

13-575 Thornton Road North, Oshawa, ON L1J 8L5

Mr. Patrick R. Burke, Fire Marshal of Ontario
Office of the Fire Marshal
5775 Yonge Street
7th Floor
Toronto, ON M2M 4J1

May 26, 2010

Dear Mr. Burke,

We would like to express our thanks for your continued support of our concerns about access to visual smoke alarms for Deaf and Hard of Hearing homeowners. We appreciate the invitation to attend the Fire Marshal Public Safety Council meeting on April 23, 2010 in Gravenhurst.

As you are already aware of, our goal is to increase fire safety for Deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing residents in Ontario who we believe are at higher risk than the general population to die in a fire emergency because they do not have a visual smoke detector.

Upon reviewing the statistics that was provided to us at the recent Council meeting, it stated that the incidence of fire death is highest among the senior population. Prevalence of hearing loss is also highest in this age group so there is the possibility of a correlation between a higher incidence of fire death and the unavailability of appropriate visual alerting device for seniors.

We had a successful day at Queen's Park with The Canadian Hearing Society to advocate for the addition of visual smoke detectors to the list of funded devices under the Assistive Devices Program and for an amendment to the Ontario Fire Code to include visual smoke detectors with various Ministers, MPPs and Deputy Ministers on May 5th, 2010. We regret that you were not able to attend due to other commitments.

We would like to share our ideas and strategies about how we can work together to accomplish our goal for better fire safety for Ontarians with varying levels of hearing loss with you:

- **Continue to advocate for the Assistive Devices Program (ADP) to provide some degree of financial assistance so that visual alerting devices will be affordable for homeowners to purchase.** We are still writing to the ADP under the Ministry of Health to reconsider their decision about not adding visual smoke detectors to their list of funded devices. We would like the Office of the

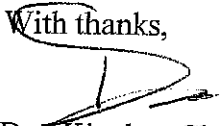
Fire Marshal to continue their advocacy on this issue by communicating with the Ministry of Health representatives and MPPs.


- **Provide training to all Fire Prevention Officers in the province to be more aware of fire safety issues for people with hearing loss.** The Office of the Fire Marshal can initiate action on providing internal training to update local Fire Prevention Officers, and other staff if needed, to be aware of issues regarding fire safety for people with hearing loss. Topics would include the available fire safety technology for households and public buildings; available technology for high-rise dwellings when fire occurs in another apartment not belonging to the person with hearing loss; available funding for these devices; and where to direct individuals to purchase visual smoke detectors. The Canadian Hearing Society can assist you by providing some training.
- **Include information about fire safety for people with hearing loss and other disabilities in the mainstream public fire safety education program.** Include appropriate information about visual smoke detectors and alternative strategies for people with hearing loss or other disabilities to share with the mainstream population. This includes presentations at schools and in materials produced by the Fire Safety Canada Distribution Centre. The Canadian Hearing Society can also provide assistance with developing appropriate information about fire safety for people with hearing loss.
- **Advocate to have visual smoke detectors be available for purchase in mainstream stores where regular smoke detectors are being sold.** Advocate stores such as Walmart, Zellers, Home Depot, RONA, Lowe's and Home Hardware to carry fire safety products that include a strobe light or vibrating device to make this more accessible for seniors and people with hearing loss to buy.
- **Amend the Ontario Fire Code to include visual smoke detectors.** The Ontario Fire Code only recognizes audible smoke detectors as mandatory for homeowners to have in their households. The Fire Code should also recognize visual smoke detectors as required in households for residents with hearing loss.
- **Amend the Building Code to require visual smoke detectors in new and existing public buildings.** Wayne Arthurs, MPP for Pickering-Scarborough East, had introduced a private members' bill to enforce that all new public buildings to include visual smoke detectors. We would like to have legislation to also include existing public buildings too as well. The Building Code is being reviewed this summer and we would like to have the Office of the Fire Marshal provide some input about the importance of including visual smoke detectors.
- **Make the Fire Marshal of Ontario's website available for American Sign Language (ASL) users by including a video clip in ASL about visual smoke detectors.** While we commend that your short film documentary about fire

safety included captioning, the film fails to recognize that these audible alarms portrayed will not save the lives of people with hearing loss. There are real and ongoing concerns in the Deaf community about needing affordable visual smoke detectors ever since the Fire Code had been amended to require smoke detectors for all homeowners in Ontario. A response to these concerns from the Office of the Fire Marshal of Ontario in both ASL and written English should be made available on the website.

We hope you can take the time to review our suggestions for taking a more proactive approach. We look forward to hearing from you about how we can continue to work with you and the Council in different ways in order to improve the quality of fire safety for Ontarians with hearing loss in their own homes.

With thanks,


Don Kinsley, Chair

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- cc: Durham Deaf Accessibility Committee – Mike Finnegan, Veronica Bickle, Gordon Ryall, Beverley Dooley, Kim Reid, David Hamen, Mirek Swiecicki and Erika Stebbings
 - cc: Maggie Doherty-Gilbert, Regional Director, The Canadian Hearing Society, Peterborough, Durham and City of Kawartha Lakes Regions
 - cc: Chris Kenopic, Regional Director, The Canadian Hearing Society, Hamilton, Brant and Niagara Falls
 - cc: Gary Malkowski, Special Advisor to the CEO, The Canadian Hearing Society
 - cc: Jo-Ann Bentley, Provincial Co-ordinator, Communication Devices Program, The Canadian Hearing Society
 - cc: Dean Walker, Executive Director, Ontario Association of the Deaf
 - cc: John Mans, Treasurer, Ontario Association of the Deaf
 - cc: Michel David, President, Canadian Hard-of-Hearing Association, Ontario Chapter
 - cc: Valerie Eaton, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, Toronto Branch