

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
HCM Council and Auto - Extrication**

Stonecliffe, Ontario – February 19, 2016 – **Unprotected Provincial Highway in Head, Clara & Maria**

Currently, there is no auto-extrication service along Highway 17 in Head, Clara & Maria from the Bissett Creek Bridge to the Laurentian Hills border potentially leaving the travelling public in danger. HCM Council is attempting to resolve this issue.

According to Ontario Provincial Police records, from 2010 - 2015, there have been an average of 1.8 motor vehicle collisions involving personal injury annually along highway 17 in Head, Clara & Maria; only a portion of them being on this stretch of the highway.

Data collected by the Ontario Provincial Police for the years 2010 to and including 2015 show the following calls involving motor vehicle collisions resulting in personal injury.
2010 – 4, 2011 – 1, 2012 – 3, 2013 – 2, 2014 – 0 2015 – 1.

In 1985 Head, Clara & Maria (HCM) entered into an agreement with the current Towns of Laurentian Hills and Deep River for the provision of auto-extrication services along this stretch of the highway through a joint purchase of equipment funded in part by the provincial/federal Joint Emergency Preparedness Program grant. Although not legislated, municipal fire departments traditionally provide equipment and personnel; the province pays for service calls.

Under the agreement it was understood that each department would look after its own municipality first. There was always the possibility that a call could result in no response if the equipment or personnel were needed in the base municipality.

In 2015 HCM Council, concerned with the lack of reporting or accounting during the life of the agreement asked to strengthen it. Conditions of the agreement were not being met; reporting was non-existent. HCM was being asked to sign a new agreement with no upper limit for expenses; in essence, a blank cheque.

Instead of repairing the agreement, in April of 2015 the Town of Deep River stated that it was no longer in a position to provide this service as its department was understaffed and facing its own internal challenges; that the Ontario Fire Marshal's office had questioned their continued partnership.

The Town of Laurentian Hills was willing to stay in the agreement but were also willing to handle auto extrication on their own.

Representatives of the three municipalities during a meeting of the North Renfrew Emergency Response Unit (NRERU) board agreed to mutually dissolve the agreement ultimately transferring the equipment to Laurentian Hills.

After public consultation in August of 2015, and having previously consulted with the Ontario Fire Marshal's Office, the Council of the United Townships of Head, Clara &

Maria agreed to mutually dissolve the NRERU; promising to investigate alternate service arrangements. Promising to follow resident's suggestions, Council contacted the province for support and resolution.

Council believed that being a provincial asset, the province should assume responsibility where service could not be arranged. Further they believed that since Laurentian Hills was in receipt of the equipment, that a pay for service agreement might be brokered once the NRERU was terminated.

In October of 2015 HCM Council requested such an agreement from Laurentian Hills Council; HCM was told unequivocally that no, Laurentian Hills was not in a position to provide this service.

The Town of Mattawa, which provides coverage along Highway 17 from the westernmost border to the Bissett Creek Hill/bridge was contacted via telephone in April 2015 and we were told that they were not able to come further east due to exposure to their residents.

In November of 2015 Head, Clara & Maria notified the province of the situation along Highway 17 and requested that the province take steps to assist in protecting the travelling public. A copy of this letter was sent to our MPP, John Yakabuski.

Under the *Fire Prevention and Protection Act* a municipality is not required to have a fire department. If it chooses not to, or does not have the ability to form a department a municipality shall provide: a simplified risk assessment, a smoke alarm program, fire safety education material and building inspections upon complaint or when requested to assist with code compliance. Head, Clara & Maria meets these obligations.

With a total permanent population of under 250, an aging population and a geographic expanse of approximately 70 km along the highway, even if gifted auto-extrication and/or fire equipment, HCM does not have the population to man it, paid or volunteer.

Although not legally its responsibility, socially some Head, Clara & Maria Council members feel that it must work to find a resolution to this situation and is investigating other options.

Irrespective of agreements in place with municipalities with fire departments, as with policing, auto-extrication and public safety along provincial highways remains a provincial responsibility.

Contact:
Melinda Reith, Municipal Clerk
15 Township Hall Road
Stonecliffe, ON. K0J 2K0

613-586-2526

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