



ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

Leading innovation and excellence in public and life safety

News release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 12, 2018

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Multiple fatal fires prompt plea from Ontario's fire service leaders, demanding action in every household

Ajax, ON – After a series of fatal fires in Ontario, chief fire officers and public educators across the province are pleading with their communities to put an end to further tragedies by following simple – and life-saving – fire prevention strategies at home.

A Jan. 8 fire in Oshawa claimed four people's lives, including two children. Upon investigation, the Ontario Fire Marshal's office determined the house had no working smoke alarms. This happened days after a fatal fire in Tottenham on Jan. 1, which killed one person and injured two others. Again, no working smoke alarms were found in the home. Another man died in a Belleville apartment fire on Jan. 7. And, two more people perished in an early morning fire in Brighton on Jan. 10; the presence of working smoke alarms is still being investigated for both incidents. All this occurred in Ontario only a week after a massive blaze in the Bronx – the deadliest New York City fire in more than 25 years, which resulted in the death of 12 people, four of whom were children.

"We've only just entered 2018, yet multiple Ontario communities have been rocked by fire fatalities. These are preventable tragedies. It's unacceptable to us as a fire service," said Chief Stephen Hernen, President, Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC). *"Fire fatalities are heartbreaking for everyone involved, from victims' families, to firefighters responding on scene. We, Ontario's fire service leaders, urge everyone to take the proper measures to prevent a fire at home. Only working smoke alarms can save lives."*

The Ontario Fire & Life Safety Educators (OFLSE), a committee of the O AFC, agrees. *"It's not enough to say 'four lives were lost in Oshawa,'"* remarks Ajax Fire and Emergency Service's Chief Fire Prevention Officer, Kevin Vaughan, who is also the OFLSE Chair.

Mr. Vaughan continues, *"People need to know that a fire killed 50-year-old Steven Macdonald. The same fire killed Lindsey Bonchek, a 36-year-old mother, and her nine-year-old daughter, Madeline. Lindsey's four-year-old son, Jackson, was pulled from home, but did not survive. Imagine, for a moment, someone telling you that your loved ones didn't survive. Imagine, for a moment, standing at the curb and knowing that your friends or family are still inside."*

Both the O AFC and OFLSE are calling on Ontarians to ensure they have working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms (CO) in their homes. Every family and household should create and practice a home fire escape plan, as well as a back-up escape route. O AFC and OFLSE emphasize there is no excuse for not having proper detection.

(more)



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Chief Hernen adds, “Every household must be vigilant about fire protection. The alarm industry has come up with multiple, handy products, such as 10-year sealed battery alarms, smoke/CO combination units and alarms with hush features. There are many home fire prevention solutions on the market, and all of them can save your life.”

Ontario’s fire service leaders remind residents that the law requires homeowners and landlords to install smoke alarms on every storey and outside all sleeping areas. The fire service recommends installing smoke alarms inside sleeping areas as well. CO alarms are mandatory in residences with fuel-burning appliances and/or an attached storage garage, with alarms required outside all sleeping areas.

Smoke and CO alarms expire, so ongoing maintenance is required. An expiry or manufacture date is printed on every alarm unit. Smoke alarms more than 10 years old, and CO alarms five to seven years old, must be replaced. All alarms should be tested monthly, with batteries replaced at least once a year.

For more information on fire prevention, contact your local fire department or visit the O AFC’s website at www.oafc.on.ca/public-safety.

About the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC):

The O AFC represents 449 municipal chief fire officers in Ontario, who are responsible for the management and delivery of fire, rescue and emergency response to the province’s 13 million residents. Our mission is to lead innovation and excellence in public and life safety by inspiring and influencing a safer Ontario.

About the Ontario Fire and Life Safety Educators (O FLSE):

The O FLSE is a committee of the O AFC whose goal is to reduce personal injury, loss of life, and loss of property due to fire. Through public education initiatives and key messaging, the O FLSE works to positively promote and influence behaviours that keep communities safe.