

PROTECTING CANADIANS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

THE 2010 AGENDA FOR ACTION

No job is more important than protecting the lives and safety of Canadians. There is not a Canadian family whose life has not been touched by the dedication, commitment and courage of those who go beyond the call of duty to aid those in distress.

The Minister of Public Safety made that important observation on September 13, 2009 while delivering the keynote address at the sixth annual national Memorial Ceremony on Parliament Hill to honour Canada's fallen firefighters.

The Government of Canada has stated repeatedly that it has a major role to play in ensuring the safety of Canadians. Two notable examples are the October 2007 and November 2008 Speeches from the Throne, which stated respectively as follows:

- *Canadians feel less safe today and rightly worry about the security of their neighbourhoods and the country. There is no greater responsibility for a government than to protect this right to safety and security.*
- *Canadians need to be assured that they are safe in their homes and communities.*

It is clear the Government of Canada recognizes that it has a role to play in protecting the citizens of Canada. It is equally clear that this role extends far beyond handing off its responsibilities to other levels of government.

This 2010 Agenda for Action has been prepared by the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) to assist the Government of Canada in supporting those who work diligently to reduce the likelihood and impact of unwanted events and continue to “go beyond the call of duty to aid those in distress.”

ABOUT THE CANADIAN FIRE SERVICES

Most issues involving protection of the lives and safety of Canadians must initially be addressed by emergency responders at the community level. Almost inevitably, the emergency responders arriving first at the scene of an incident are the Fire Services.

In earlier days, the role of the Fire Services was overwhelmingly focused on fire prevention and fire protection. Over time, that role has evolved significantly. It is regularly estimated within the Fire Services that about two-thirds to three-quarters of the incidents to which they respond do not involve fire.

Traditional responsibilities for fire prevention and fire protection have been expanded to include: accident responses of every description and kind (air, rail, highway, construction, domestic, etc.); health response (day-to-day medical, SARS, etc); natural

disasters (floods, tornadoes, ice storms, etc.); rescues on land and water (building collapses, subway disasters, highway and rail disasters, etc.); and all-hazards and materials issues (highway, rail, storage, nuclear facility, etc.). While Canada has not yet experienced a terrorist attack, firefighters would become the front-line soldiers in the event of such an incident.

Canadian Fire Services demographics are:

(Strip in the pie charts found on page 2 of the 2009 Guide.)

Composite Fire Departments are staffed by a combination of full-time and volunteer personnel.

ABOUT THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

CAFC is a non-partisan national association that was formed in 1908. The 102 years of support that Chief Fire Officers have provided to the Association testify strongly to its ongoing relevance. CAFC's 1,000 members are located in every Canadian Province and Territory. In addition to the Fire Chiefs and other Chief Fire Officers of hundreds of Canadian municipalities, members also include Fire Chiefs from First Nations, industry, airports, seaports, major health care facilities and Canadian Forces establishments. CAFC is the only association that speaks for all elements of the Fire Services in Canada.

This position paper has already indicated there are almost 3,500 Fire Departments in Canada and that about 91 per cent of them are Volunteer Fire Departments. CAFC counts virtually all Fire Chiefs from full-time and composite Departments as its members. The fact that more Fire Chiefs from Volunteer Fire Departments are not members is largely a reflection of the fact that these Departments are, typically, woefully underfunded.

The 2006 Census reported a total Canadian population of just over 31.6 million. The lives and property of over two-thirds of these individuals are protected by CAFC members. That Census also reported 21.5 million people residing in the 28 census metropolitan areas across Canada. CAFC members are the emergency first responders for 97.8 per cent of Canadians residing in the 28 census metropolitan areas.

The issues raised in this Guide Book flow from resolutions adopted by the Association's membership at Annual General Meetings of the organization. These subjects are not self-serving. They reflect the mandate of the Fire Services which, in essence, is to protect the lives and property of Canadians while, concurrently, not unnecessarily imperiling firefighting personnel. CAFC is committed to the belief that every Canadian citizen deserves a basic level of protection.

If Members of Parliament and federal public servants are equally committed to that belief, significant progress can be made toward providing the safety that should be regarded as an inalienable right of all Canadians. The balance of our 2010 Agenda for Action focuses on five key issues that, if properly addressed would significantly increase the basic level of protection for Canadians. They are:

- improve funding for equipping and training the Fire Services;
- provide personal income tax incentives for the Volunteer Fire Services;
- require that all new residential occupancies be equipped with automatic sprinkler systems;
- improve emergency preparedness; and
- establish the Office of the Canadian Fire Advisor.

EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING

Joint Emergency Preparedness Program

Since 2002, CAFC has consistently urged that funding under the Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP) should be increased. JEPP is the primary vehicle used by the Government of Canada “to enhance the national capability to manage all types of emergencies and to ensure a reasonably uniform emergency response and recovery capacity across Canada.”

“Approximately \$8.4 million is made available annually for emergency preparedness, Urban Search and Rescue and critical infrastructure protection projects from coast to coast.” (source - JEPP)

Through JEPP, about \$5 million of that approximate \$8.4 million is made available for emergency preparedness and critical infrastructure protection projects each year. Although CAFC has requested an increase in the level of JEPP funding in each of its pre-budget submissions beginning in 2003, the \$5 million remains in effect and is being eroded in its usefulness with every passing year.

With almost 3,500 Fire Departments in Canada, \$5 million does not go far. When it is recognized that these scarce JEPP dollars must be shared with other orders of government and other municipal departments, the inadequacy of JEPP financing is underscored. For example, at the municipal level, available JEPP money can be distributed not only to the Fire Services but to a wide range of other functions, including police, emergency medical services, public works, waterworks and emergency management organizations.

It is difficult to reconcile the words of the Minister of Public Safety about the “dedication, commitment and courage of those who go beyond the call of duty to aid those in distress” with the reality of an insignificant amount of federal financial support

to help ensure that these individuals are properly equipped to perform their dangerous roles as safely as possible.

JEPP funding is underutilized for two reasons. First, the total amount of available funds is low considering the number of Fire Departments and other agencies across Canada that are competing for these relatively scarce dollars. Second, the application process itself is sufficiently bureaucratic and complex that it discourages most communities from taking advantage of this funding source.

While the primary funding mechanism used by the Government of Canada to support the Canadian Fire Services is JEPP, its relevance has been undermined by federal unwillingness to maintain the available money at required levels. An increased medium-term financial injection is required to restore the meaningfulness of JEPP. It is required to ensure that the Canadian Fire Services are prepared to deal with large-scale emergencies at the municipal level.

The importance of increased levels of JEPP funding to the Fire Services is underscored when it is recognized that community policing in Canada is often provided either by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or the Provincial Police in Ontario and Quebec. As well, local Emergency Medical Services are typically jointly-funded by provincial and municipal governments. It is only the Fire Services that rely almost totally on their municipal governments for financial resources.

In addition to the JEPP funding referred to above, additional amounts have been made available over proscribed periods of time to address CBRNE and USAR issues. The December 2006 report of the Standing Committee on Finance had this to say about CBRNE funding:

“Since the 2001 federal budget provided five years of funding for the purchase of specialized equipment to strengthen Canada’s ability to respond to CBRNE threats, the five year period has now almost expired. The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs identified an acute need for an extension to the program, and recommended that the federal government provide \$10 million annually for four years for the purchase of CBRNE equipment.”

CAFC has gone on record as supporting the Standing Committee on this matter.

The Government of Canada should be committed to:

- **ensuring that the funding available to Fire Departments through JEPP is increased to \$20 million annually over the next four years and ensure that a equitable share of that total can be used by Volunteer Fire Departments for the purposes of training and equipment acquisition.**

- **in conjunction with the provincial/territorial governments, allocating \$10 million annually over the next four years for chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive equipment and training.**
- **Streamlining and making the grant application process more accessible and meaningful.**

It bears noting that, from the perspective of the Fire Services, CBRNE incidents are hazardous materials incidents with criminal intent. The Fire Services recognize and respect the role that law enforcement agencies play at such crime scenes. These law enforcement agencies, however, rely on the experience and ability of the Fire Services to respond with adequate resources and specialized staff to mitigate the haz mat portion of the incident. Both disciplines are required to mitigate CBRNE incidents successfully and safely.

PERSONAL INCOME TAX RELIEF FOR VOLUNTEERS

Since 2003, CAFC has been warning the federal government of widespread problems in many parts of Canada with respect to the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighting personnel. Expansion of infrastructure at the municipal level is an important component of the Government of Canada's plan to address the current economic downturn. Unaddressed problems within the ranks of the volunteer firefighting community could eventually translate into a reduced capacity to protect infrastructure in Canada's smaller communities.

For several years, CAFC has pleaded for personal income tax relief for volunteer firefighters and their officers. Our policy on this matter has been included in several pre-budget submissions; in meetings with Members of Parliament; and in support of various Private Members' Bills.

In 2009, CAFC conducted a survey of its membership on this subject. It resulted in responses from 526 Volunteer Fire Departments and a further 118 Composite Departments. Survey results confirmed CAFC's assertion of recruitment and retention problems in the Volunteer Fire Services as follows:

- 91.9% of Volunteer Fire Departments in Canada are experiencing difficulties in the recruitment of new members; while 85.0% of them are experiencing difficulties retaining existing members;
- 96.5% of Volunteer Fire Departments stated that an element of personal income tax relief would help them with their recruitment difficulties, while 96.3% of them felt such relief would help them with their retention difficulties.

Members of Parliament representing constituencies that include communities protected by Volunteer Fire Department should be aware what will result if Volunteer Fire Departments find themselves with a diminished capacity to protect their constituents. Either their municipalities will have to hire full-time firefighters, which could be prohibitively expensive, or they will have to accept the reality of diminishing protection. Neither of these alternatives should be viewed by any Member of Parliament as being even remotely acceptable.

The citizens and businesses of smaller communities rely on the willingness of employers to allow their employees who are volunteer firefighters to respond to emergencies on extremely short notice. The time that these volunteers spend on emergency responses can cause financial hardship and inconvenience to employers who depend on these same people to operate their businesses.

The Government of Canada and, in particular MPs whose constituencies are at least partially rural, should be committed to:

- **ensuring that volunteer firefighting personnel who have performed at least 200 hours of service in a taxation year, and have a letter from their Department attesting to that fact, will be allowed to deduct \$3,000.00 from their taxable income from any source. The 200 hours of annual service should include time spent in carrying out related duties and in achieving and maintaining a level of training to recognized standards.**
- **providing employers with a \$500.00 tax credit for each employee who is actively serving as a volunteer firefighter or officer. “Employer” should include the self-employed.**

RESIDENTIAL AUTOMATIC SPRINKLER SYSTEMS

CAFC’s policy recommending that all new residential occupancies be equipped with automatic sprinkler systems has been in effect since mid-2004. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has reported that the past three years there were 581,900 housing starts in Canada. CMHC is estimating a further 164,900 starts in 2010. By the end of December this year, Canada will have recorded 746,808 housing starts since January 1, 2007.

The only major community in Canada that requires automatic sprinkler systems in new residences is the City of Vancouver. Since the introduction of its By-law, not a single person in Vancouver has died in a residence protected by an automatic sprinkler system. Virtually every other Canadian who has moved into a new home since the beginning of 2007 is at greater peril. This is a striking example of the danger of delay.

The complexity of new construction techniques, including the use of lightweight building materials, and houses constructed to retain heat, have created new fire hazards, particularly flashovers. Synthetics used in residential furniture, floor coverings and upholstered articles have compounded this enhanced level of peril. The fact that the majority of recent fatalities suffered by the Canadian Fire Services were all caused by flashovers is another compelling reason for the mandatory installation of automatic sprinkler systems. They will result in fewer firefighter fatalities and injuries while reducing the likelihood of fires spreading to adjacent structures.

It has been suggested to CAFC that Members of Parliament lack the political will to require that automatic sprinkler systems be mandatory in a wide range of residential and non-residential constructs. The Association finds it difficult to believe that this observation is accurate. CAFC calls on the Government of Canada to take a major step toward the protection of citizens, including firefighters, by embracing our recommendations designed to make the widespread use of automatic sprinkler systems a reality.

Sprinklers in Existing Non-Residential and High-Rise Residential Buildings

The majority of existing non-residential buildings and existing high-rise residential buildings are not equipped with automatic sprinkler systems. Owners of such buildings, who might otherwise be favourably disposed to the installation of automatic sprinkler systems, are dissuaded from doing so by the cost of such installation.

It has been suggested that it would be impractical to require that all existing non-residential buildings and all existing high-rise buildings be equipped with automatic sprinkler systems. CAFC does not agree with that assertion. Some jurisdictions have already embraced that requirement. Federal government action to ease the ensuing expense to some degree would make this approach even more palatable.

Sprinklers in Other Residential Structures

During the period of record levels of new housing starts, no federal provisions existed to ensure that all new low-rise housing be equipped with automatic sprinkler systems.

Owners of existing low-rise residential buildings, who might otherwise be favourably disposed to the installation of automatic sprinkler systems, are also dissuaded from doing so by the cost of such installation.

Again, it must be recognized that modern building material and new fire loads in structures, combined with synthetic building contents, are creating new and dangerous conditions for building occupants and firefighters alike. Significant research into this ever-growing peril in Canada is long overdue, and federal leadership to address this concern is a necessity.

The Government of Canada should be committed to:

- **amending the federal tax regime to encourage owners of existing non-residential buildings and existing high-rise residential buildings to install automatic sprinkler systems.**
- **amending the Income Tax Act to permit the owners of low-rise residential structures to partially deduct from their payable taxes the cost of equipping their residences with required automatic sprinkler systems.**
- **encouraging the National Research Council to amend the National Building Code to require that all new and existing low-rise residential structures be equipped with automatic sprinkler systems.**

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

It is now more than eight years since the horrific terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City and on the Pentagon near Washington. Since then, Bali, London and Madrid have experienced similar man-made tragedies. At the same time, the 2005 New Orleans hurricane and flooding demonstrated the forces that nature can unleash. The number and severity of natural disasters seem likely to grow as a result of climate change.

Events of this nature are bound to occur in Canada. The Government of Canada has done relatively little to prepare for national emergencies. It must recognize that many of these events will be far beyond the capacity of individual Fire Departments which, in most Canadian communities, are the first line of defence.

The release in early November 2009 of the Auditor General's report on the state of emergency management in Canada confirmed the dangerous shortcomings that have been observed by the Canadian Fire Services for many years.

It is the view of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs that, due to insufficient planning, Canada is ill prepared to deal with major emergency events, be they man-made or naturally occurring. Development of the plan should be regarded as a national priority. Letting a further six years slip through its collective fingers like so much sand is a luxury the Government of Canada cannot afford.

The December 2006 pre-Budget report of the Standing Committee on Finance contained a recommendation that the government should work with relevant stakeholders in order to ensure the development and adequate funding of a national emergency preparedness plan. More than three years later, that recommendation remains ignored. Time is a deadly enemy

The Government of Canada should be committed to:

- **regarding the development of a comprehensive national emergency preparedness plan as a priority.**
- **ensuring that relevant stakeholders be made active participants in the development of this plan.**

In late 2009 and early 2010, Canadians were faced with the realities of the H1N1 influenza pandemic. Most of them had likely little or no knowledge of the pandemics of 1918, 1957 or 1968. The relaxation of tourism and trade restrictions throughout most of the world, combined with high speed air passenger services has meant, however, that H1N1 was likely inevitable.

The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector published by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) recognized the crucial role played at the community level of the Fire Services in a pandemic. Fire Chiefs and firefighters were identified as priority recipients of first doses of vaccine. Unfortunately, that level of priority was widely ignored when the vaccine was being dispensed at the local or regional levels across Canada.

It is important to recognize that, whatever its shortcomings, the PHAC had a plan in place which, in the light of recent experiences, can be further refined. That same degree of planning does not exist in many other areas of emergency preparedness for which the Government of Canada is responsible, as the 2010 Agenda for Action demonstrates.

CANADIAN FIRE ADVISOR

CAFC's policy recommending creation of the Office of the Canadian Fire Advisor was adopted at our 2004 Annual Meeting. In the four-and-a-half years since, that policy has been presented countless times, including to senior officials at Public Safety Canada; to the Standing Committee on Finance; and, to many individual Members of Parliament.

The appointment of a Canadian Fire Advisor is regarded by CAFC as the single most important action that the federal government could take to improve the protection of Canadians. Yet, the official federal government response has been one of inaction.

The contents of our Agenda for Action demonstrate clearly how important public safety issues identified and advanced by CAFC have been virtually ignored, mainly by Public Safety Canada. The Auditor General's November 2009 report starkly confirms this fact.

The size and technical complexity of events facing the Fire Services have changed significantly. Densely populated urban areas come into direct contact with the forces of nature (Kelowna Wild Fire); trains and trucks regularly transport hazardous materials

through most Canadian municipalities; and words such as “Avian Flu” have entered our vocabulary. All are signs to the Fire Services that the range of responses that Canadians are expecting of them will continue to expand.

There is a need for the Fire Services to co-ordinate and standardize their approaches to training and equipment to the greatest extent possible. Faced with major emergencies in the future, it will be imperative for the Fire Services to work collaboratively and inclusively with the Provinces and Territories. The Canadian Fire Advisor (CFA) could make an important contribution by ensuring a strategic co-ordinated approach to planning across the nation.

The function of the CFA should include:

- a) national coordinator for the Fire Service for emergency preparedness: Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRNE) incidents and Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) responses, etc.);
- b) responsibility for national fire training standards, fire prevention and education; coordinating body for provincial fire prevention activities. Developing strategies on a National level for Fire Prevention in Canada;
- c) responsibility for co-ordinating a National response by the Fire Service to emergencies, both within Canada and internationally;
- d) serve as a national link for the Provincial Fire Marshals/Commissioners;
- e) ensure that national fire-related statistics are compiled and distributed in a timely and standardized manner; and
- f) represent the interests of the Canadian Fire Services with respect to the National Building Code and the National Fire Code.

Support for the creation of the Office of the Canadian Fire Advisor extends well beyond CAFC. Other national organizations favouring the CFA include:

- the International Association of Fire Fighters;
- the Canadian Volunteer Fire Services Association;
- the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Foundation;
- the Canadian Council of Fire Marshals and Fire Commissioners;
- the Federation of Canadian Municipalities; and.
- the National Council of Women.

The Government of Canada should be committed to:

- **establishing the Office of the Canadian Fire Advisor.**

