

Mayne Island Fire Department Annual Fire Chief's Report on 2006

July 14 2007

Good Afternoon,

2006 was the busiest year on record for the Mayne Island Fire Department. We responded to 131 recorded calls. The year started off with the BC Air Ambulance Contractor refusing to make night flights into the Mayne Island Heliport. To have service restored to the island the members of the fire department agreed to respond to every med-e-vac, to set up temporary lights and have fire department vehicles placed so the Pilots were able to see the tops of the trees. I thank all of the fire fighters for turning out for this very important service. From this we entered into 2 months of high winds and several brush fires. Early spring was a very dry time and then around the end of May it became wet. However, we went back to a very dry spell towards the end of June and into July and this is when the Galiano Wildfire started. MIFD responded to Galiano Island's request for mutual aid. After this incident we had several open burn complaints which you will see with the number of complaints. The middle of September brought rains and relief from the possibility of another wildfire. Then came November and December, again with high winds, snow, and power outages for long periods of time. Wow! What a year!

Here is a break down of calls that were recorded. The reason I say 'recorded', is that on the evening of July 23 – 24, 2007 we were receiving calls as fast as we could answer the phone. Almost all of the calls were related to the Galiano Wildfire, as smoke and ash were blown onto Mayne Island. I would guess that if I responded to every call, our calls would have topped 200 for the year.

- First Responder 32
- Ambulance Assist 8
- Med-E-Vacs 23 with 1 cancelled due to weather
- Fire Calls 22
- Open Burn Complaints 13
- HydroLine/Pole 13
- Duty Officer pages 6
- Misc. 4
- Equipment Restriction 3
- RCMP Assist 2
- MVI 2
- Mutual Aid 1
- Search & Rescue 1

What did all of these events mean to the Mayne Island Fire Department?

The first thing that was evident, was that we were really only a structural fire fighting department and needed to start looking at training and equipment for Wildland fire fighting. I attended the Galiano fire and on my return realized that we needed forestry equipment. The Mayne Island Improvement District and I sat down and went over equipment that was needed immediately and what we could purchase in 2007. The first question I was asked by Jim Marlon-Lambert was how we can stop a Galiano fire here on Mayne Island. My reply was purchase a Thermal Imaging Camera. With this camera we can scan old burn piles and make sure they are extinguished before the hot dry season arrives. We now have this camera and have used it several times scanning fires and also for structural fires to find the seat of the fire. I have used it twice for chimney fires where in the past we would have opened up walls to see if the fire had extended into the walls from the chimney. This resulted in zero damage to the homes and no insurance claim. The other items on my list were forestry hose and wildfire boots. We immediately purchased 1-1/2" hose and 5/8" hose. Both of these types of hose are much lighter than structural hose and easier on our personnel. In early 2007 we ordered new coveralls and wildfire boots for the fire fighters.

Training- We still continue to have weekly training sessions on Tuesday nights. In 2006 we were averaging 10-12 fire fighters for practice. This is a fairly good number but there is always room for improvement. I believe we are moving forward to becoming a more well rounded department. One of my goals for 2007 will be to start a certificate program for the fire fighters. We also continue to train with the other departments in the Southern Gulf Islands. This includes sending fire fighters to Salt Spring Island for their annual training weekend.

Heliport- We started the year off with having to respond to all of the Med-e-vacs and set up the temporary lighting. This followed with construction of the new lights and the tree topping. I would like to thank all of the members of this community who helped get this service back up and running. I will not mention any names as I know that I will miss someone or group. We now have one of the most up to date Heliports on the west coast and have had several enquires into what it took to achieve.

Wildfire Protection Plan-

In 2006 the Mayne Island Improvement District hired Dr. Sharon Hope to complete a wildfire protection plan for Mayne Island. This has been done and presented to the community. More work is needed to have the plan move forward. What it has shown us is that we have a very large area of high risk areas on the island. I have been trying to find funds to help off set some of the costs but have run into road blocks. Ministry of Forests is the sponsor of these programs and will not help fund any private land clean up. I will continue to seek any help with costs in 2007.

Summary- I think that 2006 has been a new era in the way we look at Fire Protection for Mayne Island. No more can we only look at structural fire fighting as the only thing the fire department does. Over the last 5 years this department has also added rope rescue, wild land fire fighting, and has had to adapt to the new era of fire fighting. The demands put on our fire fighters to train more and more was starting to take a toll on them. It was decided that they needed to be compensated for their time and starting in 2007 will be paid for practices and calls. This has resulted in 18 fire fighters attending practices on average. Our numbers remain steady in the mid 20 range. At present we have 24 members. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the spouses and partners of the fire fighters for being so patient all year when that pager goes off in the middle of dinner or some other family event. Again Thank You. I look forward to 2007 and all of the challenges it will bring.

I would also like to thank the Mayne Island Improvement District for supporting myself and the Fire Department. It has been a pleasure to work with every Trustee and our new Administrator in our common goal of providing Fire/Rescue Services to the people of Mayne Island. I look forward to the year ahead.

Thank you,

Jeff Francis
Mayne Island Fire Chief
14 July 2007