

New fire training comes to Wollaston

By Jim Eadie

Wollaston Township is off and running with a brand new training module for its fire department volunteers. They're also sharing their efforts with Limerick and Faraday Townships.

Wollaston interim fire chief Jason Post says the first training session of 20 firefighters was a success. It's tailored to help volunteer firefighters develop skills specific to what's expected of them in rural fire services. It's one of many steps Wollaston Township is taking as it rebuilds its fire services.

Conflict between the fire service's volunteers and members of council resulted in resignations in 2016 and 2017. Wollaston council looked to consultant Dan Koroscil to address how to move forward with rebuilding the fire department.

Koroscil retired after 40 years in the fire service including 25 years as services adviser with the Ontario Office of the Fire Marshal. He's worked with council over the past year to finish a complete review and update of almost non-existent bylaws governing the fire service.

Council was told at the time that it was important to establish exactly what the core services expected to be delivered by the fire service were and then train the members to that standard. They were told to clearly tell the public what is and is not expected of the fire service.

For example, if the fire service is expected to do medical assist calls, a training standard for CPR and first aid should be set, and met. Currently, firefighters are only asked to do exterior fire suppression and not entry into burning buildings. This is the case with most small rural fire services.

The problem that has always existed for small departments is training at a fire college for volunteers is very hard to schedule. It's also expensive and provides training far above what volunteers are expected to do in a rural service. This was the source of some of the conflict in Wollaston in 2016.

Post said the need for a volunteer and rural specific training program became apparent.

"We can train people to do exactly what it is they are being asked to do here at home," said Post. "We don't have one fire hydrant in any of our municipalities for example, we don't need that training."

The Wollaston program is based on the training model for firefighters in the British Columbia, where skills are attained at the basic level in smaller steps and there is certification on the successful completion of each step.

The Wollaston model establishes the knowledge and skills required for volunteers. Once they fulfill them, they're certified within the department.

Koroscil also noted in his report to council that skills and knowledge should be reviewed and documented regularly for each firefighter, to keep the standards high within the department.

"Let's be an efficient, effective and professional fire service," said Koroscil. "Professionalism is an attitude. A well run, well oiled machine is attractive ... the professionalism factor goes up ... and recruiting becomes easier."

In addition to the new training, Wollaston has an enlarged fire prevention program, utilizing volunteers who do not wish to be firefighters.

Post noted prevention is one of the main pillars of any successful fire department.

"As much as we would like to, we will not be rushing to fires to save people," he said. "Like most small departments, we are not trained or equipped to enter burning buildings and do rescue work... We won't get there in time anyway..."

He stressed the importance of commitment to fire safety in the home or business as that's what really save lives. It's law in the state that businesses must have an evacuation diagram that allows both employees and visitors to escape the fire with no serious injuries. Failure to do so will result in fines.

visitorsRegular inspections of fire equipment is important as well to make sure everything is working. Installing software, from a company like Inspect Point, that can help monitor systems such as fire alarms and sprinkler systems is a great way of doing this.

"It is very important to have smoke detectors, and CO2 detectors in your home, and then know exactly what you are going to do if one goes off. People need to know that ... there is a false sense of security."

Wollaston education/prevention officers are happy to come to help answer questions, conduct an inspection, and talk about escape plans and can be contacted by calling the Wollaston Township office.

"I am very happy where we are at," said Post. "We have great morale, and new recruits. I am very proud of that."