
CITY OF KELOWNA FIRE DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 17, 2005
File No.: 7370-01
To: RON BORN, CITY MANAGER
From: FIRE CHIEF
Subject: OPEN BURNING

Over the past few years, the public has become increasingly concerned with the number of fires allowed within the city and more importantly with air quality. The following data will give you an idea as to why this is happening. Also included are some options.

Permits Issued

January 1 – April 15	2001	= 98
	2002	= 112
	2003	= 157
	2004	= 360
January 1 – March 15	2005	= 333

Permits issued in 2005 are only to March 15th. We would expect this to be over 400 by April 15th. Of the 333 permits issued to date, 145 are for the South Slopes area (McCulloch Road South).

Good Burning Days

January 1, 2005 to March 15, 2005. 16 of 74 or 22% of the available days. There was no burning allowed from February 15 – February 28. On March 1st, many people who had been waiting for close to two weeks, lit their fires. Obviously this created a lot of smoke on that day causing our legitimate complaint and general air quality concern complaints to go way up. This is one of the problems associated with venting and air quality. Another problem is that there is often a change in condition as the day progresses. Fires are allowed based on the morning condition and are not extinguished when conditions change for the worse.

Complaints

From January 1st to March 15th we responded to 48 burning complaints. Of the 48, 37 were valid. In addition we received numerous general complaints regarding air quality but mostly on days when burning was allowed.

I would say that we receive the majority of our complaints from the south slopes area. The number of permits issued for that area would be one reason. I believe that the general terrain may be another.

Air Curtain or Trench Burning

To date we have issued permits for 6 trench burners. Four or five requests were denied because they did not meet our approval. Of the six that have been used, I would consider them very successful. Complaints regarding trench burners have been minimal. In my opinion, this is one of the best alternative options to open burning, especially for larger parcels of land and should be continued.

Costs associated to trench burning are:

Very basic – cement block – limited life	\$16,000 - \$20,000
Manufactured box type (similar to the unit viewed by Council)	\$150,000 +
Excavator and operator	\$150/hour

I couldn't get a rental price, since no rentals seem to be available. Local contractors have told me that they would be prepared to purchase these units and rent them out, if they know that local bylaws would continue to allow for their use.

Chipping

Chipping has been successfully used on farms and larger parcels of land. My only concern with chipping on non-irrigated acreages is disposal of the material, as we have had fires caused by inappropriate storage of the material. Chipping that is not subsidized by government is as follows:

\$350 - \$450 per hour (includes machine and manpower) or

\$10 - \$11 per cubic meter.

These costs are for the larger chipper used on large acreages and farms.

For smaller cleanup applications, chippers can be rented locally for:

\$160/day – chips up to 6"

\$300/day – chips up to 12"

Options For Discussion

- Strict enforcement of the burning by-law by adopting a zero tolerance approach. Anyone found in contravention of the burning by-law is given a fine according to Municipal Ticketing or in some cases restricted from obtaining future permits.
- Have Kelowna Fire Department or other city official check out every burn prior to lighting. This would ensure that the material was dry, the piles were the right size and that only a certain number of piles would be burned at any given time.
e.g. Council was concerned with the Arthon property fire. The permit issued was for 200 acres but with no restriction on numbers of piles. At one point they had up to 40 piles burning. They were well supervised and within the bounds of the permit.
- Restrict open burning to "working farms". All other property owners will be required to either use an approved trench burner or chipper.

Conclusion

Our department has always been concerned with preventing fires, especially in the interface areas. We have been of the opinion that it is better to clean up and burn off the hazard when safe to do so, rather than leave the hazard in place until the dry summer weather. Although the public is also concerned with fire safety issues, they are in my opinion (according to calls and complaints) equally concerned with air quality.

GERRY ZIMMERMANN

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CC: Ron Mattiussi, Director, Planning & Corporate Services

