

Cleaning up a bloody mess

Currently there are no regulations in place to decontaminate hazardous crime scenes and one councillor is calling for action

VICTORIA HANDYSIDES

This Week Staff

While crime dramas like CSI sensationalize crime scene investigation, there is a side that the viewing public don't often see. Trauma scene cleanup is a messy, dangerous and necessary job when dealing with any amount of blood or body fluids. Strathcona County currently has no policy in place to deal with cleanup of hazardous fluids – an issue that has one county councillor opting for change.

"If there's a trauma scene, what are we doing to ensure that there's infection control and cleaning guidelines with respect to keeping the public safe?" asked Ward 5 Coun. Jacquie Fenske.

"Our society is changing and our responses to those emergency medical situations should probably have some rules and guidelines."

Currently, if any situations arise in the county where blood or other hazardous materials are spilled, it is up to the homeowner, business owner, or

mother nature to clean it up. Not only are RCMP, fire services, or EMTs not required to perform any kind of cleanup, professional biohazard cleanup and restoration crews are not called in unless the land owner requests it.

Brent Olynyk has run Trauma Scene Bio Services out of Ardrossan for four years and says that he's seen it all. Olynyk's staff of eight technicians suit up on a regular basis to clean up after the most traumatic homicides, suicides, motor vehicle fatalities, mass casualty incidents, and body decomposition.

He says that while his job is not for the faint of heart, somebody needs to do it. As his is the area's only certified crime scene cleanup company, he agrees that there is a desperate need for regulations in place when dealing with potentially dangerous fluids.

"In this day and age there are more liability issues and new up and coming infectious diseases, we need to be more proactive in our approach and protect ourselves and our kids," Olynyk said.

Most times, it's the grim responsibility of the homeowner to contact Trauma Scene Bio Services in the event of a tragedy, or risk cleaning a potentially hazardous crime scene themselves.

"We see the sheer violence of crimes," Olynyk said. "Going to a scene where somebody was literally beaten to a pulp and there's blood splattered all over the entire room and the room is practically painted in blood, it's sad to see."

With the growing risk of infection from blood-borne diseases like HIV and hepatitis, Olynyk says that the services his company provides are vital to ensuring public safety.

He added that there are currently cities that do have blood laws in place. The city of Phoenix, Az. has a strict policy in regard to cleanup of crime scenes, including strict timelines and procedures on decontamination, disposal and public safety.

Last week in front of council, Fenske addressed the issue of putting regulations in place to

deal with the issue that has until now been put into the hands of the public.

Coun. Fenske is especially concerned about disasters that happen on public land, like schoolyards and streets.

"If something happens outside, generally nothing happens because they think that mother nature will look after it. That's generally not a good choice," Olynyk said, adding that there was a stabbing at an Edmonton school playground last week, from which the blood was not cleaned.

"These kids were walking through all this blood on Monday and they just don't know any better," he said.

Coun. Fenske plans to continue to compile research about what can be done to combat the issue and also plans to continue to bring her findings and recommendations to council in the coming weeks.

For more information on Trauma Scene Bio Services, visit their website at www.traumascenebio.ca.

victoria@sherwoodparknews.com

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