

TO: UBCM Executive
FROM: UBCM Staff
DATE: April 23, 2004
RE: **FIRESTORM 2003 PROVINCIAL REVIEW**

ITEM #3(h)

May 7, 2004

EXECUTIVE AGENDA

1. DECISION REQUEST

The report is for information at this time.

2. BACKGROUND

The provincial government released its report “Firestorm 2003 Provincial Review” by former Manitoba Premier Gary Filmon on February 27, 2003. The report examined four basic questions:

- a) Was British Columbia prepared?
- b) How well did emergency systems deal with the situation?
- c) What could be done better in the future?
- d) What action should be taken?

The report made a total of 42 recommendations as measures that might be taken to ensure that the province was better prepared in the future.

The Premier announced on April 17, 2004 that the provincial government intends to implement all 42 of the Filmon Fire Report recommendations, and was putting in place five new fire unit crews, had purchased two more air tankers to supplement its existing fleet of aircraft and was providing a grant of \$3 million dollars to the UBCM to improve interface fire management – fuel management strategies in the urban/wildland interface zones, community sprinklers and local emergency planning.

3. POLICY UPDATE

Legislative/Regulatory Changes

Outlined below are recommendations in the Firestorm report that may require legislative and/or regulatory changes if local government is to take action on them (attached is a complete list of the recommendations made in the Filmon Report):

1. Province to Lead Strategic Plan Development

The provincial government should lead the development of a strategic plan in cooperation with local governments to improve fire prevention in the interface through fuel management. The plan should:

- Require a community protection plan in those communities with a high probability and consequence of fire in the interface zone.
- Be cost shared with local governments.

3. Adopt FireSmart

- a) Municipalities within fire prone areas should formally adopt the FireSmart (Partners in Protection 2003) standard for community protection both for private and public property.
- b) At a minimum, this standard should be applied to all new subdivision developments.

9. Deal With Slash

The province should require all slash within or adjacent to a wildland urban interface to be removed, treated or burned on site to mitigate the surface fuel hazard.

15. Require Wildfire-Proofing Across the Province

The British Columbia government should require municipal and regional governments to implement building codes and land use requirements that have proven useful elsewhere in limiting the impact of interface fires.

16. Make Local Emergency Plans Mandatory

As is the case for municipal governments, regional districts should be required through legislation to provide local emergency plans developed to a provincial standard and maintained to a current status.

42. Deal With Watershed Restoration

The provincial government, in partnership with local governments, should examine watershed restoration as soon as possible, to identify the areas of severe watershed destruction and develop a plan for the protection and rehabilitation of these areas.

The provincial government is in the process of developing a legislative and regulatory package to address these issues.

Other Measures: Impact on Local Government

Outlined below is a list of other recommendations in the 2003 Firestorm Provincial Review which may affect local government directly (attached is a complete list of the recommendations in the Filmon report).

2. Undertake Fuel Treatment Pilot Projects

- a) The provincial government should undertake a series of fuel treatment pilot projects in cooperation with municipal and regional governments in locations of high interface fire risk to demonstrate and prove the social, economic, and ecological costs and benefits of fuel treatments.
- b) The provincial government should commit new funding for its share of the fuel management program.

17. Maximize British Columbia's Firefighting Expertise

Provincial and local governments should ensure both forest firefighters and structural firefighters are cross trained in each other's area of competence.

19. Standardize BCERMS and ICS Use and Training

To gain the full value of BCERMS and the Incident Command System (ICS) it must be universally adopted by all provincial and local government agencies.

Training course material, delivery and examination for ICS should be standardized across organizations.

20. Continuing Education

Maintaining ICS accreditation over time should be dependent on a system of continuing education credits and participation in regularly-scheduled, integrated simulations using ICS.

22. Establish Emergency Communications SWAT Team

To coordinate on-site communications during times of emergency, the province should establish a media communications SWAT team with members from municipal, regional, provincial and federal governments and including other major stakeholders as appropriate.

23. Cooperate on Training

All jurisdictions should consider intensifying inter-agency training efforts, including the use of large-scale interface wildfire simulations, to improve communications.

24. Achieve Emergency Radio Inter-Operability

The British Columbia government should develop and implement a provincial strategy for emergency communications technology focused on moving over time to total inter-operability across agencies throughout the province.

26. Educate the Public about Interface Wildfires

Municipal and regional governments should regularly distribute educational materials to interface residents.

35. Pay for Volunteer Firefighter Training

Training for volunteer firefighters should be funded by municipal and regional governments.

39. Utilize Sprinklers

Communities and homeowners in the interface should be encouraged to invest in methods of self-protection such as sprinklers as soon as possible.

43. Engage Federal Government in Funding Fire Prevention

In the short term, the federal government should examine the possibility of developing a program on a cost-shared basis with provincial and local governments that invests in the fireproofing of interface communities. This investment in prevention will undoubtedly result in a reduction in future damage costs under the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements.

The provincial government is currently looking at what measures it needs to take to implement the above recommendations and how to involve local governments in this process.

2003 FIRESTORM PROVINCIAL REVIEW

Index of Recommendations

Forest Management

- 1. Province to Lead Strategic Plan Development**
- 2. Undertake Fuel Treatment Pilot Projects**
- 3. Adopt FireSmart**
- 4. Look at Insurance Rates**
- 5. Assess Land Use Plans**
- 6. Reduce Fuel Buildup in Parks**
- 7. Ministry of Forests Responsible for Fire Suppression in Parks**
- 8. Use Prescribed Burning**
- 9. Deal With Slash**
- 10. Consider Amending the Annual Allowable Cut**
- 11. Look at Alternatives to Stumpage**
- 12. More Research and Development**
- 13. Retain The Knowledge Base**
- 14. Share Information**

Emergency Management

- 15. Require Wildfire-Proofing Across the Province**
- 16. Make Local Emergency Plans Mandatory**
- 17. Maximize British Columbia's Firefighting Expertise**
- 18. Adopt Automatic Aid**

Command and Control

- 19. Standardize BCERMS and ICS Use and Training**
- 20. Continuing Education**

Communications

- 21. Develop a Crisis Communications Strategy**
- 22. Establish Emergency Communications SWAT Team**
- 23. Cooperate on Training**
- 24. Achieve Emergency Radio Inter-Operability**
- 25. Include Amateur Radio Operators in Emergency Response**
- 26. Educate the Public about Interface Wildfires**

Evacuation

- 27. Allow More Local Decision Making on Evacuations**
- 28. Increase Understanding of the Evacuation Process**

29. Simplify Access to Post-Evacuation Assistance

Resources

- 30. Implement Firefighting Equipment Database**
- 31. Access Local Firefighting Expertise**
- 32. Establish Consistent Pay Rates Province Wide**
- 33. Restore Crews**
- 34. Eliminate Delays**
- 35. Pay for Volunteer Firefighter Training**
- 36. Treat Volunteers as Equals**
- 37. Involve First Nations**
- 38. Provide Better Maps**
- 39. Utilize Sprinklers**

Financial Accountability

- 40. Maintain Financial Accountability of Wildfire Response System**

Post-Emergency Recovery

- 41. Prepare the Recovery Plan Before the Emergency**
- 42. Deal With Watershed Restoration**
- 43. Engage Federal Government in Funding Fire Prevention**

Summary of Recommendations

The Firestorm 2003 Provincial Review Team's recommendations are meant to strengthen and build upon existing efforts, and are complementary to and supportive of the many suggestions coming out of other internal operational reviews conducted by the Forest Protection Branch and the Office of the Fire Commissioner.

The fact that some of the actions we recommend are in some part already underway attests to the effectiveness of British Columbia's emergency response system and its capacity to deal with change. Even so, many activities would benefit by being accelerated and more broadly applied. In other cases, we have suggested new approaches to build on the strength that already exists in the province.

Some of the Review Team's recommendations can be acted upon and implemented quickly. Other recommendations that we have put forth will require additional time and analysis. But at the end of day, they too should be implemented with as much urgency as possible.

Collectively, our recommendations are intended to ensure that all communities in the province are better prepared to deal with interface fires beginning with this year's upcoming fire season.

Forest Management

1. Province to Lead Strategic Plan Development

The provincial government should lead the development of a strategic plan in cooperation with local governments to improve fire prevention in the interface through fuel management. The plan should:

43. Focus on identification of those areas of the province where communities, infrastructure, and watersheds have the greatest potential to be impacted by large-scale fires.
44. Identify and assign fuel management priorities based on threats to human life, property and resource values.
45. Require a community protection plan in those communities with a high probability and consequence of fire in the interface zone.
46. Be cost shared with local governments.
47. Give priority for funding, fire management planning, fuels mitigation, and protection to these areas.

2. Undertake Fuel Treatment Pilot Projects

- a) The provincial government should undertake a series of fuel treatment pilot projects in cooperation with municipal and regional governments in locations of high interface fire risk to demonstrate and prove the social, economic, and ecological costs and benefits of fuel treatments.
- b) The provincial government should commit new funding for its share of the fuel management program.

3. Adopt FireSmart

- a) Municipalities within fire prone areas should formally adopt the FireSmart (Partners in Protection 2003) standard for community protection both for private and public property.
- b) At a minimum, this standard should be applied to all new subdivision developments.

4. Look at Insurance Rates

The insurance industry should encourage and reward, through its rate-setting process, dwellings and communities built to acceptable standards.

5. Assess Land Use Plans

The province should review and amend Land Use Plans and LRMPs to incorporate fire management considerations. Fire experts must be available to influence and participate in land management planning.

6. Reduce Fuel Buildup in Parks

The province should allow selective tree harvesting in provincial parks to reduce fuel buildup.

7. Ministry of Forests Responsible for Fire Suppression in Parks

The Ministry of Forests, Forest Protection Branch should take the lead in suppressing fires in provincial parks, as proposed under the new Wildfire Act.

8. Use Prescribed Burning

The province should establish strictly controlled conditions for using prescribed burning as a fuel management tool.

9. Deal With Slash

The province should require all slash within or adjacent to a wildland urban interface to be removed, treated or burned on site to mitigate the surface fuel hazard.

10. Consider Amending the Annual Allowable Cut

The Ministry of Forests should consider amending Annual Allowable Cut determinations in fire-prone ecosystems to encourage hazard reduction treatments by tenure holders in marginal and uneconomic tree stand areas within the wildland urban interface.

11. Look at Alternatives to Stumpage

The province should investigate alternatives to stumpage as an incentive to encourage the harvest of high-risk low value fuel types.

12. More Research and Development

Industry should undertake research into the use of small diameter trees in non-traditional forest products markets such as energy and bio-fuel.

13. Retain The Knowledge Base

The province and the forest industry must pay particular attention to retaining the existing knowledge about fuel reduction practices and continue to develop and expand that knowledge base.

14. Share Information

Wherever possible, British Columbia should focus on collaboration with North American and other jurisdictions to share knowledge and pursue research.

Emergency Management

15. Require Wildfire-Proofing Across the Province

The British Columbia government should require municipal and regional governments to implement building codes and land use requirements that have proven useful elsewhere in limiting the impact of interface fires.

16. Make Local Emergency Plans Mandatory

As is the case for municipal governments, regional districts should be required through legislation to provide local emergency plans developed to a provincial standard and maintained to a current status.

- Local plans should be based on the British Columbia Emergency Response Management System (BCERMS).
- Plans should be in a standardized format/template consistent across the province, and be made consistent with provincial plans.
- Plans should be developed from an "all hazards" perspective.
- Plans must be practical, comprehensive and updated annually.
- Plans must include mandatory mutual aid agreements among municipal and regional districts.
- Plans must incorporate clear obligations and personal responsibilities of residents living in interface fire hazard areas.
- Ideally, plans should include First Nations involvement.
- Plans must have a communications element that incorporates local media into the disaster response effort.

17. Maximize British Columbia's Firefighting Expertise

- a) Provincial and local governments should ensure both forest firefighters and structural firefighters are cross trained in each other's area of competence.
- b) The province should establish a working group of officials from a broad spectrum of interface fire responder agencies, fire training agencies, fire prevention agencies, persons with firefighting expertise, and other appropriate members to examine best practices relating to interface fires and recommend changes to government.

18. Adopt Automatic Aid

The province should adopt the principle of automatic aid to ensure that emergency services can be delivered in all areas of the province under the mandatory emergency plans.

Command and Control

19. Standardize BCERMS and ICS Use and Training

- a) To gain the full value of BCERMS and the Incident Command System (ICS) it must be universally adopted by all provincial and local government agencies.

-
- b) Training course material, delivery and examination for ICS should be standardized across organizations.
 - c) The province should consider the establishment of a single, province-wide focus for training within British Columbia to achieve:
 - d) Implementation of consistent standards and policies for the Office of the Fire Commissioner, Ministry of Forests, and the Provincial Emergency Program to allow integration from within the province's emergency response structure.
 - e) Development and continual upgrading of a common curriculum for all ICS training in British Columbia.

20. Continuing Education

Maintaining ICS accreditation over time should be dependent on a system of continuing education credits and participation in regularly-scheduled, integrated simulations using ICS.

Communications

21. Develop a Crisis Communications Strategy

The province should immediately undertake the development of a provincial communications strategy and protocol for major emergency events defining the roles and responsibilities of those involved. The strategy should:

- Include the participation of all key stakeholders including the media.
- Establish clear principles and protocols about the release of information.
- Identify how the media and the internet can be used in times of emergency as a technical resource and to disseminate information to the public.

22. Establish Emergency Communications SWAT Team

- a) To coordinate on-site communications during times of emergency, the province should establish a media communications SWAT team with members from municipal, regional, provincial and federal governments and including other major stakeholders as appropriate.
- b) The members of this team would be trained in crisis communications and would serve to facilitate, not stem, the flow of information.

23. Cooperate on Training

All jurisdictions should consider intensifying inter-agency training efforts, including the use of large-scale interface wildfire simulations, to improve communications.

24. Achieve Emergency Radio Inter-Operability

-
- a) The British Columbia government should develop and implement a provincial strategy for emergency communications technology focused on moving over time to total inter-operability across agencies throughout the province.
 - b) Initial activities should include developing a provincial inventory for all fire, police, ambulance, forestry radios and frequencies to ensure that where radio systems are compatible, they can be programmed with common frequencies or talk groups.
 - c) Whenever portable and mobile radios for emergency services are replaced to accommodate narrow banding, they should be replaced with new radios that are inter-operable across agencies.

25. Include Amateur Radio Operators in Emergency Response

- a) All Emergency Operation Centres should include a provision for amateur radio operators, including power and antenna space, in case they are needed.
- b) Communications systems should be regularly exercised to ensure that equipment, policies and procedures are functional.

26. Educate the Public about Interface Wildfires

- a) A cooperative public education program should be undertaken, building on material already available in various British Columbia government departments and agencies, as well as from external sources.
- b) This education campaign must inform interface residents about the risks and their responsibilities in planning and preparing for and responding to interface fires.
- c) The campaign should be delivered to school children as well as adults.
- d) Municipal and regional governments should regularly distribute educational materials to interface residents.
- e) Insurance agents should distribute educational materials with each policy renewal of an interface dwelling.

Evacuation

27. Allow More Local Decision Making on Evacuations

The requirements for issuance and lifting of evacuation orders should be reviewed by the provincial government to ensure that decisions can be made by those people with the best information, closest to the action, who are competent to do so. Decisions should not always be dependent on the Office of the Fire Commissioner in Victoria.

28. Increase Understanding of the Evacuation Process

- a) The province should target greater resources at ensuring better awareness by the public about the stages of evacuation, including the procedures to be followed during an evacuation and after the lifting of an evacuation order, particularly in areas of high interface fire risk.
- b) The procedures and powers of the police should be clarified and the permit re-entry process standardized so that all affected responders, evacuees, media and others understand the process, its logic and the location of the permit issuing authority.

29. Simplify Access to Post-Evacuation Assistance

The appropriate agencies should streamline and simplify registration processes and procedures, making it easier for wildfire evacuees to obtain the basic necessities of life during an already stressful time.

Resources**30. Implement Firefighting Equipment Database**

The Office of the Fire Commissioner should implement a searchable database to maintain a current and accurate province-wide inventory of private and public sector equipment available for fire response.

31. Access Local Firefighting Expertise

- a) The Ministry of Forests, Forest Protection Branch should implement a modern records management system to maintain a current and accurate province-wide inventory of certified forest firefighters available for fire response at the local level.
- b) The Forest Protection Branch should consider some mechanism, other than retaking the S100, that allows past experience in the forest industry or fire fighting to be recognized as equivalent certification, as a means of ensuring adequate local resources are available in times of extreme need.
- c) Pre-emergency preparedness models should be consistently implemented province wide by the Forest Protection Branch.

32. Establish Consistent Pay Rates Province Wide

The Forest Protection Branch and the Office of the Fire Commissioner should ensure that pay rates and payment criteria for firefighting personnel are preestablished, consistent and understood by all parties.

33. Restore Crews

The Forest Protection Branch should restore its Type 1 unit crew complement to 27.

34. Eliminate Delays

As a priority, The Forest Protection Branch should review the Danger Tree Assessment and Removal Process, as well as any other sources of delay, so that fire crews can be dispatched in a safe yet efficient manner to improve fire suppression effectiveness.

35. Pay for Volunteer Firefighter Training

Training for volunteer firefighters should be funded by municipal and regional governments.

36. Treat Volunteers as Equals

Volunteers must be treated as valued team members and fully informed of policies and expectations during emergency events.

37. Involve First Nations

The Ministry of Forests should explore ways to enhance the participation of First Nations in forest fire fighting and fuel load reduction activities.

38. Provide Better Maps

The Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management should accelerate the completion of the major mapping initiative currently being undertaken to ensure it is available for use in future fire seasons.

39. Utilize Sprinklers

Communities and homeowners in the interface should be encouraged to invest in methods of self-protection such as sprinklers as soon as possible.

Financial Accountability

40. Maintain Financial Accountability of Wildfire Response System

Following each major fire season, the provincial government should undertake a program of audits to examine, from a value-for-money perspective, the effectiveness and economy of the financial administration systems used by the Provincial Emergency Program, The Office of the Fire Commissioner, and the Ministry of Forests, Forest Protection Branch.

Post-Emergency Recovery

41. Prepare the Recovery Plan Before the Emergency

Every emergency management plan should include a recovery committee composed of representatives from local government, volunteer and funding agencies, the Provincial Emergency Program, local clergy and affected residents. For each natural disaster, a provincial "umbrella" committee with a designated lead agency should be established for the purpose of collecting donations and allocating awards.

42. Deal With Watershed Restoration

The provincial government, in partnership with local governments, should examine watershed restoration as soon as possible, to identify the areas of severe watershed destruction and develop a plan for the protection and rehabilitation of these areas.

43. Engage Federal Government in Funding Fire Prevention

In the short term, the federal government should examine the possibility of developing a program on a cost-shared basis with provincial and local governments that invests in the fireproofing of interface communities. This investment in prevention will undoubtedly result in a reduction in future damage costs under the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements.