

DATE: April 4, 2019

FILE: 5280-02

TO: Chair and Directors
Committee of the Whole

FROM: Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

Supported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

R. Dyson

RE: Addressing Air Quality in the Comox Valley

Purpose

To provide an update on the activities associated with addressing air quality in the Comox Valley, which is a Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) Board strategic priority.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

None

Executive Summary

At the CVRD Board's strategic planning session in December 2018 and at its January 2019 meeting, air quality was named as a corporate priority with the following specific direction provided:

"...investigate formation of a Regional Airshed Advisory Group, to consult with staff at The Village of Cumberland, Town of Comox and City of Courtenay and to report back to the Board by spring 2019; and that the mandate of the advisory group would be to provide a report with action items by September 2019."

This report serves to update on the activities associated with addressing air quality.

- A working group, comprising of municipal and CVRD staff and representatives from Island Health and the Ministry of Environment, will develop options relating to a long-term regional approach for improving Comox Valley air quality. Air quality control in the Comox Valley is not being approached as a CVRD service.
- The working group will explore and better understand models from Port Alberni and Cowichan.
- Recommendations from this working group are expected for Board consideration by September 2019.
- Initial discussions and preliminary research shows that addressing air quality is a complex situation where multiple jurisdictions have different viewpoints and responsibilities. Caution must be taken to minimize expectations that the CVRD is in charge.
 - o [According to the BC Lung Association](#), fine particulate matter from wood smoke (PM2.5) can cause chronic and acute respiratory and cardiac diseases, especially among children and the elderly.
 - o There is a [growing body of research](#) linking exposure to wood smoke to an increased risk of other serious health outcomes, including strokes, cancer, and dementia.
 - o [A recent Health Canada-funded study](#) that took place in Courtenay/Comox, Prince George and Kamloops found that the risk of heart attacks in people 65 years and older increased by 19 per cent when woodstove pollution was high.

- Wood smoke and tobacco smoke share many of the same harmful substances, including benzene, toluene, and formaldehyde. Actions can range from education/awareness-based to more regulatory and restrictive.
- Actions may have impacts on social, financial and environmental levels. Due to the potential impact to business and industry there is a need to ensure they are represented on solutions.
- No single action will address air quality and a consistent and deliberate effort across the range of actions may result in improving Comox Valley air quality.
- Some efforts already underway to help address air quality:
 - Comox Valley Regional District:
 - Staff are developing a wood smoke reduction awareness campaign for 2019 to build awareness of the negative health impacts of wood smoke from woodstoves, to build commitment to responsible burning practices, and to draw attention to financial incentives for switching to cleaner heating appliances.
 - Sustainability Department is working with Efficiency BC to provide financial incentives for people to improve home energy / home heating.
 - Planning Department is considering relevant updates to the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) and Official Community Plan (OCP) to support mitigation actions and programs in support of air quality protection.
 - Parks Department has updated parks bylaws to increase fines for smoking/fire in parks during smoking and fire bans.
 - Fire Services Department amended fire regulations bylaws to restrict high risk activities during extreme fire hazard season.
 - Working group initiated (as noted above) to identify options for addressing air quality.
 - City of Courtenay:
 - The City of Courtenay prohibited outdoor burning in 2008. This was a significant step in improving the air quality in the Comox Valley. The City of Courtenay consistently promotes the CVRD woodstove rebate program through our website and social media.
 - The City of Courtenay looks forward to being part of a regional coordinated approach to air quality, which is a serious issue for the Comox Valley that knows no boundaries.
 - Town of Comox:
 - Numerous actions have been taken by Town of Comox Council to do its part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality, including
 - Elimination of backyard fires, beach fires, campfires, fires used for the purpose of land clearing and the use of outdoor wood burning fireplaces and fire pits; and
 - Amending its building bylaw in March 2019 to ban the installation of wood burning appliances in new and/or existing construction.
 - Village of Cumberland:
 - Prohibited yard waste fires (February 2017).
 - Prohibited land clearing fires – except on private managed forest land (September 2017).
 - Council considered regulation of woodstoves (fall 2017) – determined to proceed with education and incentives, rather than regulation, including offering loan of moisture meters for firewood at no charge.

- Distributed CVRD woodstove exchange brochure to all property owners in winter of 2017/2018.
 - Adopted a bylaw that prohibits installation of woodstoves in new construction (Dec 2018).
 - Planning underway for targeted information campaign for fall 2019, likely to be undertaken by bylaw enforcement officers.
- As the working group conducts its research and formulates options/recommendations, relevant actions may be presented to the Board for consideration before September 2019

Prepared by:

J. Warren

James Warren
 General Manager of Corporate
 Services

Stakeholder Distribution (Upon Agenda Publication)

City of Courtenay	✓
Town of Comox	✓
Village of Cumberland	✓
Island Health	✓
Ministry of Environment	✓