



# THE CAPITAL AND VANCOUVER ISLAND

Editor: Bryna Hallam > Telephone: 250-380-5333 > Email: localnews@timescolonist.com

## High temperatures hard on the homeless: Our Place

JEFF BELL  
Times Colonist

Temperatures are expected to remain in the high 20s in Victoria and Nanaimo and over 30 C in Port Alberni today — not quite as stifling as in previous few days but still particularly hard on people without homes.

Grant McKenzie of Our Place, which offers services to the street population, said the 90 or so people living outside the agency on Pandora Avenue don't have a lot of shade to retreat to, and the tents many of them use offer little respite from the sun.

"Those tents get really hot," he said. "They can become like saunas."

During the heat wave, Our Place is being "extra vigilant" in checking on people, McKenzie said.

"We're fortunate we have paramedics on staff and outreach workers," he said. "So we go out and we've got a whole load of sunscreen and bottled water."

Those who need to cool off are invited to come inside the building to enjoy the air conditioning or have a shower. "It's just really keeping an eye out," McKenzie said.

Having paramedics to look in

on people is important because they can see if anyone is exhibiting heat-related symptoms, he said, adding regulating body heat is particularly challenging for those who use fentanyl or other opioids.

"If people are opioid users, it can be quite easy for them to curl up in a ball somewhere with the sun beating down on them," he said. "They don't regulate their heat, so it's very easy for people to go into heat stroke."

He said the public often thinks of donating to Our Place when the weather is colder, but the agency spends a lot of money keeping people safe at this time of year, too. "And financial donations are always important so we can buy more water and more sunscreen and things like that."

Contributions can be made at ourplacesociety.com/how-you-can-help/donate/.

Environment Canada meteorologist Armel Castellan said while heat warnings were still in effect around the Island on Tuesday, winds from Juan de Fuca Strait are bringing temperatures down slightly for now, although they're expected to rise again on the weekend.

Twenty-seven daily temperature records were set in B.C. on

Monday, and 25 on Sunday.

On Monday, Campbell River hit 33.4 C, eclipsing the previous record for the day of 33 C, set in 2010, while the Malahat hit 32.3 C, beating the old record of 30.4 for the same day in 2020.

Castellan said Greater Victoria can see a wide range of temperatures on a given day — the ocean's influence on Monday, for example, kept Victoria Harbour at 18 C or 19 C while Victoria International Airport saw temperatures in the high 20s.

The norm for Greater Victoria at this time of year is 22 C.

For farmers such as Terry Michell, recent weather has meant crews have been starting to work earlier in the day and irrigation is going around the clock.

"Young plants that we've planted for the winter need a lot of moisture to keep them from drying out," he said. "It's busy times — it's non-stop."

Michell said it's been a very good year for berries. "At berry season we'd rather be irrigating than trying to fend off the rain."

Lettuce, carrots, onion, beets and cauliflower are also in good supply, Michell said.

"There's a fair amount of things you can find either at the stands or at the grocery store." jbell@timescolonist.com

## B.C. campfire ban set to come into effect Friday at noon

JEFF BELL  
Times Colonist

A province-wide campfire ban is set to take effect at noon Friday as wildfire risk rises along with temperatures.

The B.C. Wildfire Service announced the ban Tuesday.

The campfire ban will apply to every area of the province except the Haida Gwaii Forest District, "which has a somewhat different climate than many other areas," said Jade Richardson, an information officer for the Coastal Fire Centre, which includes Vancouver Island.

The ban applies to all public and private land, except when otherwise specified by a local government bylaw or other statute. It will remain in effect until noon on Oct. 31, or until it is rescinded.

This year has so far been markedly less active for wildfires on the Island than last year, with 46 fires in the Coastal Fire Centre as of Tuesday, 17 of them on the Island.

By the same time in 2023, there had been 131 fires in the Coastal Fire Centre, including 61 on the Island.

There were no wildfires

on the Island as of Tuesday afternoon. The lone wildfire in recent days was a small blaze south of Parksville that was extinguished Monday night.

Relatively cool temperatures this spring and periods of rain have contributed to this year's lower wildfire numbers, but no precipitation is expected in the near future and heat is forecast to continue.

Last year, the province saw its most destructive wildfire season ever, with about 2.84 million hectares burned and more than 33,000 people forced to evacuate their homes.

Penalties for disobeying a campfire ban can include a \$1,150 ticket, while anyone convicted of an offence that leads to court action could face a \$100,000 fine or a year in jail.

In an enforcement blitz during the 2023 wildfire season, the B.C. Conservation Officer Service issued \$8,050 in fines for breaches of the campfire ban and the Wildfire Act in the South Coast and Kootenay regions.

That included five \$1,150 tickets and two other tickets linked to illegal campfires. jbell@timescolonist.com



People flock to the beach at Thetis Lake to beat the heat on Tuesday despite a blue-green algae warning. ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

## Swimmers warned as Thetis Lake hit with blue-green algae bloom

Times Colonist

Swimmers and dog owners are being warned about a blue-green algae bloom at Thetis Lake.

A similar warning was issued last week for Elk and Beaver

lakes. All three are popular swimming lakes.

The advisory was issued by the Capital Regional District in consultation with Island Health. Monitoring of the lakes is ongoing.

Blue-green algae — which appear naturally in lakes, ponds and streams — can produce cyanotoxins that can lead to symptoms such as headaches and abdominal pain in people if the affected water is ingested,

and can cause fatal liver damage in dogs.

Dog owners are being advised to keep their animals on a leash near the lakes to ensure they don't swim in or drink the water.

The algae often creates a visible, blue-green sheen that can look like surface scum on the water, but is not always easy to spot, officials said.

Toxins can be still be present if the sheen isn't visible.

## Firm facing foreign-worker allegations mulls legal action

ROXANNE EGAN-ELLIOTT  
Times Colonist

A Langley-based forestry company with operations in Port Alberni is considering suing the city for damage to the company's reputation, as a result of what it says are false claims that the firm is mistreating foreign temporary workers.

San Group has not filed a lawsuit, but it has put Port Alberni on notice that it may, said Bob Bortolin, vice-president of business development.

The company is facing allegations that it provided accommodation that was in poor condition and lacked running water to temporary foreign workers, something Bortolin said is not true.

"We wanted to make sure our name is cleared. That's the big thing. That's why the owners are even looking at possible legal action," he said.

He said accommodation was not included in the contract with the workers, who were

from Vietnam, but the company decided to provide a trailer as free temporary housing for up to 10 men who were having trouble finding a place to live.

The trailer is on another property owned by the company about 15 kilometres out of the city, he said.

Bottled water was provided to the workers, because the running water was not potable, he said.

When the company found out that more than 10 people were living in the trailer, it decided to start charging \$350 per person per month to cover the costs of water, power and hauling out sewage, he said.

Bortolin said the company believes that a third party may have misled the workers into thinking they would receive free housing and food and a path to permanent residency. Language barriers make communicating with the Vietnamese men challenging, he said.

"There's more to it than meets

the eye," Bortolin said.

The City of Port Alberni issued a brief statement last week saying it had recently been made aware of a complaint involving temporary foreign workers recruited to work in Port Alberni.

"The complaint raised concerns around the living accommodations of the workers. The city immediately notified local authorities when they were made aware of the complaint to investigate the matter. The relevant provincial and federal authorities will address the situation accordingly," the statement said.

The city said in another statement Monday that it had received a letter from San Group about comments it made. The city said it has reviewed the letter and intends to respond.

Questions about the temporary foreign worker program should be directed to the provincial and federal governments and other agencies involved, the city said.

Bortolin said that on Thursday night around 10:30 p.m., RCMP officers and fire officials visited a different property San Group owns in Port Alberni, without authorization and without notifying the company. The visit was captured on video cameras, he said.

Bortolin said authorities were seen arriving at a locked gate and walking around the facility, including going into a room containing electrical equipment that is off limits to most employees because of the hazards of high voltages.

The company would have given authorities access to the entire site if they had asked and come during the day, he said.

"But to have the fire department and the RCMP coming in at that time of day really makes you wonder what's going on," he said.

The city confirmed the visit was related to a 2022 letter the company had received saying no structures on the property

should be used as sleeping quarters.

No one has ever lived on that property, said Bortolin, who emphasized it is not the property where the men were living in a trailer.

Byron Cruz, the migrant workers program co-ordinator for the B.C. Federation of Labour, said he is supporting the men, who are now in Victoria, as they determine their next steps.

They are deciding whether to share their complaints publicly, he said.

Asked if the men are living at the Salvation Army shelter in Victoria, the organization would only say it is assisting several migrant workers who required urgent support, adding: "We ask the public and the media to respect their privacy during this sensitive time. We are collaborating with local authorities, and our collective focus right now is ensuring their well-being and safety." regan-elliott@timescolonist.com