
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report EMS-02-2022 Fire Fighter Mandatory Certification

For Consideration by Council in Committee on June 21, 2022



OBJECTIVE:

To provide background, budget implications, and possible staffing implications in regards to Fire Fighter Certification, that will become mandatory for all Ontario Fire Departments by 2026, and technical rescue specialties mandatory by 2028. To ensure Haldimand County Fire Department is training and responding to the level of service approved by Council, with the amendment of the ENR By-law, which Establishes and Regulates a Fire Department for a Municipality.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report EMS-02-2022 Fire Fighter Mandatory Certification be received;
2. AND THAT staff be directed to update By-law 1002/09, as amended, which Establishes and Regulates a Fire Department for Haldimand County, to reflect the new certification requirements and for future enactment;
3. AND THAT staff be directed to ensure the training required to achieve and maintain certification will meet the standards set out by the province to the level of service the fire department provides;
4. AND THAT staff be directed to present a budget for certification training to comply with legislative requirements as part of consideration of the annual tax operating budgets in 2023 to 2026.

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Approved: Craig Manley, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

By 2026, the Ministry of the Solicitor General has mandated via legislation that all fire departments in the Province of Ontario meet certification levels for their firefighters depending on the service they provide to their municipality. This legislation has been passed to ensure firefighters are certified in the level of service they provide to the municipality and to ensure safety of both firefighters and the public. Haldimand County Fire Department is considered a full service fire department due to the service level that has been approved previously by Council and is contained in our Establishes and Regulates a Fire Department (ENR) By-Law. Haldimand County's current training program meets and often exceeds the minimal standards for training, however, not all firefighters are currently certified to the level required. Within this report, staff will define what requirements are needed to certify firefighters who are not currently certified and for those recruits moving forward. This report will provide background information into the certification process, requirements of certification to meet National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards, costs associated with training current firefighters to the identified standards, and staffing issues that could arise due to the mandatory certification. This report will also define ongoing costs required to meet the needs of certification moving forward.

BACKGROUND:

Ontario is one of the only provinces that previously did not make firefighter certification mandatory. Ontario does have certification available in many disciplines of firefighting, i.e. interior and exterior firefighting, called the “Ontario Seal”, but these are only recognized in the province of Ontario, and not internationally. The Ontario Seal is similar to NFPA standards but is not recognized by the Fire Marshal of Ontario, other than in the Grandfathering process or Legacy process, discussed within the report. Most fire departments in the province of Ontario, including Haldimand County, train their firefighters to the NFPA Standard Firefighter I & Firefighter II. This standard is known as NFPA 1001, Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications. Some fire departments, including Haldimand County, also ensure that firefighters are trained to the level of Hazmat Operations, known as NFPA 1072 Hazardous Materials Awareness & Operations.

The Province of Ontario has been evaluating the need to certify firefighters for the past 9 – 10 years. The Province has discussed this with Fire Chiefs and other municipal stakeholders multiple times, however, it has never come to fruition. This gave Fire Departments the chance to prepare—as allowed by the Province—by grandfathering firefighters who had 5 or more years of experience, or previous certification through courses that would qualify a firefighter for the grandfathering status.

In late 2021, it was communicated by the Fire Marshal through the Ministry of the Solicitor General that Mandatory Certification for Ontario’s Firefighters is being implemented and is to be completed by 2026. Multiple consultation meetings were held in order for fire chiefs and municipalities, including The Association of Municipalities of Ontario, (AMO), to provide feedback and offer recommendations. Most fire chiefs support mandatory certification, however due to the potential costs to the municipality, timelines, volunteer firefighters vs. career and retention issues that may arise, specific recommendations and clarifications were required. The fire chiefs submitted a recommendation paper through the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC) with input from all fire chiefs in the Province of Ontario recommending greater timelines, clarification of process, and requesting grandfathering be re-opened. Specific items were addressed, however, timelines remain the same and grandfathering is not permitted, except for a legacy clause which only affects apparatus operations for Haldimand County’s Fire Department. This is due to the type of service we provide currently to the residents and visitors of the municipality, which was originally approved in 2009, then amended in 2017 in the ENR By-law which establishes and regulates a fire department.

Haldimand County Fire Department currently trains to the standard required by the NFPA to maintain certification. Having said that, not all Haldimand County Firefighters are certified to NFPA 1001 Firefighter I & II, and NFPA 1072 Hazardous Material Awareness & Operations. Haldimand has approximately 51 firefighters who will require this certification in order to be able to remain on the fire department after the mandatory date of 2026. Also, with this certification comes the need to train Officers known as Captains and District Chiefs (DC), who act as supervisors, to NFPA Standards in order to be qualified to execute this role within the station and on the fire ground. To qualify as a Captain or DC, an officer must be certified in NFPA 1041 Fire Instructor 1 & NFPA 1021 Fire Officer 1.

ANALYSIS:

Certification

Currently, Haldimand County firefighter complement totals 227 and includes 125 firefighters who have been previously grandfathered to the level of NFPA 1001, Firefighter I and II, as well as NFPA 1072 Hazmat Awareness & Operations. There are additionally 31 firefighters in our department that are fully certified, and 20 firefighters are in the process of completing full certification leaving approximately 51 still requiring full certification.

Costs associated with certifying the 51 firefighters will be \$92,000 for a third party contractor to provide the hands on training and assist in certification and another \$85,000 in firefighter wages at \$20.77 per hour (2022 wage), for a total of \$176,878 split over 3 years, at an approximate cost of \$59,000 each year. Training cannot be completed in house, as current staff do not have the time or resources available to train, as a training facility is required for live fire burns, specific practical firefighting evolutions and Hazmat Training. This is a onetime cost over 3 years to get all firefighters certified to the level required to provide the current service level under the legislation made mandatory by the province. Once this training is complete, the cost of certifying firefighters will only be required for recruits, which is a cost the fire department presently budgets for. Having said that, moving forward, Haldimand County Fire Department will be giving preference to those recruits who are already certified, during the recruitment process. If a firefighter is hired and not certified, Haldimand County has 2 years to certify the firefighter. It is important to know that these costs are not part of Haldimand County Fire Departments normal costs budgeted each year for training. Haldimand County Fire Department does budget each year for fire training, however current training is to maintain current status for response criteria. The increase in cost for the next 3 years is to certify these firefighters, which is a cost to ensure firefighters pass the NFPA testing required for certification.

For technical rescue NFPA 1006, i.e. Water and Ice Rescue, Haldimand County has until 2028 to ensure compliance with the legislation. All firefighters who are part of our water rescue teams must be certified in NFPA 1006 Water and Ice Rescue to the level of Water and Ice Technicians by 2028. Currently, Haldimand Water Teams are training and certifying to this level. As more firefighters require certification due to the need for more technicians a cost will be required to train them to that level, and maintain the certification. This cost will be budgeted and presented to Council when the need arises.

Training

Haldimand County has trainers in house that are certified as instructors to be able to train our own staff. These instructors however, require re-certification every 3 years, which is already part of Haldimand County's current training budget. Haldimand County Fire Department currently has 52 Officers (11 District Chiefs and 41 Captains) responsible for maintaining operations out of the 11 strategically placed fire stations. As previously stated, to qualify as a supervisor, an officer must be certified in both NFPA 1041 Fire Instructor 1 and NFPA 1021 Fire Officer 1. Of the mentioned Officers, 26 are fully certified in NFPA 1041 Fire Instructor 1 and NFPA 1021 Fire Officer 1, and a further 10 are certified in NFPA 1021 alone. With that being said, this means that currently the total that will be required to be certified in each discipline are 26 Officers in NFPA 1041 and 16 Officers in NFPA 1021.

In order to facilitate this training and to ensure future firefighters who are promoted to supervisor levels (Officers) meet the standard, the County will be required to fund training for both the NFPA 1041 and the NFPA 1021 each year moving forward. The NFPA 1041 Fire Service Instructor Level 1 cost for the course is \$9,000 plus HST based on 10 firefighters per class. The course is 4 days in length and runs approximately 8 hours per day for cost of \$6,700 in wages. Therefore, the total cost for this course would be approximately \$15,700 annually. The Operational Budget would be required to be adjusted to accommodate these costs, as we currently do not budget for this training.

The NFPA 1021 Fire Service Officer Level 1 cost for the course is \$11,000 plus HST based on 15 firefighters per class. The course is 5 days and runs approximately 8 hours per day for a cost of \$12,500 in wages. Therefore, the total cost for this course would be approximately \$23,000 annually. The Operational Budget would be required to be adjusted to accommodate these costs.

Cost for Technical Rescue cannot be determined at this point due to the unavailability of the exact course content. Having said that, Haldimand currently trains its Water and Ice Teams to NFPA 1006 2017 Compliance. These costs currently are budgeted for, however any increase in cost will have to be adjusted into operating budgets in the future.

During the consulting phase, it was communicated multiple times to the province and the Fire Marshal that if mandatory certification was adopted by the Province of Ontario, then funding would be required, due to the increased costs municipalities would have to take on in order to meet the requirements of certification. At this time no funding has been communicated other than the costs for the testing which is minimal at best. Some municipalities have not planned for this certification and have communicated that they may have to decrease service levels in order to accommodate. Staff do not believe decreasing service levels is beneficial for Haldimand County, as residents and visitors have become accustomed to a level of service that benefits all. And so, this new requirement would represent a significant additional cost to the County, in particular for the years 2023 to 2026, where training budgets would need to be increased by at least \$98,200 annually.

Due to the amount of training required for those firefighters who are not currently certified, staff expect that some current firefighters will opt out of the training to be certified and therefore, will be required to resign as a firefighter by June 2026. We are hoping these numbers to be minimal, but it is important to know that each volunteer firefighter has a family, full-time work, and other responsibilities that currently make it difficult to meet training requirements that are in place. Most fire departments consist of volunteers, paid on call or part-time firefighters and have communicated the same issues, including increasing challenges in recruiting. Staff are working on a plan to be able to accommodate this training and still give firefighters the time off they deserve. Currently, staff are visiting every station in the department to communicate the mandatory certification and the importance of those that require certification to maintain their status on the fire department. Haldimand Fire Department is also in the process of adjusting their recruitment process with preference being given to those applicants who are certified.

Currently, Haldimand County Fire Department is having difficulties recruiting for our more rural stations. This is due to lack of interested applicants in the area, and the more busy lifestyles of today's society. Population in these areas is an obvious factor as well. Recruitment is done by the geographical area, meaning a firefighter has to live in the District of the Station they are applying for. Each District has a maximum drive distance of approximately 10 km from home to the station to ensure quick response. Due to lack of recruits, staff have adjusted recruitment policies to allow firefighters who live on the border of other districts to apply to those stations that are lacking recruits. Our urban centres, at this point, are not experiencing the same issues with low numbers of applicants, but overall, we are finding the lack of commitment and time available to the fire department is low, due to decreased availability of firefighters. Other priorities seem to be taking precedence over fire department demands, which is noticeable in some stations, with the lacking attendance of firefighters. Haldimand County Fire Department has internal mandatory attendance policies based on percentages that work to balance response and training demands, with professional and personal priorities. It is expected that this will prove to be more challenging with mandatory certification requirements, and the need to continue to train at our current level, as any decrease in training hours would negatively impact the ability to properly train for today's emergencies.

As part of the Haldimand County Fire Department's Fire Master Plan and Community Risk Assessment, (which is being completed this year by a 3rd Party Consultant) the needs of the fire department will be identified over the next 10+ years, including a detailed assessment of the needs and triggers (timeline) in terms of whether or not the County should move towards a Career Firefighters (i.e. those that work full-time for the fire department/have this as their main vocation) model of service delivery in part or in whole. While a Career Firefighters model could address some of the challenges around recruitment and training commitment, it would add large costs, due to wages, benefits and pension requirements. These factors will all be assessed as part of the Master Plan to chart the best plan forward for the County.

In advance of the Master Plan and its future considerations, staff are reviewing a number of different approaches to improve recruitment and retention. Included in this is examining the benefit of and costs

to moving firefighters from 'volunteer' to 'part-time employees'. Should this or other significant changes be proposed, they would be presented in a future report to Council.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

If Haldimand County continues to offer the current service level and decides not to certify its firefighters, this increases the County's legal risk exposure – in that the firefighters are not certified as required by legislation.

Also, if Haldimand County decides to decrease its service level, the fire department will not be providing the same service currently provided and therefore, puts the community at risk and also increases the County's legal risk exposure.

At this time, staff have been advised by our insurance broker that the underwriters do not see any impact on the municipality's insurance coverage of having or not having the certification. However, this is always subject to change in the future.

The table below summarizes the impact of these cost increases on future tax-supported operating budgets:

	2022 Tax-Supported Operating Budget	2023 Projected Budget (status quo)	Additional Costs – Changes to Provincial Regulations	Total Estimated 2023 Budget
Proposed Training	\$289,440	\$289,440	\$47,500	\$336,940
Proposed Certification	\$0	\$0	\$50,700	\$50,700
TOTAL	\$289,440	\$289,440	\$98,200	\$387,640

The 2022 Tax Supported Operating Budget includes \$289,440 for Volunteer Firefighter Training for the current standard of training. Additional expenditures related to this program would need to be included as a new initiative in the 2023 Tax Supported Operating Budget and will be ranked and evaluated during the budget process. Inclusion of this initiative would result in a levy increase unless offsetting levy reductions or funding sources are recommended as new initiatives to accommodate this program.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

Not applicable.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: No

By-law: Yes

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

ATTACHMENTS:

None.