

Premier talks fire and rain

*by Grant Scott - Story: 77108
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Premier Christy Clark visited the West Kelowna Fire Hall Tuesday morning to announce that the district has become the latest partner to join a provincial initiative aimed at making sure every home in BC has a working smoke alarm.

The smoke alarm campaign was launched in Surrey last March, bringing together BC's Office of the Fire Commissioner, the Fire Chiefs' Association of BC, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, the Insurance Brokers' Association of BC, and the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs.

Since then about a dozen communities have signed on.



*Photo: Grant Scott
Premier Christy Clark talks about fire safety with a group of young children from the Edleun Pre-School in West Kelowna.*

"One of the simplest and most effective ways we can keep BC families safe in their homes is by ensuring they have a working smoke alarm that they test regularly," says Clark.

By becoming a partner, residents of West Kelowna and those living within the boundaries of the Westbank First Nation, are now eligible to have fire personnel come to their home and install or test their smoke alarms free of charge.

"The District of West Kelowna is proud to be a new partner in this important campaign to save lives," says West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater.

Both Findlater and MLA Ben Stewart admitted that they have at times not paid enough attention to the smoke detectors in their homes, but pledged after today that would change.

Clarks says today's demonstration was important to ensure that society's most vulnerable, seniors and young children, are prepared in case of a fire in their home.

Research by Surrey Fire Services, in partnership with the University of the Fraser Valley, has shown the province's most vulnerable populations, including seniors and young children, face the highest risk of dying in a residential fire.

"We know that the safety of seniors in particular is improved when they have working smoke alarms in their homes. With so many people choosing to retire in the beautiful Okanagan, West Kelowna's leadership in joining us to actively support the smoke alarm campaign is vital," says Clark.

She posed with a group of three to five year-old children from the Edleun Pre-School and a group of seniors, who were given a brief lesson on the importance of having a smoke alarm in the home.

Pat Folliott of Kidde Canada flew in from Toronto to be a part Tuesday's announcement.

"We donated 5,000 smoke alarms to the provincial government for distribution to senior citizens, under privileged families and people at risk of fire to help them get early warning and to make sure they escape if they have a fire in their home," says Folliott.

Clark was also joined by Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Steve Thomson and Attorney General Shirley Bond.

The Liberal cabinet will be at The Cove in West Kelowna the next few days for their annual retreat.

The premier also said help was on the way for victims of flooding in the North Okanagan and elsewhere. Clark promised help "for every home affected by the flooding," and that provincial emergency funds will be made available for those near the flooding at Sicamous and Mara Lake.

Clark then threw out an olive branch to the BC Government Employees Union, by pointing out that BCGEU members in the affected regions have, in spite of being in a strike position, stayed on the job and are providing whatever help is necessary for those who have been hit by flood waters.

The Premier says she will not be heading into the region on Tuesday and does not have any immediate plans to do so.

While not entirely ruling out a trip over the next few days, Clark says she prefers not to politicize the disaster or draw attention away from the work that needs to be done by visiting the scene.