
SUMA Position Statement

Fire departments are an essential part of the provincial emergency response system, providing a variety of services, including attendance and extractions at MVCs on provincial highways. While SGI provides some compensation for these calls, it is often less (and sometimes much less) than the department's actual cost of attending an MVC.

SUMA is calling on the provincial government, through SGI, to:

- reconsider productive and non-productive call statuses;
- provide hourly compensation rates that reflect actual costs for municipal fire departments to attend MVCs; and
- reimburse for consumable items, such as fire-retardant foam.

Lastly, we ask that the government develop a funding mechanism to reimburse fire departments for their attendance at STARS landings, for which municipalities currently receive no funding.

Fire departments, and by extension municipalities, do not make money from MVC calls. Even if the recommended changes to call classification, call rates, and consumable reimbursement are put into place, MVC calls will not make money for municipalities. We are only asking for fair compensation for services, which will allow fire departments in our province to continue providing much-needed services.

Key Messages

- Fire departments are not legally or legislatively responsible for responding to MVCs outside of their municipality; they do so because they are committed to public safety.
- SGI's application of productive and non-productive call rates is inconsistent and often unfair. Non-productive call rates should be limited to calls where responders are sent home having performed no services of any kind, including traffic control.
- There has not been a meaningful rate review since the program transitioned to SGI in 2009, and the current rates do not reflect the cost reality of providing MVC services, which requires specialized equipment and training. Actual costs vary from \$1,000 to \$1,200 per hour, far above the current \$852 and \$511 productive and non-productive call rates.
- Once reasonable rates are established, increases should be applied yearly, based on inflation.
- Fire departments receive no reimbursement for consumable materials, such as foam, and must pay out of pocket.
- Urban municipalities struggle to adequately fund fire services, and should be able to rely on the provincial government to pay for their public safety interests on provincial highways.

Current Status

- SUMA, SARM, the Saskatchewan Association of Fire Chiefs, and the Saskatchewan Volunteer Firefighters' Association submitted a joint recommendation to SGI in November 2014.

- All four groups are prepared to work with SGI and the provincial government to determine fair compensation rates, and necessary changes to call classifications and adjustment practices.

Background

- Fire departments may submit a request for compensation to SGI after attending an MVC. The request is given to an insurance adjuster, who determines the classification of the call, and what compensation SGI should pay out.
- Adjuster decisions are not always consistent, and may be unfair. Calls are sometimes deemed non-productive if extraction is not required, and productive calls may be downgraded to non-productive rates once the actual extraction is complete. Hourly rates may also be adjusted or pro-rated with no explanation. Fire departments are left with little recourse outside of the court system, spending money which further reduces resources fire departments need to do their jobs.
- Much of the specialized equipment for MVC attendance, such as the Jaws of Life, was funded under the federal/provincial Joint Emergency Preparedness Program, which was dissolved in 2012-13. Municipalities now shoulder the entire burden of purchasing this equipment.
- Fire departments are also required to attend STARS landings, to help control traffic and clear the landing site. They currently receive no compensation for these efforts.

Strategic Context

Urban municipalities fund the majority of fire department services in Saskatchewan. As a result, a lack of adequate compensation for fire departments directly affects municipal budgets, already stretched considerably to fund infrastructure and other services essential to quality of life, public safety and health.

Attendance at MVCs costs some municipalities tens of thousands of dollars each year, for which they receive only a fraction in compensation. It is essential that the province recognize this inequity and work to rectify it.

Conclusion

SUMA members deserve fair and adequate compensation for the services their fire departments provide at MVCs. SUMA will continue to working with our partners and SGI to determine improved call classification and compensation rates for MVC attendance.

Contacts

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