

Mar 2011 - West Prince Graphic - Fire dues up for residents in O'Leary

By Jim Brown

Residents in the O'Leary Rural Fire District will pay an extra 10 per cent in dues in 2011, following the district's annual meeting in O'Leary March 2.

Ronnie MacWilliams, chairman of the O'Leary Rural Fire District Committee, said the district's budget is rising from \$128,000 to \$135,000 this year.

The fee increase will be applied across all five categories of ratepayers - homeowners, cottage owners, small business operators, owners of vacant lots and large business operators.

There are 982 households in the district, 163 cottages, 256 small businesses, 291 vacant lots and nine large businesses.

Household rates are going up from approximately \$55 to just over \$60 per home.

Mr MacWilliams said a reserve of approximately \$11,000 last year was utilized to stave off an increase. That reserve is not available this year.

The Community of O'Leary will vote on its share of the budget, about 23 per cent, later this month.

The three member committee were reluctant to raise rates, but had little choice, said Mr MacWilliams.

A new fire truck is slated to arrive about six to eight weeks that must be paid for, he said.

That brand new truck includes a tanker a few years old. The purchase must still be approved by O'Leary Community Council at a future meeting.

Insurance, maintenance costs, heat and electricity and other expenses have also gone up.

O'Leary Fire Chief Ronnie Phillips said the department's 28 firefighters handled 113 calls last year, compared to 135 the year before, a reduction attributed largely to a decline in so-called "nuisance calls" such as false alarms.

So far, to the end of February, 2011, the department has fielded 18 calls, down "two or three" from the same period last year, said Mr Phillips.

In other news, the fire department is spending \$93,000 to replace aging, damaged and out-dated equipment, with the cost shared by three levels of government - the fire department, the Community of O'Leary and the Island Community Fund, which is providing two thirds of the funding.