the site is then cleaned up and disposed of by City staff.

Over the last 10 years, more than 6,000 people have been successfully housed through our Streets to Homes program.

This morning, we learned that some people are encouraging people to move into vacated encampments. Further, we learned that protests were organized which resulted in our staff being directly interfered with, in the course of their duties, this morning.

These staff were working on Lake Shore Boulevard, at both Bay Street and Spadina Avenue, actively working to relocate residents living outdoors, and in clearing the safety hazards that were present.

In collaboration with our enforcement partners, we will be addressing these concerns, directly and formally with those responsible for these actions.

Anyone who facilitates, suggests, or encourages anyone to remain in, let alone to move into, an encampment is simply placing lives at risk.

To recap, there have been 55 encampments this year and 15 in the last two weeks. On May 1st, one of our residents died in an encampment fire.

The City of Toronto has moved quickly to create effective solutions and options for our residents who find themselves without shelter. We are working hard to remove the risks and dangers that encampments pose.

Our teams are working non-stop to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in Toronto and are taking extensive action to provide the shelter and housing that our most vulnerable residents require.

We are working around the clock to both manage the risks posed by COVID-19 and to ensure that we are able to implement the changes that are being announced regularly by the Provincial Government.

Unfortunately, encountering situations like those we experienced this morning, impact our ability to respond to COVID-19 and delay our city in being able to safely and efficiently return to normal.

I appreciate everyone's assistance and cooperation as we work together to beat COVID-19.

In closing, as we head into the long weekend, please do all you can to stop the spread of COVID-19 by following public health recommendations. As always, I remind everyone that toronto.ca/covid19 is the best source for up-to-date information on COVID-19 in Toronto.

Thank you.