



Fire and Emergency Services

Prepared for: Council-in-Committee

Report: FES-01-2026

Meeting Date: April 10, 2024

1. Title

2025 Year End Report

2. Recommendations

That: Council receives the 2025 Year-End Report for the Fort Erie Fire Department, including Emergency Management, for information purposes only.

3. Relation to Council's Corporate Strategic Plan

Not applicable

4. List of Stakeholders

- 1) Mayor and Council
- 2) Town of Fort Erie Residents and Property Owners
- 3) Town of Fort Erie Fire Department and its members

5. Purpose of Report

This report outlines the work accomplished by the Fort Erie Fire Department in 2025, including its emergency management efforts.

6. Analysis

Administration

2025 was another busy year for the Fort Erie Fire Department. We continued to prioritize training consistency, the development of Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG), and policy changes. In 2025, we placed a strong emphasis on suppression activities, with a deliberate focus on reducing firefighter exposure to carcinogenic contaminants prevalent in the fire service. This cultural shift prioritized health and safety without compromising operational effectiveness.

In 2025, we conducted a comprehensive review and update of our Respiratory Protection Policy. Education sessions were delivered to all firefighters to reinforce policy requirements, increase awareness of occupational exposures that can lead to job-related illnesses, and provide practical strategies to reduce personal risk.

A significant operational enhancement in 2025 was the addition of a second tactical radio channel. This channel is designated for longer-duration and more technically complex incidents, allowing the primary channel to remain available for lower-acuity calls and dispatch operations. Dispatch monitors both channels and provides town-wide coverage, improving operational coordination and firefighter safety compared to our previous single-channel model.

The introduction of the new channel required updates to our Standard Operating Guidelines regarding radio channel selection and incident communications. These changes were implemented through in-person training sessions delivered to all staff prior to the channel going live, ensuring a smooth and safe transition.

In late winter 2025, Kevin Hesse took a temporary role with the City of Thorold. This left the Fire Prevention Division short-staffed until early summer. Darryl Seuss was hired as our temporary Fire Inspector. This position focuses mainly on business licensing and short-term rental inspections. Darryl is a Volunteer Firefighter and a municipal water operator.

Mandatory certification under O. Reg. 343/22, introduced in 2022, requires staff, volunteer firefighters, and volunteer public educators to obtain certification in the relevant core competencies by July 1, 2026, excluding technical rescue. The Fire Department is ready to meet these requirements for the upcoming deadline. Additionally, technical rescue certifications are required by July 1, 2028, and we continue to provide training for our staff to meet this timeline.

Suppression Attendance

2025 saw fluctuations in the number of volunteer staff responding to incidents; overall, the department's average remained similar to the previous year.

Station	2024 Attendance	2025 Attendance
2	31%	
3	36%	
4	32%	
5	33%	
Average	33%	

Response Data

Suppression volunteers, comprising approximately 87 active responders, attended a cumulative total of 1,040 emergency response events, totalling 11,672 response hours.

(See table below)

Station	2024 Calls	2025 Calls
2	287	279
3	321	293
4	334	326
5	133	142
Totals	1075	1040

Incident Type	Percentage (%)
Medicals	27
Alarm Activation	20
Burning Complaint	8
MVC	11
Fire – Car / House	3
Aid to other agencies	2
Ice/Water Rescue	1
All other calls	28
Totals	100

Year	Calls	Variance (%)
2025	1040	(3.4)
2024	1075	9.5
2023	1027	(8.7)
2022	1171	9.7
2021	1058	2.9

Training

The recruitment of replacement firefighters was necessary in 2024/2025, resulting in 10 graduates. The need for additional firefighters at Stations 2, 3, and 5 prompted us to initiate a recruitment drive for 2025/2026. This campaign attracted 50 applicants, led to 22 interviews, and resulted in 19 conditional job offers. These new firefighters started their training in January 2026.

Peer Team

The peer team provides emotional and mental health support and guidance to all fire staff and their families. They help in various forms, including text messages, phone calls, in-person one-on-one sessions, and group debriefings following traumatic incidents. All interactions with the peer team are strictly confidential.

In 2025, the peer team engaged with 44 individuals through 54 in-person contacts, 39 phone calls, and 73 text messages. They also conducted 3 critical incident debriefings. Their efforts are significantly impacting the well-being of fire staff and their families.

Fire Prevention

The Fire Prevention Division has been establishing a 'compliance philosophy' focused on Bylaw 135-2019, which oversees the Fire Prevention & Public Education Policy. Staff divided the municipality into zones and devised an inspection schedule aligned with the bylaw's criteria for all occupancy types. Basic details for each property are entered into Emergency Reporting and will be updated after inspections. A risk score will also be assigned to support community risk assessment.

A third-party review in 2025 issued 13 recommendations, including staff training, Division leadership, SOG development, and cultural rebuilding. Staff training was well underway by the end of the year, and SOG review and development are ongoing. Changes within the division to

improve culture were being implemented by the end of 2025. The development of supervisory oversight is in its early stages in 2026.

Public Education

Public education efforts in 2025 were supported through strong collaboration with the Niagara District Catholic School Board and Niagara District School Board, resulting in 935 elementary students receiving in-class fire safety presentations, reaching approximately one-third of Fort Erie's estimated 3,000 elementary-aged children, all of whom were provided with take-home safety information. Additional outreach included visits to private daycares and station tours for approximately 150 children. Engagement with older youth was also a priority, with GFESS and FEIA connecting with over 200 local high school students.

Seasonal programming, including March Break and summer Junior Firefighter Camps, as well as partnerships with the Boys and Girls Club and local gymnastics camps, saw participation from 170 children. The department maintained a strong presence at major community events such as Bridgeburg Easter, Dog Days in Stevensville, PRIDE, Stevensville Springfest, Ridge fest, the Niagara Region Water Festival, the Stevensville Conservation Fall Festival, Jarvis

Street Touch-a-Truck for Halloween, Santa at the Racetrack, and a large-scale fire safety presentation at Ridgeway by the Lake.

Educational outreach tables were also featured at events, including the Crystal Beach Co-op Housing event, Stevensville Market, Niagara College, Fort Erie Railway Museum, LaFrance Association Open House, and the Stevensville Fire Station 100th Anniversary.

Niagara CampFIRE was another success, providing 32 young women from across Niagara the opportunity to experience firefighting over three days.

The SAFE program remained active, conducting 23 deployments and visiting 156 homes to support smoke and carbon monoxide alarm compliance, which currently stands at approximately 35%. High-rise fire safety education was delivered at two local residential buildings, and additional community engagement included fire extinguisher training at the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre, as well as multiple station tours, school visits, and participation in their Community Day. Following a recent fire, an After the Fire canvass was completed in the Buffalo Road and Crescent Park areas, reaching 75 homes. Public education staff also continued their support of Victim Services Niagara by participating in monthly bingo.

Emergency Management

In 2025, Emergency Management continued to strengthen municipal preparedness through ongoing planning, training, and inter-agency coordination. A key initiative was the development and delivery of a comprehensive emergency exercise to test the resilience of municipal systems and their ability to maintain essential services during significant disruption. The exercise involved activation of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and brought together internal departments to test decision-making and continuity of operations.

Lessons learned from this exercise have informed improvements to response plans, reinforced system redundancies, and enhanced overall readiness to manage complex, multi-faceted emergencies.

Training efforts also continued in Incident Management System (IMS) and Basic Emergency Management (BEM), further enhancing staff capacity and readiness.

As part of our obligations, municipalities must submit a compliance report to Emergency Management Ontario (EMO). This report includes details such as meeting dates and minutes, training records, exercises, Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA), and the name of the Community Emergency Management Coordinator (CEMC). We have received our compliance approval from EMO for our electronic submission.

7. Financial, Staffing and Accessibility (AODA) Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report, as it is provided for information purposes only.

Staffing levels remained consistent with approved complement requirements, with temporary adjustments made to support Fire Prevention operations during a short-term vacancy.

The initiatives outlined in this report align with the principles of the AODA. Public education programs, emergency response services, and community engagement efforts continue to be delivered in a manner that supports accessibility and inclusivity for all residents.

8. Policies Affecting Proposal

This report is provided for information purposes only and is intended to provide information to Council on the activities of the Fire Department in 2025, with the proposed plans for 2026.

9. Comments from Departments, Community and Corporate Partners

The Fire Department continues to collaborate with internal departments and external partners to support service delivery and community safety. Key partnerships in 2025 included coordination with municipal departments, local school boards, community organizations, and emergency service agencies.

10. Alternatives

Not applicable.

11. Communicating Results

This report will be made available to the public through the Town's website.

12. Conclusion

The 2025 initiatives are designed to ensure ongoing service delivery to residents, taxpayers, and visitors.

Other fire services see the Fort Erie Fire Department as a progressive, professional, and well-trained team. Efforts will focus on advancing this vision, aiming to deliver the best possible service to the community while fostering unity and a sense of belonging among our volunteers and staff.

13. Report Approval

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Approved by:
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14. Attachments

N/A