

No fines yet for uncontrolled fires in S. Stormont Township

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OSNABRUCK CENTRE— Folks in South Stormont will be getting a bit of a reprieve should they lose control of an open fire and require the assistance of the fire department.

Grass fire season can be busy and costly for firefighters in South Stormont but public education and a fire ban in early April may be turning that around.

Fire chief Roger Dejardins told council at the May 12 meeting that in 2009 there were 23 grass fires and so far this year they've only been called out to six.

The municipality enacted a fire ban in early April because of dry weather conditions and an abundance of parched winter grass. "I certainly think it must have

helped," Desjardins said of the temporary ban, which was lifted after a couple of days of rain, and new growth had begun.

Of the six fires this spring Desjardin said three could be singled out for some sort of compensation. But, until residents have a better understanding of the fire bans and the open fire bylaw Chief Dejardins said he was reluctant to seek compensation or levy fines for fires that get out of hand and require the assistance of the fire department.

Except for small backyard camp fires less than 18 inches in width and height, open burning is prohibited without a municipal permit. With or without a permit, South Stormont residents could face fines of up to \$5,000 or cost recovery of up to \$2,000 for fires that

get out of control.

Until more public education can be carried out and an effective means of letting the public know when a fire ban has been put into affect can be found, Desjardins recommended letters be sent explaining the burn bylaw and outlining the possible consequences.

A recent fire, which was clearly an accident, resulted in the loss of a shed for the property owners. They were not aware of the bylaw or the burn ban and it would be quite a shock, he said, for them to get a \$2000 bill for compensation on top of their property loss.

Chief Desjardins also told council that 42 volunteer firefighters from South Stormont attended live burn training in Odessa last month. Council was given a brief slide show of the train-

ing sessions. Exercises included getting into the 1200 degree Fahrenheit 'Hot Box'. "Firefighters now know what to expect," said Desjardins. "Some had never felt the heat of a structural fire."

The training is worth every cent, he said, and he had heard nothing but positive things about the experience from those who attended. With half the department having completed the live burn training Desjardins hoped council would approve funding for the training again next year. The cost of training is \$75 per firefighter.