



Assembly of First Nations Emergency Management Forum

SUMMARY REPORT – MARCH 2017





CONTENTS

Executive Summary	2
First Nations Response and Recovery to Recent Emergency Events	3
First Nations Wildfire Evacuation Experiences	5
Case of Sandy Lake First Nation	5
Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC)	5
Strengthening Indigenous Emergency Management in Canada	7
Emergency Management Assistance Program	7
First Nation Emergency Response - Regional Success Stories	8
Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation (OFNTSC)	8
Interlake Reserves Tribal Council (IRTC)	8
Challenges & Gaps in Emergency Management in First Nations	9
Enabling and Empowering First Nations Youth	10
Modernizing Canada's Search and Rescue Governance and Policy Framework	10
Activities Supporting Emergency Management in First Nations	11
Conclusion	12
Forum Recommendations	13



Executive Summary

In recent years, First Nations are reporting more natural disasters including, fires, floods, and tornadoes, and often are not prepared and as a result can suffer long-term effects. There is a pattern of increased frequency and intensity of emergencies throughout Canada.

Disasters are often indiscriminate in their targets, however, when a local First Nation is affected by a natural disaster, these effects are often compounded due to other factors, i.e. remoteness, lack of clean drinking water and lack of resources. It is important for a local First Nation to be prepared in the event of an emergency and to have a thorough and regularly tested emergency plan in place, in order to eliminate risks to individuals in the First Nation.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) held an Emergency Management Forum in Calgary, Alberta, from March 28 to 30, 2017, as an information sharing event. AFN will be developing a First Nations Emergency Strategy in the near future. A proposed date to have the engagement process completed will be in the fall of 2017. Representatives attended from the AFN Emergency Services Unit and from other regions. In addition, the following partners & stakeholders attended and gave presentations: TRANSCAER@ Your Partner in Transportation Safety; Canadian Wildlife Fire Strategy; Starting Community Safety and Preparedness in a Good Way (Canadian Red Cross); Transportation of Dangerous Goods; Save the Children; Emergency Response Assistance Canada (ERAC); Coast Guard, Search and Rescue; and Health Canada.

A national plan is needed, some First Nations have their own emergency plans however it is important to learn from each other. Many First Nations who have experienced an emergency have learned a lot through this first-hand lived experience and can share their knowledge with others. In order to develop a good emergency management plan, it has to be tested in and with the First Nation to address any issues that may come up.

Any bi-lateral agreements must be developed with prior consultation of First Nations to ensure cultural relevance and traditional considerations are incorporated into any proposed strategies.

Before and during an emergency, there are many key players and stakeholders involved, and good communication between all parties is essential to ensure a smooth coordinated effort. Chief and Council, or a specific person assigned to that role, such as an Emergency Coordinator may coordinate the emergency response in a First Nation. The Coordinator will work closely with other organizations, including Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) – previously Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, provincial and federal governments and neighbouring First Nations to ensure that the First Nation has the latest information on the emergency.

Many forum participants stated that communication is still an issue and remains a major problem especially in evacuations. Participants want to see more action from both levels of government, as they often have had to develop their own mitigation plans, in order to deal with emergencies.

An issue that comes up during displacement is the loss of connection to the land and loss of access to traditional foods for Elders. Some First Nations have been waiting years to be relocated back to their



home First Nation. This can lead to significant mental health issues, feelings of isolation and a breakdown of family and community cohesion. In addition, First Nations members face racism and discrimination in the neighboring communities or cities they have been relocated to.

More federal government funding is needed to support additional emergency responders or programming budgets. Funding at the First Nations level must be provided and a champion of emergency management situations is needed. Often First Nations are struggling to get emergency management established and are expected to work on these issues off the side of their desks, in addition to other job duties.

In the work towards the development of an emergency management plan, there are many important aspects to consider. For example, looking at best practices to enhance resilience and the need to improve a better understanding of disaster risks in all sectors of society. There is a need to enhance disaster response capacity and coordination and foster development of new capabilities. Enhancement of collaboration with multiple stakeholders and various partners will be key, as well as utilizing a holistic approach.

Innovation will be critical in enhanced fire situational awareness. Many of the evacuations in First Nations have been related to smoke. There are smoke forecasting products that will predict where the smoke is going to be in 3 - 4 days before it hits. There are other innovative products and strategies currently being developed in the market.

There are many things to consider in developing emergency management planning and it can become a complex, daunting task for many First Nations. However, at the same time, many other First Nations are displaying innovative and advanced planning in this area.

A number of key recommendations emerged during the three day forum which will further inform emergency management planning development. This meeting was able to gather together valuable knowledge and information which is important to developing strong partnerships that works well for future First Nations emergencies. The following summarizes the discussions that occurred during this three day forum under the following themes below.

First Nations Response and Recovery to Recent Emergency Events

Utilizing a cultural perspective and integration of Indigenous wisdom and culture with the involvement of grassroots First Nations members was stated as being important. When Indigenous people are included as decision leaders, they will have the power to create resiliency for their First Nations. Using Indigenous knowledge is a bottom up approach and will incorporate traditional methods. There is empirical evidence that disaster risk prevention needs to include Indigenous knowledge.

Disaster Risk Reduction innovation requires multiple perspectives. For example, at meal times, Elders would appreciate and benefit from eating moose and caribou meat. The involvement of women in disaster risk reduction is critical and families, women and children should be included. The decision-making levels



must consult with First Nations because this is an area of sovereignty globally and in Canada.

In the case of James Bay, a First Nation was flooded out with the loss of two lives and people had to be relocated with perennial flooding every year. Secondly, there were numerous fires (28 homes lost) then in 2005, the First Nation had a water crisis.

The First Nation had a water treatment facility built by ISC but it was not sufficient. Major e-coli occurred in their water supply because cheap water treatment parts and parts were re-used. In October 2005, there were many people, mainly children with skin eruptions, which included impetigo. Doctors were sent up and in a period of three days did 73 house calls. The First Nation had to investigate this and try and figure out what the connection was. A helicopter went up to look at the First Nation water facility, and found a sewage lagoon was adjacent to the water intake pipe of the water facility.

The chlorinators were restored and chlorine was quadrupled to minimize the e-coli as this is what caused the skin problems with the children. The first response was to evacuate and to get expert treatment for the skin rashes. The Chief and Grand Chief contacted Premier Dalton McGuinty because ISC was not doing anything. The Premier ordered an evacuation of the First Nation and sent a bill to the federal government and got an agreement to move the First Nation to a new site.

The federal government sent up a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) team that brought in 140,000 liters of clean drinking water. In the end, with corrective measures, they completely flushed the system and a new water treatment plant (1.5 million dollars) was installed. A promise was made to relocate the First Nation and now 12 years later, they are signing a Framework Agreement. The whole situation was preventable. In 2001, the Ontario Clean Water Agency did a study and they knew that the problems were there. There is a need to look at preventative strategies and determine the best ways for preventing any problems.

In the Manitoba flood of 2011, 7,000 people were flooded out to save the city of Winnipeg. The people were not prepared and thousands were evacuated. Since then, 3,500 people have been repatriated home, while approximately 2,000 are still living in hotels. It is difficult to continue with a normal way of life and practice culture, such as hunting and fishing while living in urban centers. The Interlake Reserves Tribal Council (IRTC) region had anticipated major flooding again this year and are working towards having an emergency coordinator in each of their representative First Nations. They have been developing their own mitigation plans to deal with these situations. Many are tired of the blame game between the federal and provincial governments and want to see more action instead. The First Nations are tired of just meeting and do not feel they are being supported by governments.

In regards to preparedness, the issue of regional partnerships is one of the most important components. The First Nations understand that their relationships with local municipalities will be mutually beneficial and have experienced great success working with various communities and hamlets. In order to be prepared, the First Nations have stated there is a great opportunity in the recovery phase to do an action review. There is a need to ensure it is a constructive conversation that will initiate additional programs developed for their First Nations.



First Nations Wildfire Evacuation Experiences

Case of Sandy Lake First Nation

Evacuations are increasing over time. The goal is to examine how Indigenous residents and First Nations have been affected by wildfire evacuations and identify ways to reduce negative impacts of wildfire evacuations on Indigenous people. Sandy Lake First Nation is a fly in First Nation in North-western Ontario. The objective is to investigate how the First Nation was affected by the 2011 wild fires. A First Nations-based qualitative case study was developed with First Nations participation. Many people were concerned about smoke due to breathing problems.

The organization of the evacuation was impacted due to the lack of a First Nation emergency plan which resulted in some medically vulnerable Elders sent without a caregiver or family. There was a separation of families as stage one evacuees were sent to Sioux Lookout and Thunder Bay, while stage two evacuees were sent to various towns across Ontario and into Manitoba. One of the dominant themes of the interviews was that the evacuation 'displaced and scattered' the First Nations members. This resulted in three major consequences: it made communication and coordination difficult among the agencies, Emergency Management Ontario, ISC, and families; negative effects on family and First Nations cohesion and loss of social support; and lack of satisfaction with meal services and no access to traditional foods.

Approximately 21 people stayed behind to take care of the remaining First Nation, to feed dogs, set up sprinklers, maintain the water treatment plant, and cook for people. The repatriation process took eight days, with stage 2 evacuees returning home after two weeks and Stage 1 after three weeks.

Factors that affected the experience of evacuees included: lack of caregivers, lack of support from homecare staff in the hosting communities, leaving behind medicines and other essentials left or forgotten, etc. The longer term effects included: lingering bad memories, feelings of never again, high level of concern for wildfire risk and disruption cause by it, and increased awareness of risk. The First Nation recommendations based on their experience were identified as:

- ensure an up-to-date evacuation plan;
- ensure resources and personal evacuation planning and preparedness;
- ensure all parties involved in emergency response adhere to principal standards in Ontario's mass evacuation plan;
- maintain family and community unity;
- ensure the importance of family care for frail Elders;
- for the host community to be prepared to address the needs of evacuees; and
- ensure adequate financial support for evacuees.

Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC)

The PAGC have experienced and identified miscommunication, lack of, disrespect and frustration with front-line communication. They feel partnerships with federal and provincial governments are necessary and to visit First Nations for emergency management discussions. First Nations need to be included in



planning as they know the people, territory, protocols and procedures, and can share best practices among First Nations. There are flaws with evacuations, but also solutions to these problems, they include:

ISSUE	SOLUTION
Food – Lack of access to healthy and traditional foods. Evacuees not staying at the evacuation centre have to go there to get food.	Provide nutritious options and traditional foods, and provide family meal allowances.
Community Liaison – no specified role to help look after evacuees.	A liaison role can assist in identifying priority people who require special assistance, etc.
Family Unity – during evacuations sometimes families get split up causing stress and trauma.	Work with a community liaison to help keep families together.
Leadership – there are situations where government makes decisions that negatively impact the First Nation.	Leadership must have authority and be part of decision making during emergency situations, need a Nation to Nation approach.
Training – First Nations are not allowed to fight fires due to no certification, instead government brings in the army or National Defense.	First Nations have experience and would benefit from training to build capacity and resiliency.
Funding – Emergency assistance programs need improvement and ISC funds do not flow directly to the First Nation.	Consult with First Nations to provide recommendations to improve funding program and allow funds to flow directly to First Nations.

PAGC trains First Nations members in the four pillars of emergencies and does not want to tell people how things are done. The invitation must come from the First Nations.

With regards to bi-lateral agreements, First Nations need to be at the table. One of the problems encountered is that they (Province of Saskatchewan) wanted \$1 million as a standby fee. Previously, there was no agreement signed and they would go to assist the First Nations. This funding could have been used to hire emergency coordinators from the First Nations and deliver capacity training. PAGC will continue to push for building capacity and resiliency in First Nations in Saskatchewan.



Strengthening Indigenous Emergency Management in Canada

Emergency management is a shared responsibility that involves the First Nation, municipality and is individualistic. Everyone in Canada has to play a role in the challenges and in finding a solution, including working in collaboration with each other and hope that these discussions create partnerships.

The Assembly of First Nations approach has been to include the federal family and this discussion is going to be made from a federal point of view. It is by no means a comprehensive approach. The Prime Minister is looking to renew his government's commitment to strengthen a Nation-to-Nation partnership and we will be seeking some feedback.

In September 2016, Public Safety Canada partnered with ISC to identify some of the key issues, following a request by Ministers to put together a "gap analysis" report. Four key themes were identified:

- need for capacity building;
- strengthening governance;
- relationship building - multiple initiatives can be linked together; and
- cultural awareness

There has been renewed interest in engagement and are seeking tangible solutions. There have been a few initial opportunities that Public Safety Canada has had in understanding those gaps, as well as participating in forums such as the Disaster Risk conference in Banff, which will be another opportunity. In examining infrastructure, there is a need to look at critical infrastructure as the key needs, such as schools where First Nations-based engagement often occurs. Currently, there is more understanding that this is a complicated relationship when it comes to bringing forward all aspects of the First Nation.

Emergency Management Assistance Program (EMAP)

The resiliency of many First Nations has been eroded over time. There are increasing costs of natural hazard emergencies. First Nations in Manitoba experience the most emergencies, particularly with flooding. ISC is a federal lead and sole pillar for emergency management.

In 2004, ISC's EMAP became the single window for First Nations to secure funding for emergency costs, including those previously funded under Public Safety's Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements. EMAP reimburses First Nations, provincial and territorial governments, and non-government organizations for eligible costs incurred in the delivery of emergency management services on reserves. ISC's emergency management program has annual approximate amounts for various disasters and each year the cost of the disasters exceeds that amount. The result is, every year, ISC asks for more money, thus there is a need to invest more in prevention. There is an annual call for proposals every year.



First Nation Emergency Response - Regional Success Stories

Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation (OFNTSC)

OFNTSC Emergency Planning Program has been involved in emergency planning preparedness training in Ontario for the past seven years. They have successfully worked at building First Nations strengths and assisting them through the realities and challenges they face. They bring industry standard information in a culturally friendly and interactive learning way. They have designed their own training materials while creating consistency across the province. They added one point to the four usual points of emergency management, "First Nations recovery".

OFNTSC runs the full spectrum of infrastructure needs for First Nations. The services they provide include: communications, emergency management, engineering, environment, fire safety, fuel systems management, etc. Distribution in Ontario includes all 133 Ontario First Nations and 16 Tribal Councils. Since 2010 the program has grown from a static plan to a comprehensive multi-faceted participatory training model. It ranges from Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment through Recovery.

OFNTSC wants to ensure that those who are utilizing their education materials have taken the proper courses provided by the trainers. Training helps First Nations develop, train with best practices, and reflect upon their unique situations. OFNTSC continues to tailor and adapt to the First Nations feedback and needs when assisting them to exercise their Master Emergency Response Plans. OFNTSC strives to have a holistic approach when it comes to First Nations. Emergencies happen usually in inclement weather and it is important to acknowledge the impact of climate change.

Interlake Reserves Tribal Council (IRTC)

First Nations focus on being proactive in emergency management. This is reflected in the wisdom and traditional knowledge from one of their Elders, who would observe that the beavers would build a higher than usual hut or dam and know that there would be floods.

The IRTC consists of a partnership of six First Nations working together to advance their collective well-being. The original mandate was to provide service delivery to the First Nations and to support each First Nation, with a focus on growth, jobs and opportunity. The flood of 2011 in Manitoba resulted in over 5,000 people being evacuated from their area. In addition to floods they also face wind storms, snow/ice storms, forest fires, and pipeline and industry disasters.

Some of their proactive emergency management solutions include:

- Development of own Emergency Operations Command Centre.
- Purchasing of \$5 million of Tiger Dams to address perennial flooding.



- Hiring of Emergency Management Coordinators.
- Training in emergency preparedness, mitigation, education and awareness.
- Since 2016 over 100 trainees from the IRTC member First Nations.
- Ensure safety, security and monitoring of emergency equipment.
- Developing partnerships such as Red Cross and Save the Children.

IRTC found that the documentation of First Nations evacuees' stories is key to good emergency response planning, transparency and preparedness. Strategies are shared to ensure the problems and challenges that happened previously do not happen again. IRTC engages with all members of the First Nation including, Elders, youth, men and women, and Métis communities, to better understand the First Nations needs and emergency management capacity.

IRTC ensures that emergency response plans will include at minimum, the following components: notification and activation procedures; list of resources; products and hazards; detection and mitigation procedures; and highly sensitive areas. Meetings occur regularly to discuss and provide updates, and have found positive solutions through public and private partnerships.

Challenges & Gaps in Emergency Management in First Nations

The Red Cross started to look at where they provided services and found there was a large gap in Alberta that was not being serviced. In the areas that were not serviced, there was a higher suicide rate, higher risk of disaster and higher infant mortality rate, etc. By the 1990's they were developing a formal strategy to increase engagement with First Nations. In 2007, this was the first time Red Cross signed a memorandum with the AFN and other national relationships were established. In 2011, and the Red Cross started to look at a national engagement plan.

In one example, the Red Cross connected a First Nation with required items that would fill those gaps in an emergency. One First Nation wanted sand bagging machines and the Red Cross connected this First Nation with a contact person that could help them. Once Red Cross has been engaged, they will have a conversation with the First Nation and ask them what do they need from the Red Cross? From there the conversation will go to where do you want your people to go? Red Cross will also support the Chief and Council with messaging so they can inform their people.

When it comes to recovery and evacuation needs to transition from short term (30 days) to longer-term, the Red Cross has a plan for that. What is working is open and respectful communication, willingness to work toward shared goals, understanding of roles and responsibility and relationships built on mutual respect.



Enabling and Empowering First Nations Youth

Save the Children Canada is part of a global organization that focusses on the unique needs of children in emergencies and the importance of incorporating children into emergency preparedness, recovery and response. Children are drastically affected by emergencies, both physically and emotionally. Emergency planning often has gaps when it comes to children who are often described in a general category of “vulnerable”.

The organization is new to Canada and are currently working to build partnerships while strengthening resilience and self-determination, as this is about First Nations-ownership. They have worked with First Nations in three provinces to reach almost 4,000 children. They provide train the trainer workshops, teacher workshops, prep rallies, supply children with emergency backpacks and equipment for First Nations to set up their own child friendly spaces. They also help develop or update emergency preparedness plans and child safeguarding policies and procedures.

They encourage First Nations to understand the unique needs of children and to understand and plan for things like gender, disabilities, mental health issues, and pre-existing trauma. They believe in involving children as they are great at building First Nations preparedness.

Modernizing Canada’s Search and Rescue Governance and Policy Framework

What is Search and Rescue (SAR)? SAR comprises the search for, and provision of aid to, persons, ships or other craft, which are, or feared to be, in distress or imminent danger. There are three distinct types of SAR incidents: Aeronautical SAR Incident; Maritime SAR Incident; and Ground SAR Incident. The Canadian SAR system responds to approximately 18,000 - 20,000 incidents on an annual basis.

In 1986, Canada created the National Search and Rescue Program (NSP) to integrate the activities of various organizations with individual SAR responsibilities to provide a whole of government approach to SAR delivery in Canada. The program was transferred to Public Safety Canada in 2015.

The program remains formally undefined and past reviews and audits have identified gaps in governance and policy framework. There is opportunity to align the program within the broader Emergency Management Framework. To start the conversation with stakeholders a discussion paper was developed for feedback. Public Safety has reached out to various interested stakeholders including police forces with jurisdiction, First Nations via the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association and municipalities etc.

A sample of what they have heard includes:

- Create a unified, single governance system that recognizes separate domains (ground, air, marine) and supports/establishes working groups and committees.
- The framework should reflect past experiences, the current environment, and future trends.



- Need for a national policy that covers and provides support to all those involved in the delivery of SAR services.
- Broaden jurisdiction to include First Nations, non-governmental organizations, police forces of jurisdiction, and municipalities.

Next steps include finalizing stakeholder First Nations consultations, development of the framework and endorsement of the framework from federal, provincial and territorial governments.

Activities Supporting Emergency Management in First Nations

Alberta has been providing emergency management services to Alberta First Nations for more than 20 years. The First Nations Emergency Management Team objective is to empower First Nations to manage their own events. Field Officers are deployed to events but do not take over, as First Nations have been able to manage the events on their own through proactive training and coordination. They do their own registration and tracking of the evacuees.

When an event happens on reserve First Nation, the Alberta First Nations Emergency Management team will deal with the funding, that makes the process go quicker. Issues to consider in supporting emergency management in First Nations include:

- Leadership roles and responsibilities is important, who does what, is there a plan, does the Emergency Management Committee have the full support of Chief and Council? What should Chief and Council focus on? Get them to talk to the federal and provincial governments, as they have to back up the emergency plan with funds.
- There should be a basic emergency management manual, this demonstrates the difference between an event and an emergency. If you know the roles and responsibilities, you will be able to deal with situations much more easily.
- First Nations should take an emergency social services course that will address how are you going to evacuate people? Who will do it? Everything needs to be planned out so that if a situation happens, you will be prepared.
- There should be a designated emergency coordination center, this is where the committee discuss and plan how they are going to coordinate and be aware of what is going on. It should be select people that give briefings or it can get overwhelming.
- Finally Nations helping Nations, First Nations people can come together and help each other, whether through sharing best practices or lessons learned or through hosting a First Nation that has had to be evacuated.



Conclusion

Indigenous Services Canada's Emergency Management Assistance Program works with First Nations, but often the funding falls short. There is great need for support as natural disasters are increasing in frequency and severity each year due to climate change, and First Nations must have adequate and appropriate support in building their capacity, offering training and protecting their critical infrastructure.

The safety and security of individuals and First Nations is important to First Nations leadership and through strategic engagement and good communication with key partners and stakeholders, a proper emergency management plan can be established.

Effective emergency planning must involve the Elders as appropriate, and strives to incorporate traditional knowledge into any planning and strategy development. There is a critical need to consider the long term and mental health effects that may occur in evacuees after an emergency, i.e. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression or anxiety. First Nations have stated the underlying intergenerational trauma in their First Nations is heightened and worsened during an emergency situation, and requires safeguards to be put in place with effective emergency management strategies and planning in order to mitigate the risk of harm.



Forum Recommendations

1. Recommendation to have an annual meeting on Emergency Management Planning.
2. Recommendation to utilize First Nations people during an emergency situation, as they know their First Nation and the people that reside there, i.e. registration during evacuations.
3. Documentation of First Nations evacuee testimonials to inform and guide future emergency planning. This also helps in understanding the First Nation and emergency management capacity.
4. Suggestion to create an Indigenous Forest Fire Association that is culturally relevant and self-sustainable so there is not a need to rely on provincial assistance.
5. Ensure up to date evacuation plans for future emergencies.
6. First Nations must be consulted in the development of all government strategies before implementation.
7. Greater coordination of mental health services and other support services and professionals such as therapists. Intergenerational trauma must be considered during times of emergencies to provide essential supports.
8. Traditional knowledge must be considered in the control of wild fires and all aspects of emergency planning. Traditionally, First Nations knew how to survive wildfires and looked after their traditional territory.
9. Government and agencies must work with First Nations to relocate evacuees back to their home First Nation in a timely manner.
10. Government(s) to examine possible relocation of a First Nation, for those that experience perennial flooding.
11. Need support from the federal government to fund on-reserve fully equipped and trained fire departments.
12. Conduct a cost analysis study on emergencies and evacuations between First Nations and non-First Nations. Focus to include what was allocated and timeline for reimbursements to First Nations, i.e. Fort McMurray compared to First Nations.

