

Canadian Fire Chiefs Ask Federal Parties to State Position on Fire Services Issues

For immediate release

OTTAWA, May 2, 2007 – Leaders of national political parties are being challenged to state their positions on a number of federal issues of concern to the Canadian Fire Services as they prepare their election platforms.

Ontario Fire Marshal Pat Burke, President of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) has sent letters to leaders of the major parties, stating in part: “As you prepare your platforms for the upcoming election, you must address urgent concerns of the first responders, the Fire Services, who play a critical role in protecting the lives and property of Canadians. Over 100,000 firefighters, their families, and the neighbours who rely on them across Canada will be watching closely to see how you plan to address their concerns, should you form the next government.”

CAFC concerns include:

Creation of a National Fire Advisor (NFA) to establish and monitor national fire statistics, training standards, coordinate emergency preparedness and provincial fire prevention activities, and act as a national link for provincial fire marshals and commissioners. The NFA would also be responsible for liaison with federal government departments and agencies, including the military, on emergency preparedness and response for matters like large-scale floods, earthquakes or terrorist acts involving chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) incidents. Other national organizations sharing CAFC’s demand for an NFA include the International Association of Fire Fighters, the Canadian Volunteer Fire Services Association and the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Foundation.

Tax incentives for volunteer fire services to recognize the personal sacrifice of these firefighters, and to address growing problems of recruitment and retention. More than 91 per cent of Canadian fire departments are served exclusively by volunteer firefighters and officers. In rural and remote areas they are the backbone of front-line responders in emergencies which include not only fires, but vehicle accidents, spills of hazardous materials, floods, ice storms and other natural or man-made incidents. Volunteer fire fighters face significant risk to personal safety, as well as financial hardship in terms of lost employment time. CAFC wants the federal government to provide a \$3000 tax credit for volunteers who have performed at least 200 hours of work in a taxation year.

Mandatory requirement for automatic sprinkler systems in residential and non-residential buildings, especially new construction. New construction techniques including use of lightweight building materials and heat retention techniques have created new hazards, both for residents and firefighters. A fire doubles in size every minute and automated sprinkler systems would offer a major protection as occupants evacuate and fire services race to the site.

Equipping the Fire Services to national standards through increased funding for the Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP). The program currently provides five million dollars annually “to ensure a reasonably uniform emergency response to all types of emergencies from coast to coast.” With almost 3500 fire departments across Canada, five million dollars are quite inadequate to ensure consistency in the increasingly more technical equipment needed by firefighters to protect their own lives and those of Canadians. CAFC is asking that JEPP funding be increased by \$20 million over the next four years, with a fixed percentage of that total set aside for the exclusive use of volunteer fire departments for training and equipment purchase.

In the face of the growing terrorist threat, CAFC also wants federal, provincial and territorial governments to allocate \$10 million annually over the next four years for equipment and training to deal with chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) emergencies.

Development of a national emergency preparedness plan, as called for by the Standing Committee on Finance. The number and severity of man-made and natural disasters is growing around the world and such events are bound to occur in Canada. Fire Chiefs seek a national emergency preparedness plan that pays heed to response capability and addresses the fact that little funding has found its way down to the response community who are expected to execute the “plan”.

For details of the CAFC Election Platform please visit www.cafc.ca

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