

DELEGATION REQUEST

Names of persons speaking: Chris Bowen, Tomi Wittwer, Aaron Struch

Organization you are representing: Pioneer Fireplace, Comox Fireplace and Patio

Primary purpose of the organization: Concerned hearth retailers in the region

Number of members: 3

Mailing address:

419 North Terminal Avenue
Nanaimo, BC V9S 4J8

Contact name: Chris Bowen

Subject matter: We would like to present our concerns and possible ramifications in regards to proposed partial wood stove bans throughout the region. We would like the opportunity to present options that may assist in everybody's desire for clean air.

Specific request of the regional district, if any (i.e. letter of support, funding): We would like the region to consider specific recommendations we present while deciding on which direction to take in regards to clean air/ wood stoves.

Requested meeting date: August 13, 2019

Audio-visual equipment needed: We would like to present a power point presentation.

Good Evening,

Thank you for allowing us the time to present our perspective on the issue of air quality in the Comox Valley. My name is Chris Bowen and I am the general manager of Pioneer Fireplace and this is Tomi Witwer the owner of Comox fireplace and patio. We are speaking to you today on behalf several local businesses that include hearth retailers, chimney sweeps, wett certified inspectors and fire wood suppliers. We are also presenting with the full support of our national trade association, the HPBAC.

The Issue:

I would first like to express our concern for and willingness to address the Comox valley air shed issues, particularly the extremely poor air quality that occurs here during inversion events, especially in the winter months. We also recognize the negative impacts that these events can and do have on members of the public who have existing health issues. We also recognize that these events will disproportionately impact the elderly and young children. As members of the community we all share these concerns.

The Hearth industry has made tremendous advancements towards cleaning up wood burning appliances over the course of the last twenty five years. Prior to 1994, woodstoves and open fireplaces would release into the atmosphere anywhere from 60 to 100 grams of particulate matter per hour. (display). The most recent iteration of the EPA minimum standards that is being adopted here in British Columbia requires that all new stoves will have to produce no more than 2 grams of particulate matter per hour. (display). This represents a tremendous investment in terms of both time and money by the hearth industry in order to affect such revolutionary change, in a relatively short period of time. To give you some real world perspective on this. If I burn my high efficiency woodstove for twelve hours a day and my neighbor across the street burns his for 3 hours every evening, I would have to burn my stove for 12.5 days to produce the same amount of particulate matter that my neighbor would produce in just one evening.

From a consumer perspective, one of the most striking advantages that our customers experience by using a new higher efficiency wood burning stove or insert is that they significantly reduce the amount of wood or fuel that is required to adequately heat their homes. This is particularly important to lower income families who rely on wood heating as the only truly affordable way to heat their homes. During the heating season one of the most consistent reasons we as retailers hear as motivation for consumers to install a wood heating system is the often crippling cost of using other heat sources, particularly electric. An average sized home can be heated using wood for around \$750.00-\$1000.00 per year. For many people that is 1-2 months of heating with electric. Some people may be able to afford \$800.00 or \$1000.00 electric bills, they may not like to pay it, but they can afford it. There are, however, a great many people in our communities that quite literally can't afford these exorbitant costs. And find themselves in a situation wherein very difficult choices may have to be made. We often hear that people find themselves in a position where a choice has to be made between keeping themselves warm and eating. These are not speculative hypotheticals, we deal with people like this every day. I would also ask you to consider that the purchase and installation costs of wood stoves and their required components is significantly less than other heating appliances such as heat pumps or gas furnaces.

Another serious issue that is worth addressing is the ever present threat of power failures to people all across Vancouver island and surrounding gulf islands. A stark example of this occurred in December of 2018 when a severe wind storm hit Vancouver island causing wide spread power outages. A total of 756,000 people were effected. The most disastrous element of this weather event was the duration that many people found themselves without power. In some cases people were without power for more than a week. We heard more than one story of families coming together in the home of a neighbour who had a wood stove. This allowed them to stay warm and cook food through those difficult times. Again these are not speculative hypotheticals, these were the real experiences of

far too many people. Depriving people of this type of energy security could prove to be catastrophic in future severe weather events.

When it comes to clean air and the part wood stoves play in that, Clean burning high efficiency wood stoves are not the primary issue. The primary culprit is old inefficient, often non-certified appliances, and the challenge is how to get rid of them. An excellent tool we have utilized in the past and continue to use is the wood stove change out program. Although the programs have had mixed results as you go from region to region in terms of air quality, it is easy to make the argument that some regions have been very successful in improving local air quality while others have not. What is more difficult is to determine why this is the case. There are many possible reasons that could effect the success of exchange programs such as marketing, income levels, industry involvement etc. As the manager of a business that operates in five separate regional districts I can tell you that the one size fits all approach to these wood stove exchange programs likely lends itself greatly to the success and failure the regions have experienced. I'd like to use the municipality of Courtenay as an example of how a more targeted and re-structured exchange program could be implemented. In the 2017 university of Victoria study in which air quality was monitored for a period of time, several maps were produced showing which areas of the city had the worst air quality. Without knowing these areas particularly well, I accurately speculated that these were older areas filled with homes using old inefficient wood burning appliances. By using these maps, the wood stove exchange program with the help of industry could target these areas to have these older appliances removed and replaced with newer more efficient wood burning appliances.

Targeted wood stove change programs have occurred in other locations and resulted in tremendous success. The most notable success, occurred in Libby, Montana. Libby is small town nestled in a rocky mountain valley. The inhabitants of Libby used wood heat as their primary heat source and as consequence suffered from very poor air quality due to cool weather inversions, very similar to what is

experienced in the Comox valley. An added complication in Libby was that the citizens were predominantly low income. The adverse health effects experienced by the community at large became unacceptable prompting governments and industry to combine forces and solve the problem. Over the course of the next number of years every stove in Libby was changed out and the air quality improved dramatically. Although this is an extreme example of a targeted exchange program, and one not likely to be repeated, it does demonstrate that a collaborative approach to air quality improvement combined with a specifically tailored change out program can result in significant improvement in a troubled community. We believe that the CVRD decision to remove wood stoves from the list of appliances eligible for a rebate disproportionately disadvantages lower income people and people living in remote communities, without having the intended outcome of reducing the installation of wood burning appliances.

To summarize, the wood industry on Vancouver Island has a large impact on the economy, employing more than a thousand people in high paying jobs ranging from fire wood supply to manufacturing. The broader hearth industry has made tremendous investment in terms of time and money towards the improvement of wood burning heating systems, meeting and exceeding extremely strict standards set by the EPA. Wood heating has been a long standing and central feature of the Vancouver island heating landscape. Much more so than perhaps in any other region in North America. The use of wood stoves and the degree to which they are relied upon is due to many factors including cost and security. Neither of which can be understated. The importance of wood stove exchange programs operating within their intended parameters is key to this discussion as they have most certainly proven to be successful in many other jurisdictions. I think it is fair to say that industry has to play a much larger role in getting the old inefficient stoves out of circulation and replacing them with newer more efficient options. We haven't done as good a job at this as we probably could have.

As a major stakeholder on Vancouver Island and more specifically the Comox valley we would like to emphasize our desire and willingness to be involved in a collaborative effort to improve the air quality in the Comox valley, we believe this should include round table discussions in which our perspective and expertise could be mightily informative and help us along to achieving the desired outcome of clean air in the Comox valley.