

Update on COVID-19

Chief Pegg, Fire Chief & General Manager of Emergency Management

December 7, 2020 at 2 p.m.

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

Good afternoon.

The enforcement of public health-related Regulations has been a top priority for the City of Toronto since the outset of COVID-19.

Our coordinated COVID-19 enforcement team has been working tirelessly for the past nine months, enforcing the Regulations relating to COVID-19.

This includes proactive inspections, responding to complaints, educating the public and when necessary, issuing tickets and laying charges against those businesses and individuals found to be in violation of the law.

The City has taken formal enforcement action 1,693 times to date, in response to COVID-19.

This weekend, our enforcement officers continued to monitor compliance with the Reopening Ontario Act.

228 bars and restaurants were inspected this weekend, resulting in a 99.5% compliance rate.

Only 1 was found to be non-compliant, with action being taken by the investigating officers.

We also received 73 complaints related to non-essential businesses.

In response to these complaints, and following inspection by our enforcement teams, 3 charges were laid in response to violations of the Reopening Ontario Act.

This included a number of different types of non-essential businesses including giftware and furniture stores.

We received 98 complaints relating to gatherings on private property, over the course of the weekend.

3 charges were laid by Toronto Police, under the Reopening Ontario Act, as a result of the investigation of these complaints.

It is important to note that this is roughly half as many complaints as we received last weekend, which is deserving of our collective acknowledgment and thanks.

We did not experience any significant issues in our Toronto parks over the course of the weekend.

I want to thank the vast majority of residents and businesses who continue to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in our City.

Your actions are helping to save lives, prevent the transmission of COVID-19, and prevent our healthcare system from becoming overwhelmed.

Unfortunately, we responded to 9 fires in encampments over the course of the weekend.

This included responding to a fire involving a foam-based pod in HTO park on Queen's Quay.

These pods are constructed from expanded polystyrene insulation, which is a highly flammable product, not intended to be used in this manner.

When these polystyrene-based pods are exposed to heat, hot surfaces, sparks, open flame or other ignition sources, they represent an immediate threat to life for those occupying them.

Polystyrene burns rapidly and vigorously and when it burns, it produces very thick, black, toxic smoke.

Firefighters require specialized protective equipment to fight fires involving these products, as a result of the hazards that exist when polystyrene burns.

I want to be very clear. These pods are not a suitable nor safe means of shelter and are not a suitable alternative to safe, indoor housing.

The City has helped more than 1,100 people move inside from encampments, since the pandemic began, and we are continuing this important work every day.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our Shelter, Support & Housing and our Parks, Forestry and Recreation teams for their continuing work to support our most vulnerable residents.

Our teams are working hard to educate Toronto residents about the significant danger that results from occupying one of these makeshift shelters and pods.

Where we observe evidence of an immediate threat to life, such as proximity to a potential ignition source, we will take the necessary action to eliminate the risk without delay.

Fortunately, there were no injuries as a result of the fires over the weekend.

Tragically though, one person has already died in an encampment fire, in May of this year.

In total, 7 people have died in encampment fires in Toronto since 2010.

In 2020, we have responded to 226 encampment fires, which is a 228% increase over the same period last year.

As always, I remind everyone that toronto.ca/COVID-19 is the best source for reliable and timely information on COVID-19 in Toronto.

Thank you.