

Operating Guideline # 824

Termination of Incident Without Attending Site

December 11, 2019



PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Operating Guideline (OG) is to ensure a consistent approach to delivering fire protection services as defined by the Township of Muskoka Lakes “Establishing and Regulating” by-law for the fire department, specifically to clearly define those circumstances wherein an emergency response may be terminated without attending the site or scene of a reported incident.

ISSUE/RATIONALE:

In 2016, Council of the Township of Muskoka Lakes authorized the existence and structure of the Township of Muskoka Lakes Fire Department pursuant to the provisions of the Fire Protection and Protection Act by implementing (updating) a “Establishing and Regulating” by-law that sets out various provisions including the definition of what services the department will provide and under what circumstances. It is ultimately Township of Muskoka Lakes Council that has the authority to set or define the levels of service it offers to the community based on the local “needs and circumstances” of the community.

In Muskoka Lakes, emergency responses can be challenged by a variety of issues including geography and notably access to the incident site. There are literally hundreds of kilometers of “private” or “cottage” roads that are not built to typical municipal standards and many of these roads are not maintained during the winter months. Access down these roads therefore at certain times of the year can be problematic at best, and impassible under the “worst case” conditions. Similarly, there are hundreds of seasonal residences (cottages etc.) that have been constructed over the years which are accessible by water only. Delivering fire protection services to these properties is also challenging and at certain times of the year, impossible.

With these challenges in mind, and guided by the notion that firefighter safety is one of the departments foundational imperatives, the ability to “terminate” a response is an action that can only be undertaken in the most extreme circumstances, and only after very careful consideration of all the factors affecting an emergency response. This OG will serve to guide the decisions of those persons empowered to make such a decision and ensure that the department is providing the services within the parameters as established by Council.

GUIDELINE:

1. When members of the Muskoka Lakes Fire Department (MLFD) are dispatched to the report of any incident, members shall attend the incident location and conduct fire department related operations in accordance with all policies and guidelines in a safe and efficient manner, bringing the matter to a successful conclusion.

2. Fire Department apparatus and staff must make every effort to reach the location of all emergency incidents quickly, safely and without delay.

Operating Guideline # 824

Termination of Incident Without Attending Site

December 11, 2019



3. In circumstances where access to the location of an incident is obstructed or blocked or in cases where access to the property is impossible. In such a cases, the incident commander may be forced to consider reducing, varying or terminating the response.
4. In the case of an island response, the incident commander is authorized to engage the services of marina operators when necessary when our Fire Department marine units are not available. For responses on smaller lakes where these private marina's and transport services are not available, or where an incident site is accessible by water only, the incident commander may consider the enlistment of transportation aid from other means including O.P.P., mutual aid fire services and private individual(s) - but only after a thorough assessment of all relevant safety considerations.
5. The decision to terminate a response must be undertaken ONLY in extreme circumstances and after a thorough consideration of all other alternatives.
6. Where the termination of a response is considered, it may only be done so after all alternatives have been considered, all other possibilities of reaching the incident site have been exhausted including the availability of resources of other emergency services (i.e. – O.P.P.) and mutual aid assets; and the command duty officer (Fire Chief, Deputy Chief) has been conferred with and have agreed to the response termination.
7. The incident commander shall photographically document any obstruction or impediment to the response.
8. In the case of the response to an “unverified” alarm activation (i.e. – a fire alarm received from an alarm monitoring company who have advised that the owner is not available to attend), and where a response must be terminated, the officer-in-charge/incident commander shall ensure that Communications has notified the original caller of the circumstances. In all cases, the Fire Prevention Division will make a follow-up contact with the owner of the property as soon as is practical.
9. In all cases where a response has been terminated in accordance with this OG, the officer-in-charge of the response shall notify the fire chief in writing as soon as possible, outlining all of the circumstances of the response and the reasons for the response termination.

RESPONSIBILITY:

It is the responsibility of all staff to comply with the provisions of this Operating Guideline.

REFERENCES:

- Fire Protection and Prevention Act 1997, as may be amended
- Township of Muskoka Lakes By-Law 2016-125 (“Fire Department Establishing and Regulating By-law”)