

Shelburne Council, Fire Chief ask local drivers to pull over if they see green light

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The Town of Shelburne is working to remind local residents, both old and new, that a green flashing light on a vehicle is an indicator of a volunteer firefighter.

During Shelburne's Town Council meeting on Sept. 14, Coun. Lindsay Wegener inquired about possible ways to provide information and education to both old and new community members who might not understand what the green flashing light means.

While there is, presently, no law that dictates drivers should pull over if they see a volunteer firefighter approaching in their rear-view mirror, it's something local residents really should consider doing, says Shelburne Fire Chief Ralph Snyder.

‘It is a courtesy light for volunteer firefighters and it gives them no more right than any other driver on the road, but it indicates that they are responding to an emergency,’ said Chief Snyder. ‘They’re trying to get to the fire hall, to get to the trucks, to respond to an emergency and it would be courteous if people would give them the right of way.’

The Shelburne Fire Department, which is led by new Fire Chief Ralph Snyder, is a volunteer based department. The local department consists of 29 volunteer firefighters, who according to Snyder respond to an average of 300 calls yearly. There are currently 457 fire departments in Ontario, with 426 of those being either part-time or volunteer based. The flashing green light is part of a piece of legislation that was introduced on December 9, 1994 and is used as a way to recognize volunteer firefighters across the province, and is strictly only used in Ontario.

While Snyder says there isn't a particular problem regarding local drivers ignoring flashing green lights around town, it is something he's seen and heard about on occasion. He believes the issue is likely more down to a misunderstanding of the green light concept from people who have moved from areas who don't have to rely on volunteer firefighters, than anything deliberately malicious.

‘The green light is to get our guys to the trucks so they can get rolling to the emergency,’ Snyder emphasized.

Coun. Walter Benotto, during Council's discussion, noted that although the flashing light indicates a volunteer firefighter, it doesn't allow them ‘to break any laws’.

‘They are allowed to come through as quickly as they humanly possibly can, but not break any laws regarding getting to the fire station,’ said Benotto.

Shelburne at this time has signs in town indicating the green flashing light, and plans to implement reminder posts on the Town's social media accounts, as well as the Town Hall and Fire Department signboards.

As a final reminder to the public Snyder says,

‘They are responding to the hall, to someone else's emergency, it could be anything from a medical assist to a full blown structure fire - they respond the same way to all. So, if you could pull over, let them get to the hall, so they can get that truck rolling as soon as possible because seconds matter quite often on every call that we make,’ Snyder said.