

Statement from Ken Beckett, Fire Chief
April 15, 2013

I have been in the fire service for 52 years, over 30 years as a Fire Chief. I can tell you that I take great pride in the professionalism of the East Gwillimbury Emergency Services Department, both our full time firefighters and our part time, on-call, volunteer firefighters. Our volunteers are trained to the highest standards, the same standards as full time firefighters across the province. We provide service to our community 24/7, 365 days a year.

In the time since the tragic fire on Howard Avenue, Emergency Services remains focused on supporting the Ontario Fire Marshal's ongoing investigation. In addition we have done much reflection and looked to lessons that can be learned. There has been much discussion in the community on various aspects of the fire and I want to take this opportunity to provide some clarity.

RESPONSE TIME AND MUTUAL AID

The Ontario Fire Marshal indicated in his preliminary findings on April 3rd that response time was not a significant contributing factor in the outcome of this fire. The primary factors that were identified are detection (smoke alarms) and notification (the call to 911).

We have mutual aid agreements throughout the Region. Mutual aid is an agreement among emergency responders to lend assistance across municipal boundaries and occurs when an emergency requires a response that exceeds the capacity of local resources. The decision to implement mutual aid is made at the scene by the incident commander.

Given the circumstances at the Howard Avenue fire, there was no need to call for mutual aid.

AUTOMATIC AID

While the Fire Marshal has been clear in his preliminary findings that response time was not a significant contributing factor in the outcome of this fire, the discussion of automatic aid within York Region and neighbouring municipalities is an important one.

An automatic aid agreement would mean that the fire service in the best position to respond most quickly is the one that would automatically be dispatched to a fire, regardless of municipal boundaries. For East Gwillimbury, this means that in order for a neighbouring municipality to be immediately dispatched, it would require an automatic aid agreement.

The discussion of automatic aid agreements is one that York Region and our neighbouring municipalities should be engaged in. As Chief of East Gwillimbury Emergency Services I support this discussion as a priority.