

Summerland steps up to support wildfire response

by Doug Holmes

Our thoughts are with all the people in neighbouring communities who have had to flee their homes in the wake of the wildfires.

Some structures have been lost but together we'll get through this trying period. Firefighters and other first responders have been working heroically to contain the fires, save lives and protect our communities. And thank you to the many other organizations and individuals who are doing their part to keep us all safe.

The District of Summerland has been working closely with regional Emergency Operations Centres (EOC) and BC Wildfire Service to help where we can.

A Summerland fire truck and crew was dispatched to support fire fighting efforts in West Kelowna and Kelowna. And with fire forcing the closure of Kelowna's landfill, some of their commercial and residential waste is temporarily being accepted at the Summerland landfill.

Summerland's Deputy Fire Chief has been posted at the South Okanagan EOC, our director of Emergency Support Services (ESS) has been assisting with the regional reception centre in Penticton, and Summerland RCMP officers have been helping out in Kelowna.

Many local businesses and residents have been opening their doors and making generous offers of support. It's helpful to direct offers to the ESS (emergency.rdos.bc.ca/ess) so they can be coordinated regionally.

The evacuation and shelter of domestic animals and livestock is being coordinated by the Animal Lifeline Emergency Response Team (ALERT), telephone: 250-809-7152.

Summerlanders are stepping up to help our neighbours – that's what we do in a crisis. Yet we must also be ready to respond to any emergency that may happen locally.

As of press time there had been no evacuation alerts or orders issued for Summerland and our own EOC has not been activated. However, the wildfire situation is volatile and can change at any time.

If a wildfire does directly threaten Summerland, the best information source is the municipality's emergency notification system, VoyentAlert! People can sign up through the District's website or from the iPhone or Android app store.

It's also a good idea to have a grab-and-go bag on hand and provisions to sustain yourself for at least 72 hours.

Meanwhile, poor air quality is affecting everyone. Forest fire smoke is a complex mixture of gases and particles that can irritate the respiratory system and cause inflammation. It's recommended that people remain indoors where possible, and with that in mind the District is providing special public swimming and skating times.

The public is also being asked to practice caution in natural areas (trails, parks, forests) to reduce the risk of starting new fires. The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen and its member municipalities (including Summerland), together with First Nations and RCMP, have issued a joint statement to raise

awareness that many wildfires are human-caused and accidents can happen even when precautions are taken.

Under the current extremely dry conditions, a small spark from an off-road motorized vehicle can quickly grow into a large wildfire, and it can't be stressed enough that a campfire ban remains in effect.

Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland

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