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## **Sask. city eyes charging property owners for cost of repeat emergency services calls**

**North Battleford could charge violators as much as \$1,200/hour**



North Battleford, Sask., director of protective services Lindsay Holm hopes a new bylaw will prevent unnecessary calls to fire, police and ambulance services. (Jason Warick/CBC)



**Jason Warick**

Lindsay Holm has to step carefully around the broken beer bottles, discarded needles and rusted auto parts strewn around the backyard of a North Battleford, Sask., home.

Holm, the city's director of protective services, and other emergency responders have been called here many times.

"It is kind of typical for what we're dealing with," Holm said.

Police, firefighters and paramedics are often called to the same handful of properties in the city, so officials are taking a new approach.

That new bylaw would charge some property owners for the cost of repeated emergency services calls on their property. The costs could be as high as \$1,200 per hour.

They hope it will lead to cleaner, safer neighbourhoods.

"As you can see, it does have a large accumulation of debris and rubbish. Typically, the home inside would be very similar. It becomes a safety hazard for police and fire fighters

and others. This is the type of property we'd be looking at applying our bylaw to," Holm said.



**WATCH | North Battleford eyes charging property owners for cost of emergency services calls: Duration 2:02**

Police, firefighters and paramedics are often called to the same handful of properties in North Battleford, Sask. Officials there hope a new approach will cut down on these calls and lead to cleaner, safer neighbourhoods.

The bylaw passed second reading this week in North Battleford council. If the final vote passes later this month, it will become law Jan. 1.

Holm said they visited one property more than 30 times last year. He said this bylaw will give them another tool to force owners to take responsibility for their property.

He said they aren't targeting legitimate calls. For example, they won't be going after people with medical emergencies, or individuals and businesses targeted by vandalism or other crime.

"We want to ensure people are calling 911 or utilizing emergency services. This bylaw is not intended to take any of that away," he said.

Kyle Palfy, the RCMP commanding officer for the region, said police, fire and ambulance services, and mental health workers are all extremely busy. This bylaw could help them spend more time with the people who need them most, he said.

"There's a lot of cross over between their work and ours. We're having to go back to the same properties repeated times," Palfy said.

Palfy and Holm said they hope these changes will improve the quality of life for neighbours living near these properties.

Cameron Choquette, CEO of the Saskatchewan Landlords Association, said he was disappointed his association wasn't consulted on the changes.

While it's understandable that North Battleford's city council wants to recover the costs it's spending on emergency services, property owners are already paying "an abundance of property taxes" that go toward emergency response services, he said.

"It puts property owners on the hook for costs that tenants may be causing," he said, noting that if the bylaw passes, landlords will most likely be tightening up their screening protocols on prospective tenants.

"We simply can't afford to pay for additional costs related to emergency response services and aren't going to take that risk on a tenant who may have a poor rental history."

Linda Machniak, chief operating officer for the Battlefords and District Chamber of Commerce, said businesses would likely be in favour of the bylaw if they are not penalized for legitimate calls. She said fewer calls could also lower business and personal taxes for residents.



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