

REPORT ON NEW FIRE SERVICE MODEL

The report on "Public Safety in British Columbia: Transforming the Fire Rescue Service" has been released for review and comment (for complete details of the report see www.fcabc.bc.ca). The final report was prepared by the Fire Services Liaison Group (FSLG) and contains 14 recommendations. These recommendations are prioritized on the basis of immediate objectives and long term objectives for developing a new model for the delivery of fire services. A number of the recommendations call for further studies or development of strategies to implement the suggested changes.

The UBCM supported the Fire Services Liaison Group (FSLG)—which includes representatives from the Fire Chiefs Association of BC, BC Professional Fire Fighters Association, Volunteer Firefighters Association of BC, Fire Prevention Officers Association of BC, and Fire Training Officers Association of BC—in getting financial assistance from the provincial government to undertake a review of the fire service model.

In early consultations with the FSLG, UBCM became concerned that the intent of the review was to impose new requirements on local government to provide mandatory delivery of fire/rescue services (fire suppression, first responder services, rescue services etc.) and that a mandatory minimum training standard be introduced for all fire departments. UBCM indicated early in the discussions that local government could not afford the implementation of these types of measures and that they could have a major impact on the delivery of fire services across the province, and withdrew as an active participant in the report being developed by the FSLG looking at a new model for the delivery of fire services.

A draft report entitled "Proposed Fire/Rescue System Model" was released to members of the fire services community on December 15, 2008 and local governments were also requested to provide input into the process. The report contained 36 recommendations, or elements, as they were identified in the document. UBCM requested local government comments on the report, and based on the comments received, the following issues were identified as high priority;

- Improved Training Delivery – particularly as it relates to volunteer firefighters;
- Improved Liability Protection – provide liability protection to local government when it is responding to a request for fire services outside its local boundaries;
- New Financial Resources – need to enhance the financial resources available to provide fire services, and recognize that the province and other provincial agencies that are benefiting from the delivery of fire services contribute to the cost of these services;
- Creation of a Fire Services Advisory Board.

There were a number of issues raised in the draft report that UBCM saw a need for further consultation on to ensure a clear understanding around the intent of the changes before any action was taken. These included issues such as:

- expansion of the delivery of fire services to include first responder services, motor vehicle accidents, and rescue services;
- implementation of mandatory fire service standards across the province; and
- changing the underlying responsibility and accountability for the delivery of fire services across the province.

The primary service provided by fire departments currently is fire suppression. If this is to be expanded to include other services, and the roles and responsibilities of the various parties is expected to change, it is important to understand whether there is the capacity to undertake these changes. The new report attempts to address some of the concerns raised.

The UBCM Executive has indicated its support for the following recommendations outlined in the report on Transforming the Fire/Rescue Service:

- Recommendation 1: Establish A Fire Services Advisory Board
- Recommendation 4: Support Training, Recruitment and Retention For Volunteer Departments
- Recommendation 7: Investigate Local And Regional Efficiencies
- Recommendation 10: Update Compensation Agreements For Services To Provincial Agencies – the tariffs paid to fire departments for services provided to provincial agencies
- Recommendation 11: Improve Training Opportunities
- Recommendation 13: Research And Develop Best Practices.

The other recommendations in the report will require further discussion and review. UBCM is interested in participating in further discussions through a provincial advisory committee on the issues identified in the report and how they might be implemented in the future. It is anticipated that there will be further opportunity for local government to comment on the recommendations outlined in the report.

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