

March 12, 2009

Province takes action to increase fire safety

Edmonton... The Alberta government is taking significant action on its commitment to help keep Albertans safer from high-intensity residential fires.

Improvements to the province's building and fire codes will increase security and fire safety on construction sites and help minimize the severity, frequency and damage caused by fire. The new provincial codes are being implemented two years ahead of the expected national code changes.

"We are taking a leadership role by introducing new codes that will improve safety and reduce the effects of high-intensity residential fires," said Ray Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs. "When a fire occurs, the changes will buy time – for individuals to get out of their homes, and for firefighters to respond."

The changes to the Alberta Building Code will help ensure that new homes are built in a way that prevents or slows down the spread of fire by:

- adding new fire resistance requirements for homes built close together.
 - New homes with flammable siding, such as vinyl, built close to the property lines will be required to have fire resistant material, such as gypsum board, installed under the siding.
 - New homes built close together will have new restrictions on the size and amount of windows allowed facing their neighbours.
- improving sprinkler or exterior siding requirements for walk-up apartment buildings.
- adding new fire resistance requirements for the interior of attached garages.

The changes to the Alberta Fire Code will help prevent fires from starting on construction sites and spreading to nearby homes and buildings by:

- requiring buildings adjacent to construction sites to be protected from potential fires.
- requiring enhanced fire safety plans on construction sites to help control fire hazards in and around buildings.
- clarifying where fire extinguishers should be located on construction sites.
- improving safety measures for construction processes involving heat sources, such as roofing equipment, in order to prevent these activities from starting fires.
- improving access to construction sites for fire departments, by ensuring:
 - fire trucks have adequate access to the site to be effective;
 - firefighters can access all parts of a building under construction; and,
 - that the appropriate water supply systems are in place to accommodate fire fighting.

Alberta's new fire codes are in effect immediately, and the new building codes will come into effect on May 3. To find out more information, visit municipalaffairs.alberta.ca.

– 30 –

Backgrounder attached

Media inquiries may be directed to:

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To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

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Response to recommendations from the *High-Intensity Residential Fires Working Group*

Last May, the Alberta government accepted 18 recommendations from the High-Intensity Residential Fires Working Group, created by the province to examine ways to reduce the incidence and impact of major residential fires.

The government committed to take action to:

- increase public education to give Albertans information to prevent fires;
- improve the fire code to help prevent arson and to promote workplace safety;
- update the building code to enhance fire safety requirements for homes built closely together.

Large-scale residential fires, such as the 2007 fire in Edmonton's MacEwan neighbourhood, involve fire spreading to adjacent buildings. The working group was established to review the facts surrounding high-intensity residential fires and make recommendations to reduce their occurrence and severity. The working group included representatives from the Alberta government; municipal emergency services, including the Edmonton and Calgary fire departments; the Safety Codes Council; and municipal safety codes officers.

Following the working group's report, several affected organizations were asked to analyze the recommendations and provide information on the effects of the proposed changes. These groups included representatives from the fire service, municipal governments, home builders, land developers, and safety codes administrators.

To inform the construction industry about the new codes and how they will help reduce the effects of high-intensity residential fires, Municipal Affairs is running advertisements in newspapers and radio commercials across the province, directing Albertans to its website to find out more about the new codes.

The working group's full report is available on the Municipal Affairs website at www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca.

- 30 -

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