



# City of Richmond

## Report to Committee

**To:** Community Safety Committee

**Date:** April 7, 2010

**From:** John McGowan  
Fire Chief

**File:** 09-5140-01/2010-Vol  
01

**Re:** Fire-Rescue's Activities with Richmond School District No. 38

### Staff Recommendation

That the staff report dated April 7, 2010 from the Deputy Chief – Administration of Richmond Fire-Rescue, entitled "Fire-Rescue's Activities with Richmond School District No. 38", be received for information; and,

That this report be forwarded to the Richmond School Board for their information.

John McGowan  
Fire Chief, Richmond Fire-Rescue

FOR ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT USE ONLY		
CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER 		
REVIEWED BY TAG	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
REVIEWED BY CAO	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

## **Staff Report**

### **Origin**

The loss of property and lives through fire has devastating impacts on a community. While emergency response is a necessary capability for any fire department, prevention and education are considered the most efficient and effective means of protecting and preserving life and property as they prevent harm in advance.

Richmond School District No. 38 has experienced both major and minor fires that have disrupted the provision of education and impacted administration, students and their families' lives. The financial and emotional impact of major fires on the school community is a reality in Richmond.

Recognizing the impacts, Richmond Fire-Rescue and Richmond School District No. 38 have built an excellent working relationship, and have co-operated to develop and implement fire and life safety education to a variety of age groups in Richmond. While this report is focused on Richmond School District No. 38, it should be noted that Fire-Rescue also offers similar programs to eight private and religious schools to ensure no one is left behind in this important work.

More recently Richmond Fire-Rescue has realized the opportunity for outreach through our schools to women and visible minorities as potential new recruits for our department. We participate in various career fairs and have recently piloted a co-ed Enhanced Physical Education Program.

### **Findings of Fact**

Richmond Fire-Rescue has worked co-operatively with Richmond School District No. 38 and developed an ongoing relationship with educators, maintenance and administrative staff, and connecting with students to proactively limit both the potential for fire, and the potential damage from fire. Public schools are also an excellent means of delivering training and information in fire and life safety to families in our ethnically diverse community as children are encouraged to communicate the information directly with their parents and family members. The programs and initiatives can be distinguished or grouped into the general categories of Fire Prevention and Public Education.

### **Fire Prevention**

#### Inspections

Richmond Fire-Rescue and Richmond School District No. 38 benefit from an excellent working relationship and a long history of co-operation in this area. In the past, schools were inspected by Fire-Rescue once annually at the beginning of each school year. Unfortunately, this approach allowed a level of inefficiency to occur which saw the level of safety deteriorate over the year. The new approach, initiated by the Fire Prevention Office and strongly supported by Richmond



School District No. 38, is one of stewardship by empowering the school staff with the tools and training to take greater responsibility for their own safety.

While schools are still inspected annually by Fire-Rescue, weekly and monthly inspections, and the maintenance and testing of fire and life safety systems is now done by Richmond School District No. 38 maintenance staff who have been trained as technicians and qualified to perform these functions without relying on outside contractors. Any problems or concerns identified are brought forward to Richmond School District No. 38 Maintenance Management who contact the Fire Prevention Office to arrange for a joint inspection and follow-up. This provides the schools with superior service and assures Fire-Rescue that the chances of a significant fire in a school is minimized.

### Planning

Richmond School District No. 38, through their fire safety planning contractor, have developed a fire safety and maintenance plan in co-operation with the Fire Prevention Office for every school. These plans detail the responsibilities of staff for the routine maintenance of systems, and for emergency duties should an incident occur. This program is being further enhanced through a new pilot program whereby the overall Fire Safety Plan is copied, sectioned, and assigned to the individual staff members responsible for that portion of the plan. This will make the plan more useable and will likely be expanded to other jurisdictions and industries.

### Fireworks

The Fireworks Bylaw, the six sponsored Community Fireworks Displays, and the Halloween Operations Planning team are examples of other proactive initiatives that have reduced the danger and incidence of fires in schools. The history of Halloween was that the sense of mischief surrounding the day, the availability of fireworks, and the easy targeting of schools combined to cause four significant school fires in the last year that retail fireworks were available (2004). Richmond School District No. 38 members are represented on the Halloween Operations Team and take extensive measures to improve fire safety in and around schools at Halloween. It is always difficult to measure what does not happen, but since the bylaw was implemented, and with the planning and actions of staff and volunteers, there has been only one attempted school arson on Halloween. That fire was quickly discovered and extinguished with minimal damage to the school.

### **Public Education and Community Outreach**

#### Gilmore School Read-A-Thon

The Read-a-thon is the largest fundraising event held at James Gilmore Elementary School, and encourages kids to develop a lifelong interest in reading, while also raising funds for needed items such as library books, computers and other supplies. Each year six to eight Richmond Fire-Rescue employees participate in the annual Read-a-thon by reading to the students and speaking about the importance of reading.

### Take Our Kids to Work Program

Take Our Kids to Work is a national program that allows Grade 9 students to come to work with their parents. The purpose of the program is for career development to expose the students to the opportunities in the work world.

Fire-Rescue employees and their children participate in this annual program. The students spend a day with the fire department touring the fire halls; observe and participate in various Fire-Rescue skill demonstrations; and see what a typical day in the life of a fire fighter is like.

### School Fire Drills

Annual School fire drills are conducted for all schools in School District No. 38 during Fire Prevention Week in early October. The drills are attended and witnessed by Fire Prevention members and/or Fire Suppression crews, and any problems or concerns are identified and communicated to school administrators for follow-up. Fire safety educational materials are distributed to each child in the Elementary Schools that include 'Plan to Get Out Alive' and 'Stop, Drop, and Roll' activity and learning guides. The Office of the Fire Commissioner determines a new 'theme' for Fire Prevention Week each year and this shapes some of the content for Fire Prevention Week along with the local community's needs.

### Teen and Adult Education

While the principal focus group for fire safety education is elementary school children from Kindergarten to Grade 7, Richmond Fire-Rescue has also developed programs for School District No. 38 that raise awareness of fire and life safety for high school children and ESL Adult Learning.

High School programs include 'Career Day' presentations where Fire-Rescue Fire Prevention Officers give interested students an opportunity to ask questions about the benefits, and see a pathway for themselves to a career in the Fire Service. These presentations include materials that reinforce the fire and life safety lessons learned in elementary school.

A more recent program is the co-ed Enhanced Physical Education Program. This is a community outreach program currently offered to Grade 11 and 12 students at Steveston London Secondary and is designed to give these older teens the opportunity of a hands-on experience of the skills, tools and physical tasks required to become a fire fighter, in a safe and supportive environment. The goal is to raise awareness of the possibility of a career in the Fire Service to women and the various cultures in our community. Participants to date have been very enthusiastic and receive a certificate to be included in their graduation portfolio.

Richmond School District No. 38 offers ESL training within their Adult Education Programs. Recognizing that these students may have different cultural experiences of the Fire Service and of fire safety practices, Fire-Rescue has developed a fire and life safety presentation, and Fire Hall orientation tour to familiarize these adult students with the emergency services available in our community.

## **Conclusion**

Richmond School District and Richmond Fire-Rescue are industry leaders in many of the programs and initiatives outlined above. The level of co-operation and collaboration in many of the Prevention and Education programs and the success of those programs is unprecedented. Fire-Rescue continues to seek new ways to increase the effectiveness of our work with School District No. 38 through new initiatives such as using our local fire statistics to develop and target new public education programs.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "K Howell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "K" being a stylized capital letter.

Kim Howell  
Deputy Chief – Administration  
(604-303-2762)

KH:kh