



## COUNCIL REPORT

Report Date: April 09, 2024  
Contact: Sarah Hicks  
Contact No.: 604.873.7546  
RTS No.: 16203  
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20  
Meeting Date: May 8, 2024  
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities  
FROM: General Manager/Fire Chief of Fire Rescue Services and Chief Licence Inspector  
SUBJECT: Regulating Continuous Flame Butane Lighters

### Recommendations

- A. THAT Council approve, in principle, amendments to the Licence By-Law to regulate the sale of continuous flame butane lighters in Vancouver as described in this report and as generally set out in Appendix A;

FURTHER THAT the Director of Legal Services be instructed to bring forward for enactment by Council a by-law to amend the Licence By-law, generally as set out in Appendix A, to come into force and take effect on June 28, 2024.

- B. THAT, subject to Council's approval of Recommendation A, Council approve, in principle, amendments to the Ticket Offences By-law regarding the sale of continuous flame butane lighters, as described in this report and as generally set out in Appendix B;

FURTHER THAT the Director of Legal Services be instructed to bring forward for enactment by Council a by-law to amend the Ticket Offences By-law, generally as set out in Appendix B, to come into force and take effect on June 28, 2024.

- C. THAT Council request the Mayor send a letter on behalf of Council to the Province to advocate for provincial regulations on continuous flame butane lighters as outlined in this report;

FURTHER THAT Council request the Mayor send a letter on behalf of Council to the Federal Government for federal regulations on continuous flame butane lighters as outlined in this report.

## Purpose and Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval to prohibit the retail sale of continuous flame butane lighters in Vancouver. A continuous flame butane lighter is a device that produces a flame, fuelled by butane, and does not require the ongoing intervention of the user to produce a continuous flame. In 2023, VFRS expressed public safety and fire risk concerns related to the increased frequency of smoker material related fires and asked the Chief Licence Inspector to explore potential regulations.

Staff recommend amendments to the Licence By-law to regulate the retail sale of continuous flame butane lighters as a proactive measure to increase public safety and potentially reduce the number of fire-related incidents involving these products, particularly with respect to unsafe, personal use, as well as to reduce the strain on firefighting resources and prevent the displacement of residents from housing. Butane lighters that require ongoing intervention of the user to produce a continuous flame are not being regulated as they do not pose the same public safety and fire risks.

Staff propose that the Mayor on behalf of Council send letters to the provincial and federal governments in support of regulations for safer continuous flame butane lighters and additional fire safety initiatives.

## Council Authority/Previous Decisions

- [Section 272 of the Vancouver Charter](#) gives the authority to establish terms and conditions of a licence, by by-law, to regulate business activity, prohibiting specific types of business including the sale of specific goods and services.
- [Report - Regulating Exploding Animal Deterrent Devices \(Bear Bangers\) \(July 21, 2020\)](#) Council approved the prohibition on the discharge and retail sale of exploding animal deterrent in Vancouver.
- [Report, Regulating the Sale of Bear Spray \(March 28, 2023\)](#) Council approved recommendations to prohibit the sale of bear spray in Vancouver to anyone under the age of 19 and anyone who does not provide identification.

## City Manager's Comments

The City Manager concurs with the foregoing recommendations. While it would be preferable to manage the hazard posed by continuous flame butane lighters through provincial or federal regulation, the serious public safety risks associated with the use of these devices in residential settings warrants consideration of a direct response by the City of Vancouver pending any national measures.

## Context and Background

Butane lighters are a handheld torch-style tool that use fuel to create a very hot flame (for examples, see Appendix C). These devices are often adjustable, windproof, refillable and produce consistent high temperatures, making them a popular and efficient option for activities like smoking, culinary practice, metal work, and bartending. Due to their multipurpose nature, the butane lighter has various features to accommodate the needs of the user. The devices that provide the option or ignition system to maintain a continuous flame make them easily prone to accidents. These lighters can be purchased online and in various stores, making them readily available.

VFRS indicates a surge of fire incidents in 2023 in Vancouver (see Appendix D, E), many of which are attributed to smoker materials with a particularly high number of incidents in Single Room Occupancy ('SRO') buildings. The VFRS [2023 Annual Report](#) reflected a 31% increase in structure fires compared to the previous year with 59% caused by smoker materials. SRO residents are 67 times more likely to experience a structure fire than other residents; a result that is significantly influenced by the use of continuous flame lighters in SROs (see Appendix D).

Additionally, there has been a shift in drug consumption methods from injection to inhalation /smoking ("smoking"). According to the [BC Coroners Service](#), in 2023 smoking was the largest mode of consumption of substances (65%). Compared to injecting, smoking can reduce the risk of some health-related harms, like HIV and forms of Hepatitis.<sup>1</sup> The continuous flame butane lighter is a common tool used by people who regularly smoke opioids or stimulants.

## Discussion

Staff completed research on butane lighters and the scope of possible regulations including features of the device and type of regulation. The City does not have the authority to prohibit the use, possession or seizure of butane lighters. The City does have authority through the Licence By-law to prohibit the sale of these devices.

Prohibiting the retail sale of continuous flame butane lighters addresses the risk of unnecessarily restricting access to versions of the devices that have not been deemed a safety concern and continues to provide opportunities for industries that use butane torches on a professional basis. The concerns raised by VFRS are largely in relation to the continuous use feature and unsafe use. All residents will still have access to devices with a manual ignition and release button, addressing the need for public safety with convenience for industry and the public.

Through consultation (see Appendix F) staff heard that there are several industries that use continuous flame butane lighters in a professional capacity, particularly food service. In consultations with health authorities, harm reduction advocacy groups and related peers, staff heard that one of the potential risks of prohibiting the sale of continuous flame butane lighters include that individuals may return to injecting without access to the type of flame produced by butane lighters. Outside of the butane lighter, staff heard there are currently few alternative tools or supplies on the market for purchase to produce a comparable source of flame.

A prohibition on the retail sale would be accomplished through an amendment to the Licence By-law (see Appendix A). Prohibiting the sale on continuous flame butane lighters by retailers located within Vancouver would be a measured, proactive step and begin to respond to the increased fire risk associated with these devices.

### *Additional Fire Safety Measures*

VFRS is advocating at provincial and federal levels of government, including the BC Fire Commissioner and Federal Minister of Health, and fire and rescue services across Canada, to raise concerns on the growing risk posed by continuous flame butane lighters and the need for regulations. Staff are working in partnership to develop education materials on safer smoking and butane lighter fire safety practices for device users and retailers. Staff heard through

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<sup>1</sup> [Tapper, A., Ahern, C., Graveline-Long, Z. et al. The utilization and delivery of safer smoking practices and services: a narrative synthesis of the literature. Harm Reduct J 20, 160 \(2023\).](#)

consultation that there are few educational resources on safer smoking practices particularly with butane lighters. VFRS has also been working with SRO building operators and staff to support fire safety training. Council approved grant funding to the SRO Collaborative to launch a [fire safety preparedness and response program](#), operating in 35 buildings, aimed at improving fire safety in SRO buildings (see [RTS 15419](#) and [RTS 15563](#)). This included safety training walkthroughs with VFRS.

Community members and service providers expressed a need for more spaces to smoke substances safely in Vancouver. The City is advocating with federal and provincial governments to increase access to and availability of outdoor inhalation spaces. Providing alternative spaces for people to use for smoking and promoting safe spaces to use butane lighters could further reduce fire safety risks associated with smoker materials. It was also highlighted that the availability of harm reduction supplies for safer smoking may also address fire safety issues.

### *Advocacy*

While introducing municipal regulations on the retail sale of continuous use butane lighters aims to enhance public safety, there are additional related fire safety concerns, like the prevalence of indoor smoking and the lack of available resources for safer smoking, that may persist. As a result, staff propose the following advocacy to other levels of government:

1. The Mayor send a letter on behalf of Council to the BC Ministers of Mental Health and Addictions, Health, and Housing and the Office of the Fire Commissioner, in support of provincial regulations of continuous use butane lighters and additional fire safety initiatives, including specific measures for supportive housing buildings like [LifeguardLite](#);
2. The Mayor send a letter on behalf of Council to the Federal Ministers of Health, Housing and Public Safety, in support of national approach to regulate the sale of continuous butane lighters through the [Canada Consumer Product Safety Act](#), including removal of the continuous locking mechanism for butane lighters.

### **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications associated with this report's recommendations.

### **Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications associated with this report's recommendations.

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**APPENDIX B**  
**DRAFT By-law to amend the**  
**Ticket Offences By-law No. 9360**  
**regarding continuous flame butane lighters**

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF VANCOUVER, in public meeting, enacts as follows:

1. This By-law amends the indicated provisions and schedules of the Ticket Offences By-law.

2. In Table 3, Council adds a new row at the end of the table as follows:

“

Chief Licence Inspector or Fire Chief	Sell, or offer to sell, continuous flame butane lighters	Section 12.2	\$1,000.00
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”

3. This by-law is to come into force and take effect on June 28, 2024.

ENACTED by Council this      day of      , 2024

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor

\_\_\_\_\_  
City Clerk

### APPENDIX C BUTANE LIGHTER PRODUCT INFORMATION SHEET

**Example of different types of butane lighters available for purchase. This is not an exhaustive list.**

			
<i>continuous flame options available</i>			<i>Does not include a flame lock</i>
<p><b>Micro torch lighter</b></p> <p>These handheld torch lighters are predominantly used for smoking. Common features include continuous use, windproof, safety lock and flame adjuster. These devices have a small refillable fuel chamber.</p>	<p><b>Butane table-top torch</b></p> <p>This is a butane torch for personal use, primarily smoking, handiwork or small culinary. These devices have a larger, refillable fuel chamber, and often have a continuous flame lock, safety lock and adjustable flame features. These devices common include a built-in or removable stand.</p>	<p><b>Industrial culinary torch</b></p> <p>This two-part handheld device is a standardised butane torch used in the commercial kitchen industry. There are options with a continuous flame or manually trigger ignition to accommodate cooking needs. The butane fuel canister is removable when empty. These are not refillable.</p>	<p><b>Micro torch lighter</b></p> <p>This an example of a non-lockable option. Similar to the micro torch with a continuous flame, this handheld device is predominantly used for smoking and small soldering projects. This lighter includes a safety lock and an ignition switch that requires the user to continue pressing the button to maintain the flame.</p>

### APPENDIX D VFRS DATA ON FIRE INCIDENTS INVOLVING BUTANE TORCH LIGHTERS IN VANCOUVER

Figure 1: SRO structure fires causes by smoker materials, 2019 - 2023

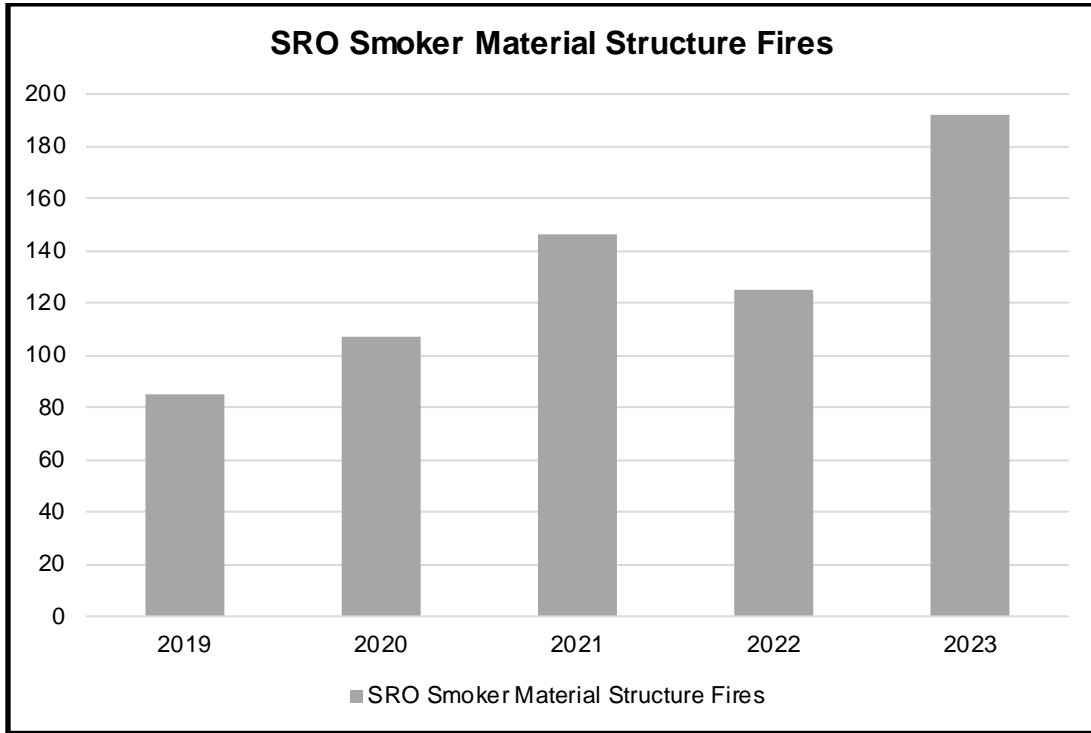
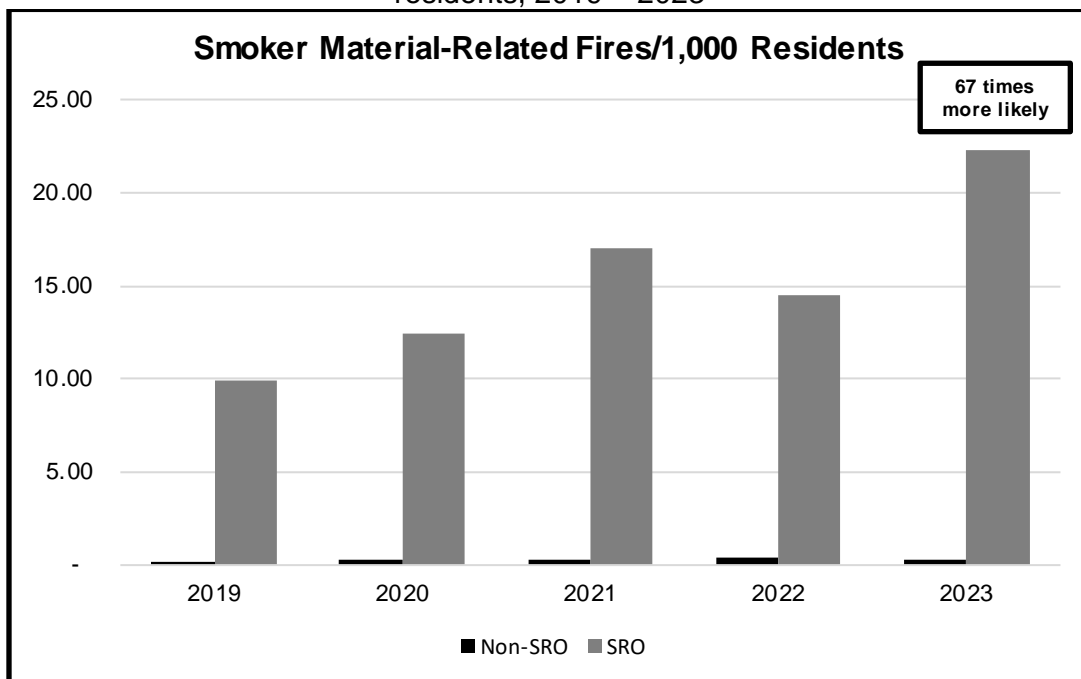


Figure 2: Number of Structure fires cause by smoker materials, Non-SRO residents and SRO residents, 2019 – 2023





## APPENDIX E REPORT SUBMITTED BY VFERS REGARDING FIRE DATA



### Lockable/Torch Fire Report

Vancouver Fire Rescue Services  
Fire Investigations  
900 Heatley Avenue  
Vancouver, B.C. V6A 3S7

#### Introduction

The purpose of this report is to detail information from fire data collected on reportable and nonreportable fires that occurred in 2023 and 2024 and can be associated with lockable and non lockable style torches. The data below represents fires where the investigation concluded that probable cause of the fire was found to support the use of an open flame or smoking material in a general sense.

#### Scope

When the Fire Investigation division collects data it does so within the limited parameters set out by the FDM system. As a result some data that is collected is done so in a “catch-all” format. For example, some fire causation may be determined to be smoking materials undetermined. This means that the evidence presented at the investigation was such that a specific igniting object was not possible but that smoking materials of some kind are suspected to be the cause. This could include: cigarettes, matches, lighters, ashes and torches (lockable). Therefore, this data was included as there is a possibility that an open flame in the form of a torch was used.

It is not always possible to identify a specific igniting object such as a torch to the point of origin of a fire. As a result, the data below includes “catch all” search criteria categories because the possibility of a torch or lighter is still within the realm of probable cause even though it may not have been specifically identified.

#### 2023-2024 (present) Findings

- The total amount of fires where probable cause was found to support that a torch *may* have been the igniting object in 2023 to present day 2024 is **3128**.
- **2130 or 68%** of these fires occurred within the Downtown area including the DTES.
- **356** of these fires occurred in SRO occupancy building.
- **79 Fire-Related** injuries and **6 fire fatalities**.
- Injuries range from light or minor injury to major and death
- The total dollar loss associated with the fires is approximated to be **\$16,785,636**.
- **397** civilians were displaced and received assistance from ESS.

#### Significant Incidents Examples

1: Address redacted

- Crews arrived and found fire in electrical vault.
- 1 male deceased
- Causation: Probable cause to support the careless use of an open flame
- Estimated \$100,000 in loss
- Lockable torch found

2: Address redacted

- Crews arrived and found 15 year old male with severe burns to entire upper body, face and hands. Third degree burns to +50% body
- Male was playing with lighter and isopropyl alcohol with lockable torch
- Male deceased from injuries
- Lockable torch found
- Causation: Probable cause to support the careless use of an open flame

3. Address redacted

- Crews arrived and found deceased male laying on ground.
- Witnesses saw a fully involved male run out of homeless shelter and collapse on ground. Lockable torch found.
- Causation: Probable cause to support the careless use of an open flame

4. Address redacted

- Crews arrived and found female burn patient with significant burns to body
- Patient had 37% burns to body
- Lockable torch found
- Causation: Probable cause to support the careless use of an open flame.

5. Address redacted

- Crews found heavy smoke from 5<sup>th</sup> floor
- Fire in unit. Tenant suffered smoke inhalation and burns to hands and arms. Lockable torch found in locked position.
- Causation: Probable cause to support the careless use of an open flame
- Estimated \$150,000 in loss and 10 displaced residents

### **Torch Availability**

- There are approximately 20 retail stores located in the DTES that sell a variety of lighters and torches. In some areas there will be several retailers located on one block.
- There are several different styles of torches available in both locking and non-locking style. Stores offer 30-50 different models.
- The price range on the torches vary between \$4-5 up to \$40.
- Retailers stated that they will sell approx. 3-10 torch lighters per day.  
Average sales 5/day X 20 Stores = 100 torches sold per day, 700/week or 2800 per month.
- Retailers stated that they will sell 5-10 refillable butane canisters per day.  
Average sales 7/day X 20 Stores = 140 butane refills sold per day, 980/week or 3920 per month.
- It was not clear if there was one particular model that was more popular over another although retailers did say they sold more of the cheaper models.

- Cooking style torches and construction style torches were also available in the majority of the stores visited
- I tried approximately 30 different lockable torch style lighters and 5 of them failed in an unsafe way. One torch sent a flamethrower stream about 2 feet as the butane was not vaporizing. This could have caused significant injury to the user.



## Conclusion

It is clear that torch style lighters play a major role in the contribution to fire loss and injury in the City of Vancouver. The Fire Investigation Division can support that the careless use of an open flame has resulted in several serious injuries and deaths. The careless use of open flame has also resulted in significant dollar loss and damage to private and commercial property.

The volume of torches and butane being sold within the downtown core is also notable considering 41% of all fires VFRS attends are associated with an open flame and are located in the DTES and Downtown core.

Approximately 17% of the torches that I sampled failed to operate safely. A ban or further regulation on torch style lighters would have a direct impact on the improved safety and property of the citizens of Vancouver.

Respectfully submitted,

**Heslop Mike, IAAIFIT**

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## APPENDIX F SALE OF BUTANE TORCH LIGHTERS WITH A CONTINUOUS-USE FLAME LOCK CONSULTATION

### Purpose of consultation:

To obtain feedback on the stakeholder's current use and sale of butane torch lighters, as well as their opinions on regulating the sale of devices with a continuous-use mechanism

<b>Detailed consultation findings with partners stakeholders</b>	
<b>Consulted</b>	<b>Summary of consultation findings</b>
Restaurant and foodservice industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It would have a detrimental effect on the restaurant industry. These style of torches with a continuous locking feature are necessary for some restaurants to operate.</li> <li>- Risk of decrease in productivity. Productivity goes down, labour goes up.</li> <li>- The even distribution of the flame with a continuous locking feature ensures quality control and consistency of product. Concerns for more acquired injuries.</li> <li>- Not a huge impact on the purchase of products if its only sale. Most restaurants are getting these through commercial avenues from restaurant wholesalers</li> </ul>
Plumbing, heating and refrigeration trades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Torches are used for soldering. Most typical type among plumbers use acetylene or MAPP gas. Trade requires torches that burn hotter. If you banned butane torch only impact would be minimal because most service plumbers are using an alternative fuel to butane.</li> <li>- Torches aren't used as much as they used to be. Plumbing industry has shifted to crimp fitting and away from soldering.</li> <li>- Consider including exceptions for licenced contractors. However, some industries do not have a licenced apprenticeship program.</li> </ul>
Retail Council of Canada and distributors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Professionals will have to drive further to get the product.</li> <li>- Vancouver business will be displaced. Sales are transferred over to other stores. The smaller independent stores will likely suffer more. Higher level of government approach required to address the impact.</li> <li>- Possibility of having buyers provide documentation (plumbers, kitchen). Varying degrees of difficulty with that.</li> <li>- Just a few types that are used, mostly standardized. Not in every single kitchen and only selling commercially. There are regulations already on the gas used (i.e. butane and propane)</li> <li>- For wholesalers and distributors, big impact not expected. Not many sold compared to full suite of products. Not everyone is using continuous flame.</li> </ul>
Vancouver Coastal Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Risk of increase injection use if there are regulations on butane torches due to the overdose crisis. More people are smoking. Downstream issue.</li> <li>- Butane torch lighter is necessary to produce to level of heat required to vaporize substances.</li> <li>- Important that regulations happen in stages, major concern about negative impacts if it happens too big, too soon</li> <li>- Holding the ignition can be difficult. Lock is an aid to the process.</li> <li>- Overlapping issue. Need for more outdoor and sanctioned indoor inhalation booths and services.</li> <li>- Education needed around safer smoking with butane torches with fire safety. There's a lot of people who have never got that education when making the transition to smoking.</li> </ul>

Peer Engagement and Advisory Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trends in drug use over the last decade include more people have moved towards smoking.</li> <li>- Some prefer continuous flame due to discomfort associated with continuously pressing down especially if outside in the cold.</li> <li>- Little to no resources for smokers. Most OPS and SCS resources are geared to injection, not a lot of options for smoking.</li> <li>- Need for regulations but requires holistic response to address from all angles When you limit the sale it risks increase in illicit activity. Acceptable if regulated properly, lots of barriers to doing this right though (type, fuel, etc.)</li> <li>- Enforcement might lead to more police interactions</li> <li>- Need for more supervised inhalation sites. Advocate for alternative smoking spaces.</li> <li>- Consider phasing in the ban with measures in place to manage outcomes.</li> <li>- People will better adjust to new products if they're readily available.</li> <li>- In the context of a potential ban, people are likely to find ways of sourcing them and selling them illegally.</li> <li>- Some of the butane lighters are refillable so a ban on retail sales might not address those who already have these lighters and are just refilling them.</li> <li>- Suggest some targeted knowledge translation to bring awareness to the risks and encourage people to shut off the flame immediately after use.</li> </ul>
Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- See attached letter in Appendix G.</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX G LETTER SUBMITTED BY VANDU REGARDING THEIR FEEDBACK



### **Feedback re: Potential regulations on lockable butane lighter sales in Vancouver**

**Date:** Feb. 6/2024

**Prepared by:** VANDU Smokers Group

**Prepared for:** City of Vancouver

#### **Background**

The VANDU Smokers Group is a group of people who primarily smoke their drugs using glass pipes, tinfoil, or other supplies. The Smokers Group was established in the fall of 2023 and winter of 2024 in response to rising rates of drug toxicity death among smokers and a recognition amongst the VANDU Board and membership that smoking had replaced injection as the most common method of drug use. Through regular weekly meetings and peer-to-peer education, the VANDU Smokers Group aims to share established, evidence-based harm reduction strategies with a new, increasingly younger, generation of drug users and develop new ones that specifically address the experiences and harms of smokers.

#### **Feedback Summary**

The VANDU Smokers Group was requested to provide feedback on the potential regulation of butane lighters by the City of Vancouver and discussed this topic on February 6th, 2024. Many of our members used lockable lighters or knew people who used them. There was collective concern that a ban could result in police searching or seizing these lighters and we will not support a ban resulting in increased police interactions. The group was particularly concerned about unhoused residents - that a ban would give police even more excuse to search tents and steal people's possessions.

We've seen increased policing and harassment of homeless people in Crab Park, Oppenheimer, on Downtown Eastside streets and beyond. This results in incredible harm. The City of Vancouver's constant displacement of unhoused people in streets and parks poses a huge risk to people's safety - including fire safety risks. When people with no place to go are decamped we are driven away to more hidden and isolated locations. This leaves us more vulnerable to overdose, violence, arson attacks, and if a fire does happen we are less visible and therefore less likely to receive help. VANDU's Our Streets program provided fire safety training and extinguishers to residents of Hastings Tent City - an important initiative in fire prevention for unhoused people that we urge the city and fire department's continue. Support, don't punish! VANDU and many other groups in the Downtown Eastside have for decades called on the City of Vancouver to provide adequate services to unhoused community members - including public bathrooms and showers, fire extinguishers, accessible storage and warming centers. Permanent housing options, safe and adequate shelter options, warming centers and other infrastructure are nowhere near adequate.

Members of our group also urge the City to address the fire safety risks in buildings in the Downtown Eastside and across Vancouver, ensuring buildings are compliant with city by-laws including the fire by-law and standards of maintenance by-law. Multiple members in different buildings spoke about inadequate fire extinguishers, sprinkler systems, smoke alarms, fire escapes, emergency protocols, functioning elevators, and negligent staff. The Winters Fire killed two people and has had devastating consequences for surviving members and our community. Had fire safety regulations been adequately enforced this could've been avoided. We know there are many buildings in the Downtown Eastside and Vancouver with repeated fire code violations, leaving tenants at tremendous risk. We urge the City to bring in harsher consequences and closer regulation over landlords and non-profit housing providers to ensure fire code violations are addressed. Staff at supportive housing should be adequately trained in fire response protocols, and this training should be available and communicated to tenants in an accessible and respectful manner. Tenant-led fire safety and fire watch programs could empower both unhoused people and supportive housing residents to keep our communities safe.

Members brought up guest policies as detrimental to their rights as tenants, to their autonomy, wellbeing, health, and safety. Guest policies were connected to increased risk of fire, burns, and overdose deaths. Members brought up the importance of not using alone, but that guest policies can make this difficult. Members also brought up the lack of inhalation sites for smokers, which would help keep people safer.

VANDU does not support banning the lighters as a solution. Members expressed certainty that people would find a way to lock lighters even if a ban took place and the lighters are likely to continue to be sold but at a higher cost. Members suggested making available lighters that automatically turn off when tilted. Membership also strongly urged providing non-lockable torch lighters available for free as harm reduction supplies which would help reduce the use of lockable lighters.

**Contact:**

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