



CITY OF HAMILTON
COMMUNITY AND EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
Hamilton Fire Department

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	August 12, 2015
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Occupational Health Exposure Program Service Provider (CES15027) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Randy Moss 905-546-2424 Ext. 3376 Rob Simonds 905-546-2424 Ext.3343
SUBMITTED BY:	Joe-Anne Priel General Manager Community & Emergency Services Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

That the contract with Occupational Health Care-A-Van Inc., the existing service provider of occupational health and exposure screening for the Hamilton Fire Department, be renewed for a seven (7) year period, commencing November 30, 2015.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 1997, Hamilton City Council committed to funding a twenty-five (25) year Occupational Health and Exposure Program (OHEP) for Hamilton firefighters. This program was a joint initiative between the City of Hamilton, the Hamilton Fire Department (HFD) and the Hamilton Professional Firefighters Association (HPFFA). Supporting documentation is attached as Appendix "A" to Report CES15027.

A unique arrangement between the McMaster University Occupational and Environmental Health Clinic and the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers – Hamilton clinic (OHCOW) allowed the McMaster University Occupational and Environmental Health Clinic to submit a joint proposal in both the 1998 and the 2001 "Request for Proposals" for the OHEP program. In both cases, the joint proposals were accepted as no other organization could provide the breadth and depth of services.

Occupational Health Care-A-Van was subsequently formed by the personnel that were formerly associated with the McMaster Occupational Health and Environmental Clinic. This Clinic was asked to find other facilities when McMaster Hospital increased the size of the children's wards. As a result, the staff members of Occupational Health Care-A-Van Inc. have been the sole providers of occupational health and exposure screening for the City of Hamilton OHEP program since its inception following the Plastimet fire in 1997.

**SUBJECT: Occupational Health Exposure Program Service Provider (CES15027)
(City Wide) - Page 2 of 7**

In order to provide a consistent and continuous level of service and have ready access to existing baseline health records, it would be in the Department's best interest that this program and its members continue their partnership with Occupational Health Care-A-Van Inc.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 6

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: This program is currently funded through an existing annual operating budget of approximately \$209,500.

Staffing: There are no staffing implications associated with Report CES15027.

Legal: There are no legal implications associated with Report CES15027.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On July 9, 1997, a polyvinylchloride plastics fire broke out on an industrial site in Hamilton's North End, releasing dioxin, benzenes, chlorobenzenes and other toxic chemicals into the air and water as it burned for four days. In the following weeks, a survey was conducted by the Hamilton Professional Firefighters Association (HPFFA) that showed 86% of all firefighters who were involved in Plastimet had reported some health effects, more than 45 firefighters lost time from work and 160 sought medical attention.

Following the Plastimet fire, the HPFFA, with assistance from a doctor of the International Association of Firefighters and the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers – Hamilton clinic (OHCOW), developed a proposal for a program of evaluation of the work-related health of its members.

In October 1997, Hamilton City Council approved the proposal for an Occupational Health and Exposure Program (OHEP). A steering committee was formed which included representatives of the HPFFA, the Hamilton Fire Department (HFD) and the City of Hamilton.

The McMaster University Occupational and Environmental Health Clinic in partnership with OHCOW were awarded a contract to provide the services for the OHEP program. Under that agreement OHCOW has the responsibility for the group analysis of the data collected by the McMaster Clinic (questionnaires, interviews, medical exams and lab tests).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

Procurement Policy # 11

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

In order to ensure adherence to corporate policies and identify the best approach to this process a Senior Procurement Specialist in Financial Services, Corporate Services Department was consulted. The Senior Procurement Specialist reviewed the report and confirmed that they were satisfied with it.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONAL FOR RECOMMENDATION

The City of Hamilton has long supported the Long-Term Medical Surveillance Program, which is detailed in the Agreement between the City of Hamilton, the HFD and the HPPFA dated December 9, 1997. At that time, Council demonstrated its commitment by agreeing to fund this twenty-five (25) year program.

The intent of the OHEP program was to integrate medical surveillance, risk assessment, clinical occupational health services, and disability management to improve the occupational health and safety of HFD personnel.

Occupational Health Care-A-Van created and administered this program that has seen the collection and analysis of medical and other data obtained from firefighters. The knowledge gained from this program is being applied to protect the health and well-being of the members of the HFD by increasing their awareness and understanding of occupational health issues. This program has also resulted in the early detection of exposure problems related to occupational illness and disease thus increasing the likelihood of more positive outcomes.

Occupational Health Care-A-Van staffs the program, contracts the laboratory technicians for the visits, and handles the file storage and database maintenance.

For the OHEP program, OHCOW provides the occupational health specialists (i.e. physicians, epidemiologist, nurses, and industrial hygienists) and develops framework for the group analysis (OHCOW is subcontracted by Occupational Health Care-A-Van to analyze the raw data provided by them). OHCOW developed the Pre-Sample, Medical and Exposure questionnaires as well as the personal exposure diaries that are provided to the participants.

These two groups have proven that they can work together to provide all the needs of the OHEP program. They have also proven their ability to successfully work with the private sector partners who provide the diverse clinical services for the program.

Both organizations have been flexible and adaptive to the needs of the HFD. They understand the unique challenges that can occur when working with an emergency service and are able to handle last minute changes at the Clinic. If required, they also have the ability to come to the stations when necessary in order to provide their services at different hours of the day without an increase in costs.

They have adhered to all of the program's needs in the most professional manner and have demonstrated their ability to continually work at the grass roots level to make this program a success.

The objective of the OHEP program is to monitor and detect any changes in a firefighter's health so that the appropriate action can be taken to safeguard their health and well-being. The program is designed to accomplish this by its commitment:

- a) To monitor the effects of exposure to biological, physical, and chemical agents to detect changes in an individual's health that may be related to harmful working conditions;
- b) To detect any patterns in the work force that might indicate underlying work related problems;
- c) To provide the worker with information about the individual's occupational hazards and current health;
- d) To make participants aware of the relevance of the prescribed clinical tests beforehand including the possible interpretations of "false positives" or "non-occupational positives";
- e) To address occupational exposure/health related stress;
- f) To provide information to the relevant parties (i.e. Joint Health and Safety Committee) to assist them in identifying and recognizing the conditions and exposures that the fire department personnel experience so that appropriate steps can be taken to prevent further exposure that may result in occupational disease and injury;
- g) Provision of a confidential process which gathers and uses medical information from the participants;
- h) To track the health of fire department personnel exposed by the Plastimet fire as well as all other fire department personnel;
- i) To generally carry out the objectives of the mission statement of the OHEP program; and,
- j) To endeavour to assist in the improvement of the health and safety of the fire service in general.

One of the many hazards that firefighters face routinely are toxic environments. Rapid changes in construction product development have added a myriad of poisons and toxic gases to today's structure fire. Management believes that staff and the Corporation are best served when HFD personnel receive the occupational benefits that most accurately reflect their work place.

The benefits of maintaining a relationship with Occupational Health Care-A-Van include the following:

- Occupational Health Care-A-Van staff have established and maintained 18 years of sensitive and confidential medical history for HFD participants thus developing a high degree of mutual trust between the providers and participants of the program.
- Occupational Health Care-A-Van's physician has fostered a consistent, personal and compassionate individual relationship with the participants.
- Occupational Health Care-A-Van operates using staff that are affiliated with the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc. (OHCOW), which is comprised of health professionals: nurses, hygienists, ergonomists and physicians that identify work-related illness and injuries, promote awareness of health and safety issues, and develop prevention strategies.
- Research and academic partnerships (such as the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board [WSIB]) may allow for the development and enhancement of the program and allow others to learn from OHEP initiatives.

Occupational Health Care-A-Van will continue to deliver the following medical components:

- Laboratory tests including blood analysis, glucose, cholesterol and urine testing;
- Pulmonary Function tests;
- Cardiovascular Assessment;
- Chest X-ray;
- Audiometric Screening;
- Individual Medical Exam;
- Patient / Physician Interview;
- Medical and Occupational History including workplace exposure records, vaccinations, and biological exposure incidents;
- Individual Review and Analysis;
- Group Analysis – Completed after the first four (4) elements;
- Medical Results: individual results, comparisons and trends; and,
- Cancer Registry.

The HFD is committed to helping its firefighters identify potential health conditions, recover their health, return to work and move forward with their lives with dignity. The HFD has established, over many years, a strong professional relationship with Occupational Health Care-A-Van and their Occupational Health Team of physicians, nurses and lab personnel. The HFD is recommending that this be permitted to continue to ensure the consistent, cost effective, and results-oriented service delivery that has occurred to date.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

An alternative for consideration is that the HFD develops a Request for Proposal (RFP), which may result in a different vendor being selected as the service provider.

It is felt that this process may erode the existing program quality as it would mean that a new working relationship with the participants of this program would have to be redeveloped. Changing vendors might well have a negative effect on the level of confidence the members of the HPFFA have in the program. It is important to note that the current OHEP program has been in place for many years and the physician-patient relationship that has been mutually fostered is one of the keys to the program's acceptance and success.

The timeliness of permitting this program to continue with the current vendor is crucial given the fact that the data collection is annually scheduled each year from September until the end of April. In past years, the HFD has submitted Procurement Policy # 11 documentation to extend the services with this vendor in order to keep this program running efficiently. Repeating this process, although recognized as being not ideal, was done to ensure that there were no interruptions in service delivery for our staff.

Financial Implications: This program has an existing operating budget, which has never been exceeded with the current vendor.

Budget increases may be sought that are commensurate with any increases of the inherent costs (physician [OMA driven] and lab fees) to deliver the program. Included as an additional driver in this potential increase is the high level of participation of current as well as retired members of the department, as the pool of participants increases so do the associated costs. The impetus for this increase would occur regardless of the vendor choice and, as such, should not negatively reflect on the current vendor.

Selecting a new vendor may have the potential for increased costs.

Staffing Implications: There are no staffing implications associated with this alternative.

Legal Implications: There are no legal implications associated with this alternative.

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2012 – 2015 STRATEGIC PLAN.

Strategic Priority #3

Leadership & Governance

WE work together to ensure we are a government that is respectful towards each other and that the community has confidence and trust in.

Strategic Objective

- 3.2 Build organizational capacity to ensure the City has a skilled workforce that is capable and enabled to deliver its business objectives.

- 3.3 Improve employee engagement.
- 3.4 Enhance opportunities for administrative and operational efficiencies.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A" to Report CES15027: Supporting documentation from December 1997