

# Fires blaze across Conception Bay

By RANDI MACKINNON  
The Compass

Newfoundland and Labrador has been plagued with a rash of forest fires this month, and the Conception Bay area is no exception to this devastation.

The fires started on May 1 and have been burning since, with numbers ranging well over 20 by last weekend. No serious damage has been done by the fires fought in Bay Roberts, Brigus, Cupids, Makinsons, Colliers, Victoria, Bryant's Cove, Western Bay Line, Shearstown, Red Head Cove, Tilton, Clarke's Beach Port de Grave and Job's Cove.

The majority of fires were attributed to human carelessness by members of the RCMP, Forestry and local fire departments.

"So far we have been very lucky," is the sentiment shared by authorities and residents alike, but suspicions are "if something isn't done soon, our luck might run out."

Sgt. Cliff Yetman of the Trinity-Conception District RCMP, expressed worries which prey on the minds of many in the area.

"Unless we get rain, it will get worse."

Investigations into the fires are ongoing, but RCMP officers anticipate there will be at least one, maybe two, arrests forthcoming in at least one of the fires.

Sgt. Yetman also warned of a zero tolerance attitude investigators will be taking.



Randi MacKinnon/The Compass

**GETTING THE JOB DONE** - The Department of Forestry dispatched a water bomber to put out flames in Shearstown on Monday, May 11. Members of the Bay Roberts Volunteer Fire Department were unable to get to the blaze due to its location. The fire was reportedly caused by children playing with matches, but the investigation is ongoing.

Although someone might not be charged under the Criminal Code, or any other statute, they can be sued in a court of law for liability whether it was accidental or a permit fire gone out of control. Costs individuals could face include rescue teams and equipment used to subdue the fire.

The Bay Roberts Volunteer Fire Department has responded to about 13 fires in the past two weeks, most of which were caused by cigarette butts or children.

The Bay Roberts fire department was unable to respond to a fire in Shearstown on Monday, May 11 due to its location in the woods. But the Department of Forestry was able to dispatch a water bomber from Gander to put the fire out. The fire was apparently started by children playing with matches, and burned an area 225 metres by 175 metres.

Ascension Collegiate in Bay Roberts was evacuated on Wednesday, May 13 because a forest fire was burning behind

the school, and could have proven dangerous.

"Due to the reaction of members, it was quickly brought under control," said Bay Roberts Fire Chief Newman Parsons. "The wind played in our favour."

Parsons said the school wasn't in immediate danger, but they evacuated due to the excessive amount of smoke accumulating in the building.

Although the Ascension fires are still under investigation as to whether or not they were set intentionally or accidentally, Par-

sons said, "it seems odd that they ignited on their own."

Ending Wednesday's rash of fires was one behind the Bay Roberts Mall, which is believed to have been intentional. Only about a quarter of an acre was burned. Parsons said the fire wasn't too severe, but again it could have been worse.

According to Terry Maddox, town clerk for Small Point-Broad Cove-Blackhead-Adam's Cove, the fire in Job's Cove was substantial enough to be seen in Adam's Cove.

# Chief still in control

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However, just before the meeting was to take place, the president was called by the chief and without an explanation, then ordered not to have a meeting that night and no papers were going to be issued.

Nothing that, "that type of attitude on behalf of the chief towards the fire department has been building, over the years," he said, "that's really the straw that broke the camel's back."

Bay Roberts town manager, Ed Fradsham said there are two or three firemen who are looking to take over and have everybody be his own boss. "That can't be the case—there's got to be one person in control," he said.

Mr. Fradsham said he felt confident of a "peaceful ironing out" of the controversy.

Noting that no decision can be made until council meets, the town manager stressed, "until that

time, everything is still under the control of the fire chief and it has to be."

Asked if there was any talk of the chief retiring, Mr. Fradsham said he understood the chief planned to retire in March, when his term ends. "This is what makes it a bit upsetting—that the boys would want to take such action when only two or three months away, he would have been retiring anyhow."

When contacted by the *Compass* on Monday, Mr. Baggs seemed to be surprised to be asked about the controversy. The chief would make "no comment whatsoever" when asked about the calls for his resignation.

Questioned about his possible plans for retirement, he said, "I don't expect to last forever."

Including the chief and town manager, the Bay Roberts Volunteer Fire Department has 27 members.