



ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

Leading innovation and excellence in public and life safety

News release

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Contact: Avori Cheyne
Communications Strategist
Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs
avori.cheyne@oafc.on.ca
905-426-9865 x228

New Highway 401 signs in Northumberland County improve emergency response times *Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs pilot project helps drivers more accurately identify location when calling to report emergency situations*

Cobourg, ON – More than 20 per cent of the calls fire departments across Northumberland County received in 2015 and 2016 regarding Highway 401 emergencies resulted in no emergency situation being found, often because inaccurate information was given to 9-1-1 operators. However, since new distance markers were installed every 0.5 kilometres along the County's Highway 401 corridor, no false calls have occurred. This means fire and emergency services are now being dispatched to the appropriate location – every time, helping to improve patient outcomes, while reducing unnecessary use of municipal resources.

The distance marker signs are part of a pilot project championed by the fire chiefs of Northumberland County, the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC) and the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) to improve highway safety and emergency response times. As an organization dedicated to improving public and life safety through the efforts of its members – chief fire officers in Ontario, the O AFC quickly identified the signs as a simple, cost-effective means to make a major public safety impact.

The distance markers, which were installed between Port Hope and Brighton in August 2017, are designed to help drivers more easily identify their location when calling to report an emergency, dangerous road condition, roadway debris or another traffic concern. The signs improve emergency response times, with first responders being able to more efficiently respond to calls by sending proper resources to proper locations. Improved response times are evidenced to improve patient outcomes.

The O AFC pursued this initiative after receiving feedback from its members operating fire departments in communities that are home to rural stretches of Highway 401. Fire chiefs across Ontario noted that time was consistently wasted turning large fire apparatus around while back-tracking to find correct accident locations. This often results in multiple, unnecessary responses from neighbouring fire departments. Duplicated responses quickly become taxing on municipal resources.

Back-tracking with fire trucks also puts firefighter and driver safety at risk when maneuvers are completed on busy, high-speed roadways, against the grain of traffic. These instances have dramatically decreased since implementing the distance markers, enabling firefighters and other first responders to more safely attend to an emergency scene, with minimal disruptions to oncoming traffic.

Due to the success of the pilot, additional signs will be implemented between Northumberland County and the Quebec border in 2018. The O AFC and MTO will also conduct a broad public awareness campaign to educate drivers on the purpose of the signs, with the goal of improving road safety for all Ontarians and first responders.

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Quotes:

“As an organization whose mission is to improve the safety of Ontarians, the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs is proud of our successes on this pilot project. It’s another example of the valuable, ongoing partnership between Ontario’s fire service leaders and the MTO. Our members identified a significant problem, and the MTO worked swiftly and collaboratively with us to develop and implement a solution. In the end, everyone benefited, and we have influenced a safer Ontario.”

— Fire Chief Stephen Hernen, President, O AFC

“The cooperation and collaboration between the O AFC, MTO and fire, police and paramedic services across Northumberland County on this project has been astounding. We quickly realized the distance markers would benefit us all, as well as travelers, and advocated as a group to get the signs made and installed. So far, the markers have helped emergency vehicles reach the scene sooner, improving safety for all road users, including first responders. We are pleased with the positive results and are proud to be leading this initiative in Ontario.”

— Deputy Fire Chief, Gene Thompson, Cobourg Fire Department

“New distance marker signs along Highway 401 between Port Hope and Brighton will help drivers easily identify their location when calling to report an emergency. Together with the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, fire, police and paramedic services we are improving highway safety and emergency response times.”

— Lou Rinaldi, MPP for Northumberland-Quinte West

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 Northumberland County:

Northumberland County is a thriving, south-eastern Ontario community strategically positioned along Highway 401 to access both Toronto and Kingston within a one to 1.5 hour drive. Northumberland County offers a range of living experiences from historic towns to scenic rolling rural areas to spectacular water settings on Rice Lake, the Trent River and Lake Ontario. The County of Northumberland is the upper tier level of municipal government that weaves together seven diverse, yet complementary municipalities, including the Township of Alnwick/Haldimand, Municipality of Brighton, Town of Cobourg, Township of Cramahe, Township of Hamilton, Municipality of Port Hope and the Municipality of Trent Hills.