



# AUDITOR GENERAL

Halifax Regional Municipality

## Management of the Fire Inspection Program Audit

# Audit Overview

- Failing to effectively manage important aspects of Fire Inspection Program
- Oversight needs improvement
- Failing to meet legislative obligations
  - Some steps to address but need detailed plans
- Inspection follow up not always timely



# Oversight – Detailed Results

- Significant improvement needed
- Management had concerns with Fire Prevention Division's organizational structure
  - Ability to meet inspection mandate
- 2019 – created fire inspector positions
  - August 2021 – 8 fire inspectors
  - Additional structure changes planned
- Management believe more fire inspection staff needed
  - But don't know how many
  - No detailed plans or timelines

# Oversight – Detailed Results

- Identified the fire inspection program as a risk area
  - No comprehensive plans to address
  - Do not know how often buildings should be inspected
- Performing inspections enforces fire code
- Periodic fire inspections educate property and business owners



# Timeliness of Inspections – Detailed Results

- Failure to manage and meet legislative responsibilities
- Fire inspections on many buildings not timely
  - 40% of inspections sampled not on time
- Regulations require certain buildings be inspected every three years
  - 45% of inspections sampled were late
  - Nine of 20 not inspected within three-year requirement



# Timeliness of Inspections – Detailed Results

- Other building types – system of inspections
- Management determined inspection frequencies
  - Does not know if frequencies are appropriate
- Sample of 38 inspections tested against these timelines
  - 37% did not meet established 2009 timelines



# Timeliness of Inspections – Detailed Results

- Halifax Fire does not have a reliable list of inspectable buildings
- 2019 list
  - Manually created
  - Risk not complete
  - Has not been updated
  - But used to schedule inspections
- New HRM building permitting system December 2020
  - Halifax Fire's system not updated with new property data since

# Compliance Orders and Follow up – Detailed Results

- Sample: 24 inspections with violations
  - Six – No orders-to-comply
- Most violations followed up
  - Not always timely
- Sampled 30 inspections completed by fire inspection staff
  - 24 noted violations
    - One – not followed up
    - Four – long delays
- Sampled 30 limited-scope fire inspections
  - 25 of 30 noted violations
    - All followed up
    - Nine – not timely





# Compliance Orders and Follow up – Detailed Results

- Some follow up of limited-scope inspections completed by fire inspection staff
  - No process to prioritize these items
- 16 of 25 limited-scope fire inspections in our sample escalated to fire inspection staff for follow up
  - Follow up not timely
    - Average follow up – 97 days
    - One case – no follow up for 16 months



# Quality Assurance – Detailed Results

- Limited quality assurance to confirm fire inspections properly completed and documented
  - Tracks pending inspections; follows up with staff
  - No regular review to confirm completed properly
- No consistent understanding of documentation required in hard copy inspection files
- Policies and procedures outdated
  - Most not reviewed or revised since 2012
  - Do not reflect current operations



# Staff Productivity – Detailed Results

- Limited management of staff productivity
  - Have not determined number inspections staff should complete
  - Management has not given fire inspection staff direction on prioritizing most work
    - 2019 inspection lists
    - Each had hundreds of buildings



# Staff and Training – Detailed Results

- Fire inspection staff training requirements identified
  - Limited course offerings
  - Six years to complete
- No concrete plans for solutions
- 2019 – created new fire inspector position
  - Required to have building official or fire inspector certification on hire



# Performance Indicators – Detailed Results

- Single performance indicator for Fire Prevention Division
  - Percentage are completed legislated inspections
- Reported in Halifax Fire's business plan to Regional Council
  - No support for calculation
- Senior management do not know if target is reasonable
- Target is low
  - 1/5 to 1/3 of what Halifax Fire is required to complete
  - Includes limited-scope inspections carried out by operational fire officers
- No other performance indicators for Division

# Other Matters

- Poor Communication between Halifax Fire, and Planning and Development
- Halifax Fire management said certain subdivisions built without appropriate fire safety specifications
- Planning and Development management said they were not aware of these concerns
- Looked at three subdivision approvals
  - Two provided to Halifax Fire
  - Only one with feedback or concerns noted
  - No documentation of how addressed
- No list with plans for when and where dry hydrants will be installed

# Wrap Up

14 Recommendations

All accepted by management

Timely action important to meet  
legislated obligations and  
enforce fire code

Follow up in 18 months



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Questions?