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Community partners take St. Patrick's Day safety messages door-to-door

WATERLOO – Party smart. Party safe. That's the simple point that community partners are promoting to encourage safe and responsible St. Patrick's Day celebrations. From doorknockers to posters and coasters, the message is clear: have fun, but play by the rules.

The City of Waterloo – including Waterloo Fire Rescue and municipal bylaw enforcement – is working together with the Waterloo Regional Police Service, the Region of Waterloo EMS, Wilfrid Laurier University, the Wilfrid Laurier University Students' Union, the University of Waterloo and the University of Waterloo Federation of Students to ensure the safety of those participating in St. Patrick's Day festivities.

Over the years, St. Patrick's Day celebrations have grown in size with thousands of participants gathering on Ezra Street in Waterloo. This year, a privately run event in a licensed tent on Seagram Drive will mean 3,000 fewer people on the street, but public safety remains the top priority.

The partners will take to the streets themselves in a door-knocker campaign March 11 from 7-9 p.m. They will be spreading safety messages and specific tips from police, fire and municipal enforcement that range from "don't drink and drive" and "false fire alarms can result in an invoice from Waterloo Fire Rescue" to the dollar figures for municipal fines associated with excessive noise, littering and excess garbage.

"We are educating students about their roles as Waterloo residents, and educating property owners about their responsibilities," said Allan Seabrooke, commissioner, community services at the City of Waterloo.

There is no licensed street event, and the consumption of alcohol is not permitted in unlicensed public areas.

"We will be maintaining high police presence while employing a firm but fair approach," said Kevin Chalk, deputy chief, Waterloo Regional Police Service. "We will focus much of our attention on behaviour that is disruptive or has the potential to cause harm to others."

Waterloo fire and municipal bylaw enforcement officials have met with property owners and are encouraging those participating to celebrate responsibly.

"We are here to make sure that the day is a safe one," said John Percy, public education officer, Waterloo Fire Rescue. "We'd like to remind people to keep the centre of the roads clear in the event that emergency service vehicles need to respond."

Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of Waterloo and their student unions are partnering in the collaborative efforts to promote safety messages, but because St. Patrick's Day falls on a Monday, their primary message is that students are expected to attend their regularly scheduled classes.

"Laurier is pleased to work closely with the City of Waterloo and other partners in the planning associated with a safe St. Patrick's Day," said David McMurray, vice-president: student affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University. "Our focus is on meaningful social engagement, while prioritizing student and community safety to the highest regard."

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"The University of Waterloo has been actively involved in discussions with community partners and are committed to help safeguard the safety and security of our students, other attendees and area residents," said Chris Read, associate provost: students, University of Waterloo.

Partners will be promoting safety tips on Twitter using the #stpaddyswr. For more information about safety tips, please visit waterloo.ca/stpaddyswr.

Media are welcome to follow the door-knocker campaign and can confirm their participation with Megan Harris at megan.harris@waterloo.ca.

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