EDITOR'S NOTE



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The New Normal

As Fourth of July 2021 approaches, our cover celebrates the increasing post-Covid normalcy which seems within grasp for most of America. At least 29 states that previously required masks in public places have rescinded those measures; eleven states never implemented mask mandates to begin with. The most visible symbol in our individual campaigns to avoid the virus is rapidly disappearing.

Perspectives may diverge when analyzing the larger questions surrounding Covid. What are the true origins of the virus? Did the government sufficiently characterize the threat? To what extent could federal, state, and local health authorities legitimately override constitutional rights? Despite those issues, there can be little argument that our ability to respond with highly effective vaccines in less than a year's time was remarkable. In the midst of widespread death and an uncertain future, resilience prevailed.

But just as the Covid demon may be in retreat, a much more persistent and intractable foe reappears. Its most recent iteration, at least in North America, occurred only days before this issue of *Municipal Lawyer* went to press. Much of the West Coast--and in particular the reliably seasonable cities in the Pacific Northwest--saw temperatures spiking 40 degrees above normal levels. While Seattle at 107 degrees and Portland at 115 degrees were all-time records, they lagged behind the nearly unfathomable roasting visited on a village much further north: Lytton, British Columbia. Sited 195 miles east of Vancouver, on June 28, 2021 the tiny community bordering the Fraser River (population 249 as of 2016) sustained the hottest temperature ever recorded in Canadian history—121 degrees. Two days later, it succumbed to wildfires that erupted spontaneously, destroying every inhabited structure in the village.

Lytton's demise was a small subset of the havoc wreaked across Western Canada. Over the next several days, nearly 500 British Columbians would die in connection with the extreme heat.

That destructive temperature spike was only partially attributable to "climate change." But few experts doubt that greenhouse gases—critical in trapping some of the sun's reflected rays and warming the earth sufficiently to sustain life, but destructive when snaring too much sunlight—played a role. While we can, in 300 days' time, analyze and outmaneuver a deadly, rapidly evolving virus, the massive scope of actions needed to address this much more foreboding problem on a global scale are daunting. IMLA member municipalities are already beginning to pursue climate-friendly strategies while seeking to restrain harmful actors, and will have a major role to play in promoting effective answers.

Here's to a Happy Fourth—and a Happy Canada Day, just passed—and to continued progress in our mutual efforts towards responsible climate policies.

Best regards,

Erich Eiselt