

New Developments in Emergency Preparedness in Alberta

Following the 2011 Slave Lake wildfires, the Alberta government introduced several changes to Alberta's emergency preparedness system in Alberta under government's plan to improve Public Safety Governance. Many were already in development or being planned. The recommendations in the KPMG report *Lesser Slave Lake Regional Urban Interface Wildfire Lessons Learned Report* align with these initiatives, some of which include:

- The steps taken during the response to the Slave Lake wildfires were thoroughly assessed and reviewed (including the evacuation, reception centre coordination, and re-entry). The best practices have been utilized during more recent emergency events in the province, such as the Mackenzie County wildfires in northern Alberta in 2012.
- The *Emergency Management Act* was amended in 2011 to support local authorities establishing regional approaches to emergency management. With this amendment there are now four approaches for communities to take with regionalizing:
 - mutual aid agreements reinforced by regional Emergency Operations Centers, plans and exercises;
 - creating a Regional Services Commission through legislation;
 - creating a Regional Emergency Management committee through a ministerial order; or
 - a summer village may delegate its powers to another local authority that agrees to accept the responsibility.
- Alberta's Emergency Alert system was upgraded in 2011 to make use of the latest technology to send out critical, life-saving information to Albertans over the internet, radio, television, and social media. The new system is unique in North America. It empowers local communities to issue alerts and quickly get emergency information directly to the public.
- Roles and responsibilities have been clarified among local and provincial public safety partners.
- A comprehensive review of provincial emergency management training programs available through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency for municipalities and First Nations has been completed, with new courses and modules being made available.

- Funding has been made available to assist communities in introducing collaborative and regional approaches to emergency management.
- The Alberta Emergency Management Agency has recruited and trained additional provincial government personnel to be available to assist in an emergency;
- The Alberta government is supporting communities in identifying, mitigating and preparing for risks through programs such as FireSmart and Flood Risk mapping.
- A cross-ministry team is developing plans that will improve the Alberta government's ability to support communities in providing social services during emergencies, including the management of personal information. This work will include development of a provincial policy for managing donations.
- The province's Disaster Recovery Programs have been improved to provide easier access to information and steps are being taken to enable applicants to better track the status of their claims.
- Use of the Incident Command System has continued to expand since the Slave Lake wildfires. It has been fully implemented within the Provincial Operations Centre and by all key public safety ministries. It is also now employed by local authorities covering 89 percent of Albertans, all emergency medical services, all law enforcement in the province, and by many fire services.