Grow-Ops in Residential Neighbourhoods

UBCM Workshop
Tuesday, September 27, 2005
Ballroom C

Outline
- Purpose of workshop
- Electrical safety proposal overview
- Demonstration projects
  - Surrey
  - Abbotsford
- Support for local governments
  - BC Safety Authority
  - RCMP
- Model Bylaw
- Questions/Comments

Workshop Objectives
- Inform interested local governments:
  - Surrey and Abbotsford demonstration projects
  - Power consumption information: potential legislative change
  - Proposed operational implementation
  - Get local government feedback and suggestions

Electrical Safety Proposal
- Background
- Use of regulatory approach
- Power consumption information issue
- Intent of potential legislative change
- Local government lead

Context
2003 NCC Report:
- “Leadership by all government levels is essential in order to effectively combat this problem and make communities across the country safer.”
- “It is recommended that provinces and municipalities be encouraged to develop and implement legislation and/or bylaws that would provide greater control over the proliferation of grow operations.”
Power Consumption Information

- How to identify residential grow-ops?
  - Tips from the public
  - Drive-by observation
  - Unusual power consumption pattern
  - Protection of Privacy issue

Intent of Potential Legislative Change

At the request of a local government, BC Hydro must disclose the following information, when a residential account displays an unusual power consumption pattern:

- Name of account holder
- Civic address
- Relevant consumption records

Surrey Demonstration Project: Description

- There are more Grow-ops in BC than Police capacity to respond. (UCFV)
- The number of Fires as a result of a Grow-op are increasing
- In Surrey in 2003/04, 8.9% of the Fires in Surrey were related to a Grow-op
- Clearly electrical installations at all Grow-op locations are unsafe

Surrey Demonstration Project: Results

- 90 Days of Operation
- 420 Police tips processed
- 400 locations reviewed, 119 Grow locations rendered safe
  - 76 Grow locations terminated power
  - 30 Grow locations terminated by police or hydro as theft of power
  - 11 Grow locations required 7 day notice to repair
- 28 Residences contained 49 Children
- 7 Residences did not contain a grow operation
- 94% of the locations had electrical safety violations

Surrey Demonstration Project: Lessons Learned

- The administrative process was successful.
- Added capacity to deal with the problem.
- Health, Building Safety and cost recovery needs to be included
- Better tools are needed to expand access to detect unusual power consumption
Abbotsford Demonstration Project

- Description
- Results
- Lessons Learned

Working with BC Safety Authority

Who We Are

- Not-for-profit corporation delivering safety services throughout BC
  - Boilers & Pressure Vessels
  - Elevators & Escalators
  - Electrical
  - Gas
  - Passenger Ropeways
  - Recreational Rail & Amusement Rides
  - Railways
BC Safety Authority and Grow-Ops
- Electrical systems are designed and installed to ensure public safety
  - Safety Standards Act and Regulations
- Safety risks are associated with electrical systems at grow-ops
  - Fire and shock

Grow-Ops: the Good, the Bad…

… and the Ugly

BCSA Underlying Principles
- Employee Safety is Paramount
- Public Safety is the Focus
- Municipalities Lead the Process
- A Comprehensive Plan Required
- Cost Recovery

Process to Engage the BCSA
- Completion of a prerequisite checklist
- Draft agreement with BCSA
  - Roles and Responsibilities
  - Communication protocol
  - Response time and task priority
  - Training
  - Fee schedule

Police Support
- Avoiding addresses connected with criminal investigations
- organized crime
- Supporting the local government team
  - safety of team members
- Resourcing small municipalities
Model Bylaw: Objectives
- Establish a baseline bylaw incorporating all methods of enforcement/deterrent
- Avoid chasing the problem from one jurisdiction to the next
- Toolkit for bylaw development – delete what you don’t need

Model Bylaw: Safety Inspection
- Authority of Fire Chief to enter & inspect
- Authority of Building Inspectors
- Special Safety Inspections
- Revocation of Occupancy Permit
- Discontinuation of Services
- Cost Recovery / Fines for Offences

Model Bylaw: Enforcement - Prohibitions
- Bypass utility meters
- Alter structure to facilitate grow-op
- Divert or install exhaust vents
- Store or use dangerous goods
- Obstruct exits, alter fire barriers
- Allow growth of mould or fungus
- Accumulation of rubbish or water
- Emit odors

Model Bylaw: Enforcement - Remediation
- “Do Not Occupy” Notice
- Obtain Permits
- Remedy Effects of Grow-op
- Professional Cleaning
- Recertify the structure for occupation
- Reinspection of Property prior to occupation
- Pay Inspection & Permit Fees

Model Bylaw: Owner’s Requirements
- Inspect premises every 3 months
- Notify police upon discovery of contravention (within 24 hours)
- RemEDIATE Structure as ordered
- Pay associated fees

Model Bylaw
- Flexible bylaw template
- Basis for Discussion / Policy Development
- Cut and Paste as Required
- Available:
  - www.chilliwack.com/modelbylaw
  - www.civicinfo.bc.ca
Summary

- Provide information about an electrical safety approach to grow-ops in residential neighbourhoods
- Get local government feedback and suggestions

Questions?
Comments?