

CANADA'S FIRE CHIEFS SEEK FEDERAL HELP IN ENSURING BASIC PROTECTION OF CANADIANS

For Immediate Release

OTTAWA, October 29, 2009 – The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) today told the Standing Committee on Finance that the federal government has an important financial role to play in ensuring a basic level of protection for citizens against fire and other dangers.

Personal Tax Relief for Volunteer Firefighters is Imperative

Saint John New Brunswick Fire Chief Robert Simonds, First Vice-President of CAFC, informed the Committee that 78 per cent of Canada's 108,000 Fire Services personnel are volunteers and pointed out that "in no other Canadian emergency first responder service do volunteers play a more significant role."

A survey carried out this summer by CAFC revealed that Canada's Volunteer Fire Service is under considerable stress. Reasons range from an inability for these firefighters to find work close to where their volunteer services are needed, aging local populations, inadequate reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses like gasoline for their own vehicles when needed for emergency calls, and competing family demands. Personal tax relief for volunteers was viewed by over 95 per cent of Chiefs of Volunteer Fire Departments as the single most important way to help address problems of faltering recruitment and retention.

Increased Funding for Joint Emergency Preparedness Urgently Needed

Chief Simonds told the Standing Committee that the \$5 million in annual funding for the Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP) is inadequate. The fund is shared among Canada's 3500 Fire Departments and a wide range of other municipal and provincial/territorial services, including police, emergency medical services, and public works.

"CAFC has been asking the government to increase JEPP funding since 2003 and to designate a portion for Fire Services, but without success. The chronic underfunding is worse now in the face of inflation and expanding populations in need of protection," said Chief Simonds, adding that the government needs to allocate at least \$20 million in annual JEPP funding for the use of Fire Departments.

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