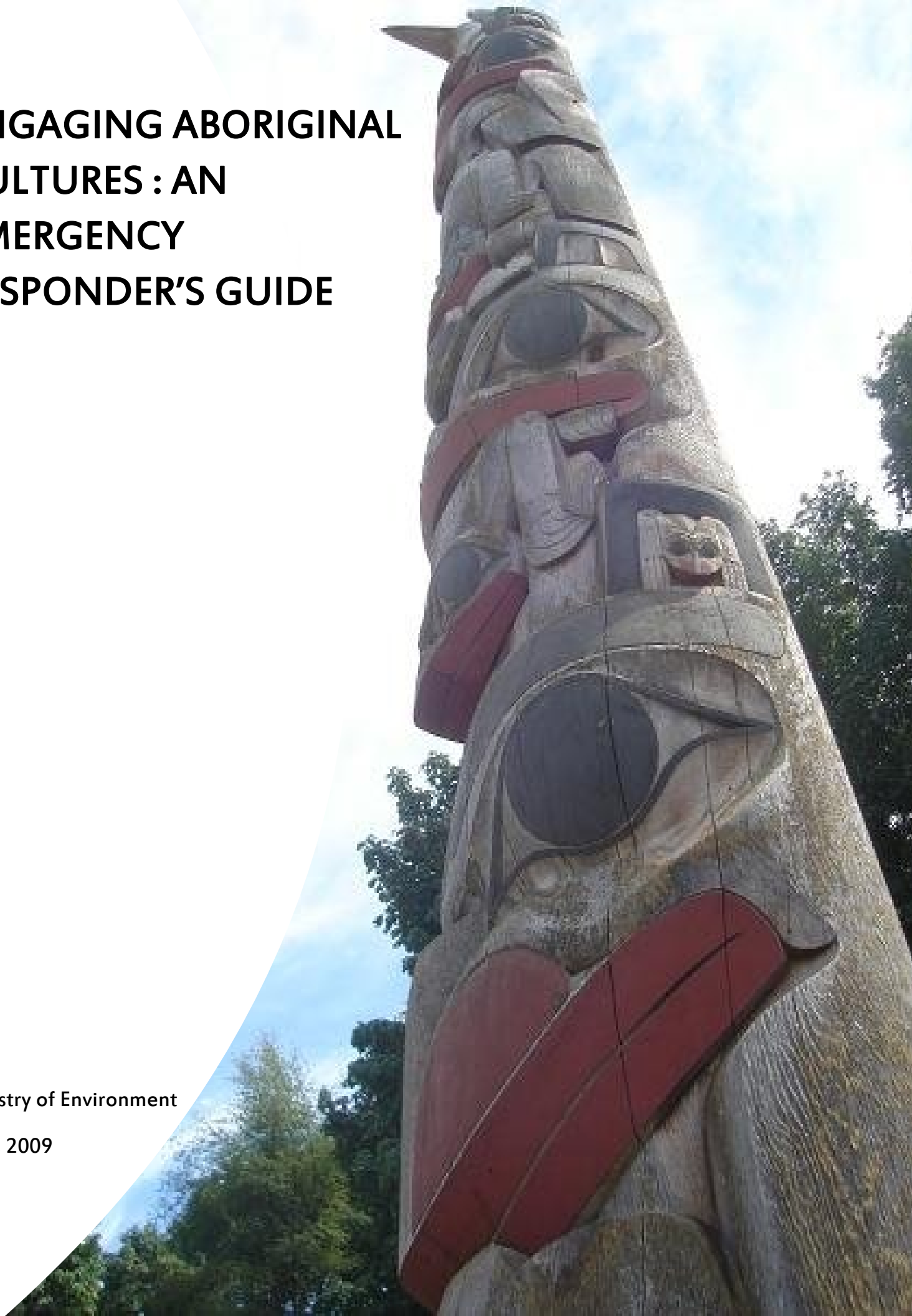


# ENGAGING ABORIGINAL CULTURES : AN EMERGENCY RESPONDER'S GUIDE

Ministry of Environment

May, 2009





Lack of understanding and unintended disrespect are significant barriers to developing effective relationships. The difference in social norms between aboriginal and non-aboriginal societies can contribute to misunderstandings, leading to disagreements. This document can guide you in respectful collaboration with aboriginal people. It will aid you in identifying and being respectful of the subtle and not so subtle differences between working with aboriginal and non-aboriginal groups. It is imperative, however, that you push yourself to truly respect aboriginal cultures for what they are – ancient, resilient and knowledgeable.

British Columbia is home to over 200 First Nations with approximately 1,700 reserves spread across the province. Each is distinct in some way, whether it be language, location, traditions, diet or customs. Given the diversity of First Nations within the province, a uniform approach to working with aboriginal people is not always possible. You may have to adapt your approach to build relationships with individual communities and discover the best way to work with them for yourself.

This guide, which was developed with and is based upon First Nations input, will provide you with information that will contribute to your understanding about aboriginal cultures. The Cultural Understanding section is important to read – it will provide you with information that explains why aboriginal people might react the way they do when their lands are threatened by an environmental emergency. Once you begin to understand their perspective, your understanding will hopefully aid you in collaborating more respectfully.

This guide will also provide you with general guidelines to ensure you are proceeding considerately. The tips and tools will apply even though each aboriginal community is unique.

Just remember to be **respectful** and you're on your way. Good luck!



Ministry of  
Environment

Cover photo: UBC Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, Canada.

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# CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

*“All British Columbians will benefit from a richer understanding of First Nations culture...”*

- *The New Relationship*

There are many inner conflicts that aboriginal people may struggle with when an incident affects their land or territory. These conflicts are caused by the direct disagreement of aboriginal values with the concept of an environmental emergency.

It is often difficult for non-aboriginal people to truly understand this point of view or, worse, they don't want to. When responding to an environmental emergency with a First Nation, it is always helpful to be mindful of aboriginal peoples' perception of the earth in order to appreciate how they may feel if their lands are threatened by an environmental emergency.

This section includes information to help build your understanding of this perspective. If you read this information and take it to heart, it will help you in your respectful understanding of aboriginal values.

This section will describe:

- The importance of oral history
- Creation as the source of aboriginal peoples' relationship to the land
- Oral histories that connect aboriginal people to their lands



## ORAL HISTORY

Aboriginal people recorded their histories orally. The same weight that is given to the written word in current Canadian practice is the same weight that may be given to oral history for aboriginal people. The following is an excerpt from *The Lil'wat Fact Book*, produced by the Lil'wat Nation:

“We describe our oral history as being “written upon the land.” It divides into two distinct category of stories, sqwéqwel’ (true stories) and sptakwlh (legends). Our ancestors used the landscape to anchor events much in the way other cultures used calendars. Both sqwéqwel’ and sptakwlh told dramatic stories of magical transformation, mystery and fierce power.”<sup>1</sup>

This declaration is comparable to this account of the narratives of the Tlingit-Tagish:

“These narratives are true stories about how the land came to be. Some groups named the features of the landscape to recall important events in their individual and collective lives. In effect, the land was their history book.”<sup>2</sup>

In many aboriginal communities, oral history is not just a matter of people doing their best to remember things. Many traditions had aboriginal memorizers identified at a young age and rigorously trained under elder memorizers to earn their title.

Some oral legends are meant to be interpreted as parables. They often have a moral to the story and help teach traditional laws or beliefs. For example, stories in many BC First Nations consistently instruct the listener to respect animals and to only take what you need from the land.

Some oral histories, however, establish the historical account of a people and determine the law that they adhere to. For example, the Iroquois’, traditionally located in south-eastern Canada and the north-eastern United States, entire law system, the Great Law of Peace, was passed on orally for hundreds of years – the equivalent of memorizing and passing on a 75,000 word book.<sup>3</sup>

Memorizers also witnessed significant events and could tell you decades later what happened, who attended and, in some cases, even what each person in attendance was wearing.

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<sup>1</sup> Lil'wat Nation, *The Lil'wat Nation: A Fact Book* (Mount Currie, BC: 2006), 13, <http://lilwat.ca/+peopleland/storys/documents/LilwatBookFINAL.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur J. Ray, *I Have Lived Here Since the World Began: An Illustrated History of Canada's Native People, Revised Edition* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2005), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Will Ferguson, *Canadian History for Dummies* (Toronto: CDG Books Canada, Inc., 2000), 17.

You can see that oral history is perceived as just that – history. It is these oral histories that record aboriginal peoples’ relationship to the land.

“It is very important to be close to the land. In our travels and in our prayers, we always have Mother Earth.”

- Elder Vince Stogan (Musqueam) <sup>4</sup>

It is important to recognize that these histories can be ancient. Such accounts of the history of the land and its people have often existed for thousands of years – much longer than the history that began at asserted sovereignty in 1846.

Recognize and respect that aboriginal cultures and their histories are often much, much older than that of non-aboriginal societies in Canada.

## CREATION

Most First Nations in British Columbia have an oral history that has been passed down through generations, oftentimes since, in their opinion, the beginning of time. Many First Nations have creation stories that explain how they came to be on that specific bit of land.

Though the stories and details vary greatly throughout the province, the underlying principle that many aboriginal people believe is this: that their people have been made by a Creator, placed on the land they were inherently meant to be on, and have been charged with protecting that land as such.

“Long time ago, we didn’t know anything about owning land. The land belonged to all of us, so we all shared it. All we know is that the Creator put this land for us to use it and that is the only thing we know, is that it belonged to us.”

- Elder Martha Rabesca (Slavey) <sup>5</sup>

Creation, the designation of a people for a specific piece of land, is the source, or beginning, of many aboriginal peoples’ relationship to the land.

“We think of everything as a whole. There is no separation in our world. There’s no separation between what is spiritual and what is the environment.”

- Leah D. George Wilson (Tseil-Waututh Nation)

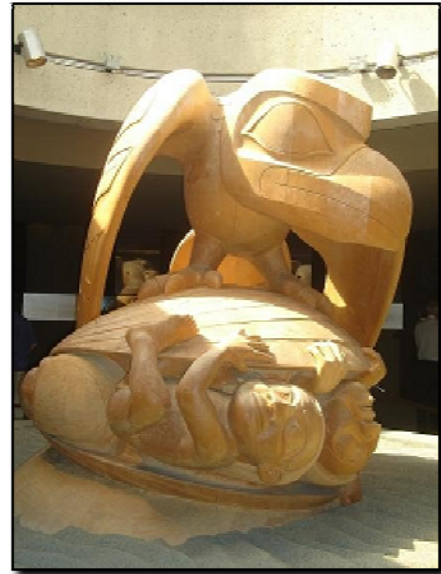
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<sup>4</sup> Peter Kulchyski, Don McCaskill and David Newhouse, eds., *In the Words of Elders: Aboriginal Cultures in Transition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 456.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 372.

Many creation stories also feature aboriginal people emerging from the land. For example, the Haida's "Raven and the First Man" creation story, captured in sculpture by well-known artist Bill Reid, describes how Raven finds the first Haidas in a clamshell and coaxes them out into the world.

In this example, not only does the Creator intend the Haida to materialize on the land of Haida Gwaii, they are also borne of the land itself.

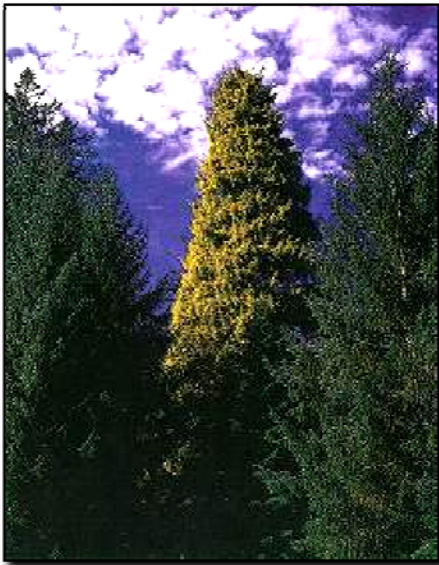


## CONNECTIONS TO THE LAND

Many oral legends also explain how landscapes were formed and/or describe the natural processes of the earth. For example, the description of a great flood seems to be consistent in many different First Nations oral histories throughout BC. Some oral histories describe wars or other significant events that support that First Nation's connection to the land.

UBC Museum of Anthropology  
Vancouver, Canada

In stories found across BC, aboriginal peoples' ancestors often had the ability to transform and became animals, trees or other parts of the earth. Transformed ancestors who became a part of the earth further solidified their descendants' connection to the land.



A well-known example is The Golden Spruce, an infamous golden coloured spruce tree on Haida Gwaii that was felled by an environmental protestor in 1997. This 500 year old tree was sacred to the Haida as well as a popular tourist destination.

Haida legend explains that The Golden Spruce was once a Haida boy named K'iid K'iyas. He disobeyed his grandfather who had commanded him not to look back at the remains of their destroyed village as they fled. K'iid K'iyas disobeyed, took root in the soil, and transformed into the golden spruce tree.<sup>6</sup>

Photo Credit: David Nunuk

<sup>6</sup> Ian Gill, *Haida Gwaii: Journey Through the Queen Charlotte Islands*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004), 79.



“We also have strong spiritual links with the spruce; K’iid K’iyaas (the Golden Spruce), cut down in 1997, was an important figure from our histories, and a living connection between our ancestors and ourselves.”<sup>7</sup>

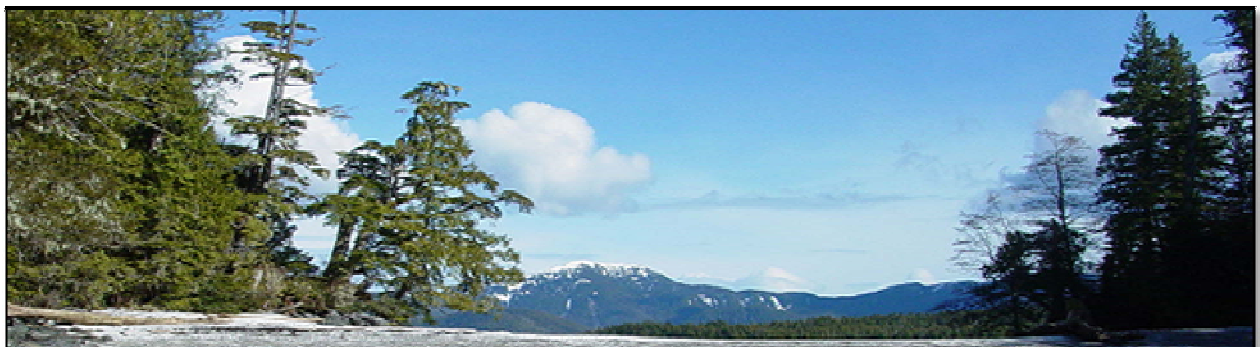
Another similar example made headlines in BC in the early 2000’s. A two year old killer whale named Luna (named by a contest run in a Seattle newspaper), born in 1999, became separated from his pod and took up residence in Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island.

“In July 2001, Luna was observed swimming alone in Nootka Sound. Just days before his death, Chief Ambrose Maquinna of the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation (MMFN) expressed his wish to come back as a Kakawin (Killer whale). When Luna showed up soon afterwards in the Chief’s traditional territory of Nootka Sound, the Mowachaht/Muchalaht gave him the name “Tsux’iit”, in honour of the late Chief.”<sup>8</sup>

Sadly, Tsux’iit was tragically killed in 2006 when he collided with a boat propeller.

The oral histories and beliefs of the Haida and the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation, as well as many other First Nations in BC, demonstrate a form of connection with their surrounding land and ecosystem. Parts of the land may be, as mentioned above, “a living connection between our ancestors and ourselves.”

“The soil you see is not ordinary soil, it is the dust of the blood, the flesh and bones of our ancestors... The land as it is, is my blood and my dead; it is consecrated; and I do not want to give up any portion of it.”<sup>9</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Council of the Haida Nation, *Critical Habitat*, [http://www.haidanation.ca/Pages/Programs/Forests/Forest%20Guardians/Land%20Planning/Critical\\_habitat.html](http://www.haidanation.ca/Pages/Programs/Forests/Forest%20Guardians/Land%20Planning/Critical_habitat.html)

<sup>8</sup> Reunite Luna, *About Luna*, <http://www.reuniteluna.com/about.php>.

<sup>9</sup> An Apsáalooke/Crow, as quoted in T.C. McLuhan, *The Way of the Earth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 378.

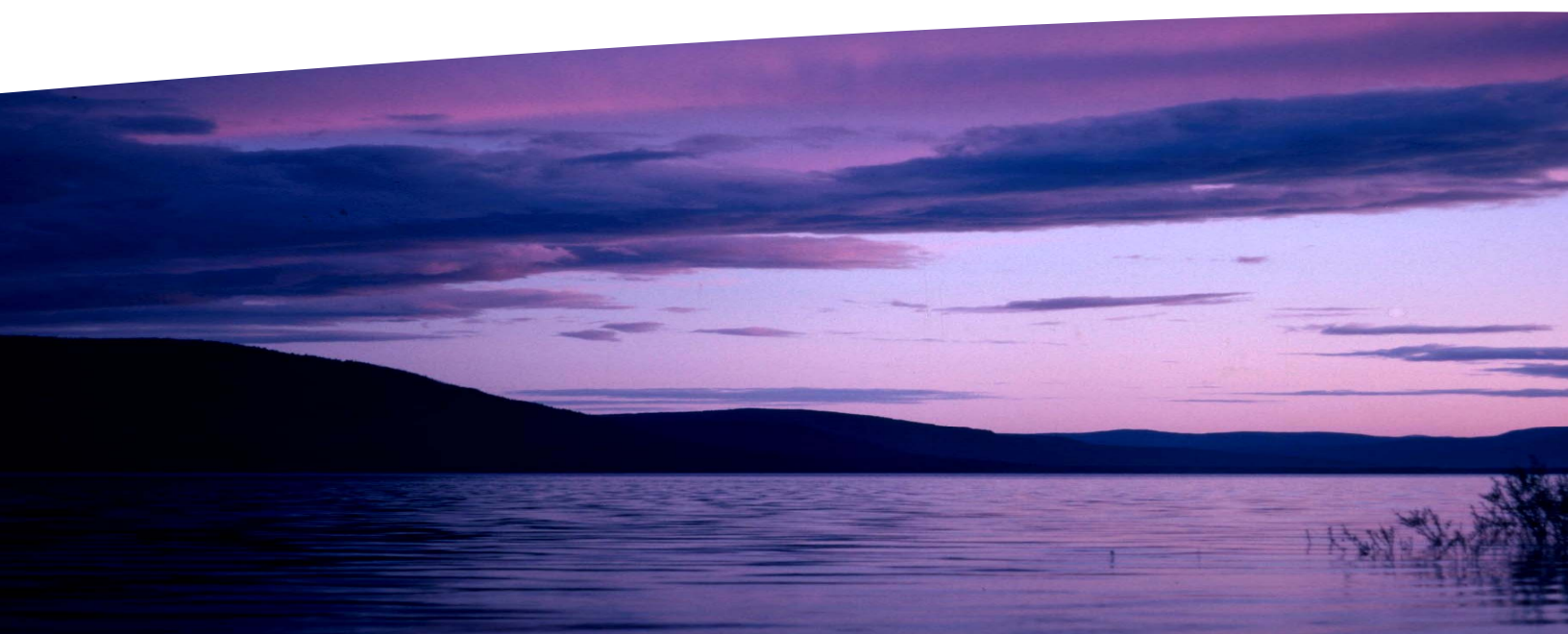
# HOW CULTURE MIGHT CONFLICT WITH ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCIES

As you can determine from the previous section, aboriginal peoples' interest in the land can run deeper than that of just general concern. Many may feel that they have been instructed by the Creator to protect the land, sustain it and ensure it is kept in a harmonious balance for the benefit of future generations. As previously demonstrated with the Golden Spruce tree on Haida Gwaii and Tsux'iit the whale in Nootka Sound, parts of the land or ecosystem may be perceived as peoples' ancestors who must be honoured and treated with respect.

Clearly, you can see how this perspective clashes with the idea of a hazardous substance spill or unnatural environmental emergency destroying their lands and ecosystems.

This section will describe:

- How the concept of Net Environmental Benefit aligns with and contradicts Aboriginal perspectives
- The importance placed on the well-being of future generations
- Customs that may conflict with emergency response



## NET ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFIT

The concept of Net Environmental Benefit (NEB) is an underlying principle that guides emergency response. NEB is based upon accelerating the natural recovery of the land and preventing further impacts that could occur via cleanup techniques.

It is interesting that NEB can both align with and contradict indigenous perspectives. On one hand, the concept of NEB, which ensures that the land's long term benefits and natural, healthy recovery are considered and that sustainable decisions are made, can align well with aboriginal peoples' perspective of their connection and responsibility to the land.

At face value, however, leaving any quantity of product on the land seems to greatly oppose this perspective.

NEB is a tough and bittersweet concept for many people to grasp, especially aboriginal people. To hear that hazardous product may be left behind for Mother Nature to deal with just doesn't cut it for those who have to live with any amount of product in their backyard, see their children playing on contaminated beaches or harvest polluted food.



During emergency response, make sure you explain the concept of NEB fully to people if any amount of product is being left behind for this reason. They may or may not fully agree with your decision and will likely still feel upset about it.

To help with the explanation, there are pictures and examples included in Appendix C.

The important thing here, however, is that you are being honest and attempting to build understanding about why emergency response activities occur the way they do.

- ☆ When you are explaining a difficult concept such as this, don't just give a quick explanation and assume that it's not important for the community to truly understand since they are not emergency responders. You will damage the possibility of any kind of relationship exponentially if you don't keep them in the loop.

- ☆ Honesty is the best policy. Even though aboriginal people will likely be frustrated with a concept such as NEB, being sincere and honest will be much more appreciated than giving no explanation at all as to why product must be left behind. Even if they don't show appreciation, which they are unlikely to do while you are telling them you're leaving hazardous products in their backyard, honesty is still the best policy.

Even though you, an emergency responder, are not able to disregard the concept of NEB, you should understand why actions that come out of those decisions can upset First Nations people.

## **FUTURE GENERATIONS**

Aboriginal people can be very community oriented. Communities generally worry about the safety of their children and need to ensure that the land is maintained in a sustainable way for the benefit of future generations.

Aboriginal people are likely not only concerned about emergency cleanup but also about the long-term effects on the land, such as the depletion of resources used for sustenance or ceremonial use. They want to see the land sustained for their grandchildren's grandchildren's grandchildren.





## CEREMONIAL CONFLICTS

As you know, First Nations vary greatly from one another. First Nations may have traditions, ceremonies and customs that cannot be found anywhere else.

It's important to understand that, when working with aboriginal people, there could always be some cultural understanding you may not be aware of.

A theoretical example, provided by an aboriginal individual for the purposes of this document, can demonstrate how ceremonial practices or customs might conflict with environmental emergency cleanup:

Tobacco is a sacred medicine to many Aboriginal cultures. It is used in many different ceremonies and can also be given as a gift to show respect for the wisdom one holds.

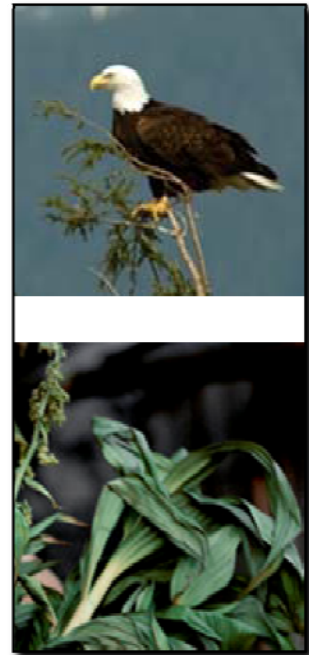
In many aboriginal cultures, tobacco is placed on the land as an offering before something is taken. In some aboriginal cultures, an offering of tobacco must be given to the land before things such as fallen eagle feathers can be collected and used for regalia and other purposes.

Similarly, in some aboriginal cultures an offering of tobacco may have to be placed on the land before medicines, such as certain types of plants, can be collected.

From an aboriginal perspective, imagine seeing eagle feathers or medicines being covered in an oil slick and unceremoniously gathered and stuffed into a bag of oily waste, ready for incineration. An aboriginal community might feel uncomfortable, disrespectful and ill-mannered to see the land treated this way.

The following similar example was once experienced by a Ministry of Environment Environmental Emergency Response Officer:

"I had an interesting experience during my response on the final day of an incident's clean-up. A First Nation gentleman meandered near the highway shoulder, approaching the exclusion zone. I casually approached him to identify our clean-up area and respectfully requested that he remain clear of this area for his safety. I also asked if I could help him in any way. As I stood approximately three feet away, facing him, he presented a large



package towards me while stating that he would like to give tobacco. Having nothing but much needed absorbent to exchange in this ritual, I instinctively nudged the tobacco back and stated that I don't smoke. He responded quickly by presenting himself as being from a local First Nation and that this land was historically travelled and occupied by his people. He advised that he would like to cast tobacco throughout this area with respect to the land that had been contaminated where his people lay."

For safety and contamination reasons, the gentleman could not enter the exclusion zone. It was mutually agreed that he would conduct his ceremony adjacent to and outside the exclusion zone.

Though, depending on the circumstance, it might not be realistic to place an offering of



tobacco over every area of land that requires cleanup due to an emergency, it is important to be sensitive to the possibility that when a First Nation is impacted by an environmental emergency, they may struggle with abundant inner cultural conflicts. As in this circumstance, they may wish to speak to an Environmental Emergency Response Officer or Incident Commander about performing a similar sort of ceremony.

Remember that man-made environmental emergencies may particularly be in direct contrast to the values many aboriginal people are raised with.

Photo Credit: Oiled Wildlife Society of BC



# RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT

Respect, trust and relationships can carry an enormous amount of weight in many aboriginal cultures. Building relationships by earning trust and showing respect can be essential to collaborating more effectively and efficiently with aboriginal peoples.

Though relationship building may be a little out of character for those with a “get ‘er done” sort of attitude, it’s imperative to understand how essential these concepts are to aboriginal people and treat them as such.

In short – if you want to collaborate effectively and respectfully with aboriginal people, you’re just going to have to get ‘er done.

This section will provide you with:

- General guidelines to consider to facilitate proceeding respectfully
- Guidelines to respectfully engage elders



## RESPECT GUIDELINES

Two questions that are often asked are “What does respect mean?” and “What needs to happen to ensure aboriginal people are treated respectfully?”

As no two aboriginal communities are the same there is no ‘one-size fits all’ approach or direct answer – only general guidelines.

### Research the community

- Research the community, their location, and any recent issues before you work with them. A First Nation’s website can be very useful for this kind of information. The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation also has comprehensive information available at <http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr/treaty/regional.html>.
- Find out if they have a traditional name they prefer to be called and practice pronouncing it.
- Find out if the community has an elected chief, a hereditary chief, other traditional governance structure, or all of the above. Start with contacting the community’s office and ask if there is anyone you should be speaking with besides Chief and Council. Make sure you are talking to the right people to avoid being disrespectful or finding yourself in a pinch when one entity asks why they were not consulted.

### Pronounce Their Name Correctly

Make sure you are pronouncing a First Nation or aboriginal community’s name correctly. Remember how awkward you feel if someone pronounces your name wrong – especially more than once.

Check out the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation’s (MARR)

Pronunciation Guide to get started:

[http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr/attachments/pronunciation\\_guidebc\\_fn\\_Oct07\\_updateFeb\\_07.pdf](http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr/attachments/pronunciation_guidebc_fn_Oct07_updateFeb_07.pdf)

If the link ever changes, simply go to MARR’s website ([www.gov.bc.ca/arr](http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr)) and search “Guide to Pronunciation for B.C. First Nations.”

- ☆ When you first meet with someone from the community, ask them how their community’s name is pronounced to be sure you are correct. Get them to listen while you try saying it a few times and



don't be afraid to have a laugh if you don't get it right – it will break the ice and they will appreciate your attempts.

### **Thank Them for the Invite**

If you are meeting with an aboriginal community at their office, it is respectful to thank them for your invitation into their community and for their willingness to host your meeting.

- ☆ Example: I'd like to thank you for inviting me into your community and for hosting our meeting today.

### **Don't Be Afraid to Ask**

Each aboriginal community may be distinct from one another in many things like customs, traditions and protocol. If you are unsure about anything, don't be afraid to ask. It's better to ask and get it right the first time than accidentally do something disrespectful and lose a community's respect and interest. If you get the feeling that you have done something wrong, apologize, own up to it and ask if there is something you should know to make sure you are proceeding respectfully.

### **Conversation Etiquette**

Many aboriginal people consider interruptions to be very rude. Don't interrupt an aboriginal person when they are talking, especially elders and chiefs.

Additionally, sometimes aboriginal people (especially elders) will pause in between sentences to gather their thoughts. Make sure they are finished speaking by waiting for 10 seconds or so before you respond.

This might feel like an awkward pause if you aren't used to it, but just wait it out to be sure.

Also make sure each person is getting a chance to voice their opinion. Non-aboriginal conversations or debates typically follow a brisk pace, making it hard to jump in without interrupting someone. As such, some may become trapped in silence and frustration as they wait for a break to speak up.

- ☆ If someone starts talking at the same time as you, stop talking and let them go first. Don't try and overpower their voice by raising yours.

## **Eye contact**

For some aboriginal peoples, continuous eye contact may not be expected or even accepted during conversation. If they are not looking at the speaker, it is not a sign of disrespect. Some aboriginal people may even consider it rude if you stare them straight in the eye for an extended period of time.

Note that this may not be the case for aboriginal people who interact frequently with non-aboriginal society and are accustomed to looking people in the eye. It may be the case, however, if you are meeting with a community in a more remote location or people who have been raised in the old ways of their culture (e.g. elders).

## **Mind what you say**

Most indigenous cultures are traditionally oral societies. As such, what you say can be taken very seriously, sometimes more seriously than what you write down on paper. Keep track of all agreements, oral and written, and make sure you honour all of them.

## **Sensitive Information Protocol**

If you are being made aware of culturally sensitive information (e.g. you are viewing or participating in a ceremony, you are being shown the location of a burial site, etc.), assume that the information is confidential. You should discuss with the community how the information will be used (e.g. only by you and your team, only within your ministry, or only within the provincial government). Ensure any documentation is clearly marked with any conditions agreed to and is properly dealt with in the office so as not to violate the approved conditions of the information sharing.

## **Information Ownership**

Some aboriginal traditions also have ownership protocols attached. Some songs, dances, stories and ceremonies may only be told or performed by designated people and/or at certain times or occasions. Some songs, dances or stories are owned by specific families. If you view or are told some of these things, it could be extremely disrespectful to repeat them as they are not yours to tell.

Taking a picture of a totem pole, for example, is in effect taking a snapshot of a family or group of people's history. Family crests often tell specific stories about the history of that family. To take pictures of artwork like this and share it with other people is essentially to put a family or group of people's history on display.

These things may be shared sometimes, but it is best to ask permission of the family or owner first.

Similarly, if you ever get the chance to hear an aboriginal singer/drummer perform a song you will often hear them say “This song was given to me by [insert name]...” before they perform the song. This is to let the listeners know that they have been authorized by the owners to perform the song.

- ☆ Don't take a picture or videotape something culturally significant (e.g. petro glyph, ceremonial dance, potlatch, totem pole, etc.) unless you ask for permission first. Don't share what you have photographed/videotaped without permission. Don't put them on the internet or use it for any reason unless you have permission.



Candice George, Stelat'en First Nation  
BC Aboriginal Youth Intern 2008-2009

- ☆ Make sure you keep sensitive information confidential. If you lose the community's trust or go back on your word, it will be extremely difficult to rebuild that relationship.

### **Keep a Sense of Humour**

If aboriginal people are teasing you, it likely means they like you. Be able to laugh at yourself and joke around, even if the humour is at your expense.

## RESPECTFULLY ENGAGING ELDERS

“The Elders were the ones who taught how a community should be run. They were the ones that made the decisions on how to make a good living and how people should be getting along together and just everybody to live in harmony. And they were the ones that taught their sons, their children, how to live a good life... If a person approaches the Elders they are always ready to give good advice and the person is always ready to listen so that the individual will benefit from the advice from the Elders.”

- Elder Martha Rabesca (Slavey)<sup>10</sup>

Treating elders respectfully is key. It is imperative to be respectful of elders at all times, include their input in emergency response wherever possible, and – most importantly – truly respect the knowledge that they hold.

### What is an elder?

“‘When do you become an Elder, who is an elder?’ The way my grandparents say, ‘When you have your first grandchild you become a real Elder.’ Before that, as long as you are older than the person that seeks help, whatever it is, if you are able to help them you are their Elder... you just drift into it. It’s almost automatic. You know what to do, you know how to help the people.”

- Elder Mary Ann Mason (Shayshas)<sup>11</sup>

### Respectfully communicate

Avoid using technical jargon or acronyms whenever possible. If they are required, be sure to explain them in detail. Never talk down to an elder, interrupt them or use a loud, booming voice when responding.

Examples:

**BAD**            “At 1800 hours, a significant amount of product entered the marine environment.”

**GOOD**        “At 6pm last night, a lot of oil spilled into the ocean.”

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Kulchyski, Don McCaskill and David Newhouse, eds., *In the Words of Elders: Aboriginal Cultures in Transition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 367.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 425 – 426.

BAD “We’re still waiting for people from CCG, CWS, INAC, DFO and MOE to arrive at the ICP.”

GOOD “We’re still waiting for people from different government agencies to get to the Incident Command Post, where we will gather information and make decisions together.

### **Respect Elders’ knowledge**

When elders speak to you or relay knowledge, listen up. For relationship building purposes, it really doesn’t matter if you are already aware of the information they give you... give them recognition and respect their knowledge.

Example:

Elder: “The tide is going to make the oil flow this way.”

BAD You: “Thanks, but our computer map has already projected that.”

GOOD You: “Thank you for letting us know. Is there anything culturally significant in that area that we should know about to try and protect?”

☆ Avoid interrupting an elder or using a loud voice when responding.

### **Make Elders a part of emergency response**

Involve elders wherever you can. If possible, have the Liaison Officer or other explain the emergency response phase and walk them through the Incident Command Post so they don’t feel lost or overwhelmed. Thank them regularly for the knowledge and help they are providing.

Remember – how you act now will have an effect on how the community perceives you in the future. Make them want to invite you back.

### **Don’t tell elders what to do**

Avoid providing directions in a way that make it appear as if you are telling an elder what to do. Remember, their point of view is often that their ancestors have been living on their land since the beginning of time and, as the holders of their people’s traditional knowledge, no one knows the land better than they do. Listen to what they have to say.

### **Elder accompaniment**

An elder may have to be present if you require access to a site of cultural significance. In this circumstance, you will just have to dialogue with the community as to how they

would like to proceed. They will be able to inform you who an appropriate person will be – elder, hereditarily designated person or other.

In the event that the significant or sacred area is too dangerous to be accessed by an elderly person (e.g. possibility of slipping, injuring oneself, etc.), be sure to relay this information to the community as it becomes available so they can select an appropriate person.

If this is the case, and if an elder would normally be the person to go, ensure that you provide them with frequent updates and include them at the ICP level as much as possible.

See the Culturally Significant Sites section for more information about possible sensitive area protocols.

# EMERGENCY PLANNING WITH A COMMUNITY

Meeting with an aboriginal community before an incident occurs will be extremely helpful in the long run. If you have the capacity to do so, contact aboriginal communities in your region and prepare for emergencies.

Go over the Respect Guidelines outlined in this document to ensure you are being respectful at all times.

This section will additionally provide you with:

- Things to consider when organizing your meeting
- Information to gather when emergency planning with the community



## ORGANIZING YOUR MEETING

### Know who to invite

Some aboriginal communities may have an elected chief, a hereditary chief, heads of houses, or some other type of traditional governance structure. Some may have more than one of these governance structures.

To be respectful and effective, make sure you are inviting the right people to meet. This may include one or more chiefs, heads of houses, local elder, etc. Don't just invite the elected Chief and Council and assume you're good to go. You could wind up in an awkward situation when one entity asks why they weren't invited.

Also, be prepared to mitigate any disagreements. If a community has more than one governance structure, they might not always agree or get along with one another. However, it's better to involve all necessary governance structures to make sure it does not appear that the province is favouring one over the other.

- ☆ Make some calls to the First Nation's office and ask who you should be inviting to make sure you don't miss anyone important. You should review any relevant government resources and also consider contacting other colleagues or government agencies that may have had more contact with that particular aboriginal community and ask for some advice. You can also ask your division's First Nations Relations Manager for some direction.
- ☆ Do your homework. Try and find out before hand what the relationship is between multiple governance structures (if applicable). If you sense or discover that their relations are less than amicable, contact all entities before the meeting, notify them of who will be in attendance, and request cooperation and courteous behaviour beforehand.

### Find out when to meet

Many aboriginal communities may schedule their lives around food harvesting times. Instead of picking a time and sending out a meeting invite, ask someone from the community to approve a date, recommend a date or suggest a range of dates.

In this way, you'll be able to make sure your meeting will not occur when the whole community may be away gathering food.



To be safe, you may want to plan your meeting a few weeks before or after their food harvesting times. Communities may know that fish, for example, will show up within a week of a certain time of year and will be prepared to drop everything once the fish show up. Also, many aboriginal communities have noted that traditional food, such as fish or other animals, in some years come at later times, so flexibility is key.

- ☆ Many communities make decisions together. If you are asked to open your meeting up to the community, consider it.
- ☆ If a death occurs in the community, meetings may have to be re-scheduled for weeks later. It will likely be considered rude to impose a meeting just before or just after a funeral.

### **Elder opening**

Many aboriginal communities open their meetings with a prayer or blessing from an elder. If you are planning and have initiated the meeting, tell whoever you are dealing with that you are interested in having an elder open your meeting with a prayer. Ask if they can recommend anyone and put you in touch with them. Note that current practice is that elders should be given an honorarium (as of 2009, approximately \$150.00) to do this. This shows that you are respecting the wisdom that they hold.

- ☆ You can contact a Ministry of Environment First Nations Relations Manager for advice, amount and information regarding honorariums.
- ☆ Aboriginal people usually stand up when someone prays. Follow their lead.
- ☆ To present an elder with an honorarium in a way that is not awkward, sign a small thank you card and slip the money into the card beforehand. When they are done, thank them for opening the meeting and present them with the card.

### **Follow up**

Before your meeting takes place, follow up numerous times to make sure it is still on. Sometimes a death in the community or other emergency can shut down the band office or put the community on halt for a number of days or weeks.

To be safe, follow up a few times. If you are traveling from far away, you might want to double check while you are on the way or just before you leave.

## **Embrace differences**

Remember that aboriginal people may do things differently than the way you do. If you are doing a presentation, for example, and your aboriginal attendees are gazing in another direction or don't appear to be paying attention, this is not a sign of disrespect. In many aboriginal cultures, direct eye contact is not necessary to show respect.

Just do your best, be honest and respectful, and you'll be on the right track.

## **EMERGENCY PLANNING**

### **Identify emergency contacts**

In your emergency planning meeting, ask the community who they would like to be notified if a spill affects their interests. Obviously, try and get a phone number that is available 24 hours (e.g. someone's personal home or cell phone number).

### **Identify decision makers**

Briefly explain the Incident Command System and what happens once a spill has been reported.

Explain the concept of Unified Command in detail and notify the community that the Ministry of Environment supports First Nations in taking a seat in Unified Command. Be honest, however, and let them know that Unified Command it isn't always utilized (and why). Let them know that they may be involved if a Unified Command is not used through mechanisms such as a Regional Environmental Emergencies Team (REET).

Identify someone from the community who would be appropriate to sit on Unified Command or other and ensure they have the community's support to be a decision maker on their behalf. An appropriate person would likely be an elected or hereditary chief, a head of a house, or an elder or individual who has the community's support.

### **The question of volunteers and contractors**

Community members may be interested in getting involved in emergency response should an emergency affect their interests. Let them know in a respectful way that the Ministry of Environment does not support using "volunteers" during emergency response, especially for substance recovery roles – this is due to safety and liability issues.

#### Contractors

If a First Nation would like to express interest in being hired as a contractor for spill response (and therefore receive training to recover hazardous substances), tell them to contact Burrard Clean Operations at [mail@burrardclean.com](mailto:mail@burrardclean.com).

If the community does not have internet access, they can call Burrard Clean Operation's head office in Burnaby at (604) 294-6001 (extension 200). The administrator will direct the call appropriately, usually depending on geographical location.

Burrard Clean Operations will look at the area the First Nation is located in and see if they require additional workers/contractors at that time. They would look at the skill set and resources that could be provided, if applicable. If there is a good fit with Burrard

Clean Operations and the First Nation, they will consider signing them up on Burrard Clean's response team. In general, Burrard Clean will make contact with the interested party to discuss opportunities if they require people in that area at the time.

### Other roles

Substance recovery aside, there are a number of other roles First Nations may be able to fill, determined on case-by-case circumstances. For example, they may have appropriate people to enhance Shoreline Cleanup and Assessment Techniques (SCAT) teams, the Environmental Unit, the Regional Environmental Emergencies Team (REET), others who may be trained archaeologists or cultural coordinators, etc.

### **Identify the scope of their interests**

The scope of a First Nation's interests will likely depend on the location of the spill and its proximity to food harvesting areas or other culturally sensitive sites. As such, it might be hard to say they only want to be contacted for "big" spills and not for "small" ones. If a "small" spill ruins their food harvesting area, you can bet they'll be interested.

Ask the community if they have a map of their sensitivities already completed – many communities already have maps prepared. If not, print off a blank map of the area and ask them to identify them for you.

### **Identify cultural sensitivities**

Remember that culturally sensitive information is confidential. This type of information is likely not normally shared with people from outside the community.

If the community is uncomfortable sharing the specifics of their sensitivities, simply ask them to identify them on a map as culturally sensitive areas. They may already have a similar map prepared.

If they decline to share site specifics, make sure they prioritize which sites should be protected first should they be threatened by an environmental emergency.

Additionally, see the Culturally Sensitive Sites section on pages 33 - 35 of this document for advice on how to proceed if you must work on or near a culturally sensitive or sacred site.

# THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE PHASE

When an environmental emergency occurs, it's important to involve potentially impacted First Nations as soon as possible. Not only do they possess a wealth of local knowledge, they also know the location of their culturally significant sites (such as burial sites and traditional food harvesting areas) that could be threatened.

This section will describe:

- How and when to notify a potentially impacted First Nation
- What to do if the incident affects overlapping territories
- What First Nations can provide during emergency response
- What to do if you must work on or near a culturally significant / sacred site



## NOTIFICATION

When an incident has occurred that might impact a First Nation, it is imperative to get a hold of them as quickly as possible and include them in emergency response. Nothing can start you off on the wrong foot more efficiently than a First Nation thinking that you don't really care about their input.

### **Current notification process**

When an incident is reported, the call is received directly by Emergency Operations staff at the Provincial Emergency Program's (PEP) 24 hour emergency line. If it is determined by the incident reporter that the incident has impacted or may impact aboriginal lands (i.e. reserves), the information is forwarded to both Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and Public Safety Canada.

This is done electronically for smaller "code 1" spills and verbally on all larger "code 2" spills. After PEP has contacted a representative from INAC, INAC will in turn notify the appropriate First Nation(s).

There are a few issues here. If the spill reporter does not determine to PEP Emergency Operations staff that the incident may impact aboriginal lands or is not aware that it may impact them, PEP will not notify INAC.

Also, INAC is only contacted if the incident might impact "reserve" lands. A First Nation's reserve lands often do not include the majority of their culturally sensitive areas and are frequently just a small portion of their traditional territory.

As an EERO, if you become aware or have a feeling that a serious incident might impact aboriginal lands or people even though you have not been told, it's important to determine if this is the case.

### **When should a First Nation be notified?**

As per the *Haida* decision, the Crown legally has a duty to consult with an aboriginal group if it is aware that their interests may be adversely affected.<sup>12</sup>

You can consult with internal provincial resources, such as the Consultative Areas Database or the Integrated Land Management Bureau map (see Appendix B), to determine which First Nations to engage with and their office contact information. You should notify all First Nations who have an aboriginal interest in the area impacted by the spill.

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<sup>12</sup> *Haida Nation v. British Columbia (Minister of Forests)*, 2004 SCC 73 ("Haida") at para. 35.

Sometimes, though, it may not be immediately apparent that a First Nation's interests have been impacted if you are not a member of that community. A First Nation's areas of interest often lie outside of the boundaries of their reserve lands. Some First Nations have culturally sensitive areas associated with their people hundreds of kilometres away.

As a general rule of thumb, if an incident has occurred, or could travel to, within roughly 30 kilometres of a reserve, get a hold of the associated First Nation(s). After you have notified them, the decision to get involved or not, based on their interests, can rest in their hands.

**NOTE** – This is just a rule of thumb. A local First Nation may actually be far away from their traditional territory and may have little interest in the immediate area they are living in.

Therefore, if you contact a nearby First Nation as dependent on their reserve location, you must take other measures (i.e. consulting internal resources) to determine if other First Nations may have interests in the impacted area as well.

There are a number of useful maps that can be used to determine the proximity of an incident to a First Nation's reserve land or area of interest. See Appendix B for a list of these maps and resources.

### **How to contact a First Nation**

There are a number of ways to do this. The best thing you can do, if possible, is call the First Nation directly through their office.

The maps in Appendix B provide the viewer with contact information for the First Nation's office. The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation also provides a Guide to Aboriginal Organizations and Services in BC, including First Nations' office contact info and Treaty/Tribal council office info:

<http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr/services/guide.html>.

Even if you leave a message after hours, at least you attempted to get in touch immediately.

However – if you leave a message after business hours, it's important to take other measures to ensure the First Nation is notified as soon as possible.

- If you collected emergency contacts at the community emergency planning stage, contact them immediately.

- Call PEP Emergency Operations Staff, notify them that the spill might impact aboriginal lands or people, and ask them to contact INAC.
- Local fire halls or police might have emergency contact information for the First Nation in question.

To be safe, it is recommended that you take all three measures to ensure the community is contacted.

### **Overlapping Territories**

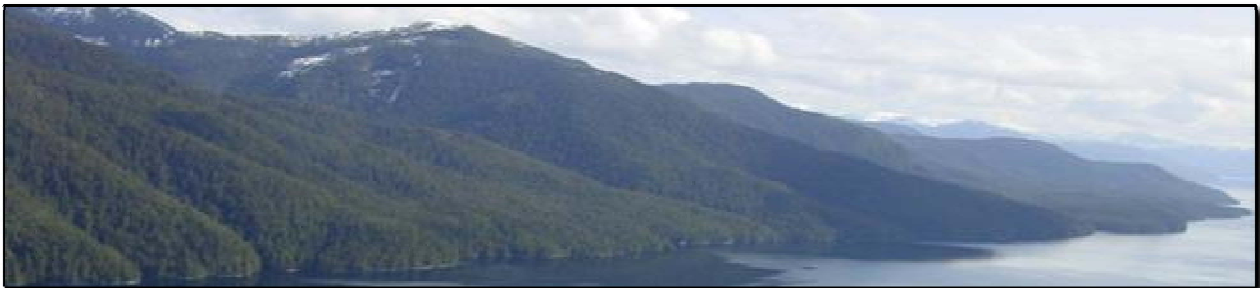
As previously mentioned, the *Haida* decision declares that the Crown has a legal duty to consult with an aboriginal group if it is aware that their interests may be adversely affected.

Much of the province is subject to overlapping claims by more than one First Nation. You should notify all First Nations that might be impacted. Your role is not to resolve any boundary disputes between First Nations; the government of BC should not appear to favour one First Nation over the other.

HOWEVER – it's important to be immediately honest and let each First Nation know which others have been contacted. Don't wait until they all show up at the Incident Command Post to tell them.

If one or all First Nations are upset about others being contacted, be honest and let them know that you are trying to be fair to all and that you have an obligation to involve all First Nations who have indicated that they aboriginal interests in the area. Tell them that if all nations end up being involved, you need them to work together for a time on a technical basis, if not a political one.

Tell each of them that emergency response is often chaotic at times and that it is essential that they put their differences aside for the time being to work alongside one another courteously and effectively.





# INVOLVING FIRST NATIONS IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

## In Planning or Advisory Roles

The level of desired involvement will, again, completely vary from nation to nation. First Nations can sometimes offer a variety of the following things to aid emergency planning, response and recovery:

- Response resources – boats, shelter, food, etc.
- Local archaeologists
- Knowledge of local culturally significant sites – burial sites, sacred sites, food harvesting areas
- Maps of their cultural sensitivities
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) – understanding of tide cycles, species migrations, critical habitats depending on the time of year, etc.

It entirely depends on the First Nation in question, though, and it is unfortunately out of the scope of this document to include which First Nations in BC have what resources and response capabilities. Plan with communities in your region before incidents occur and determine what they can offer. When an incident has occurred, and a prior meeting has not taken place, notify them of the incident and ask how they would like to be involved.

To be most effective, it is important that a First Nation representative sit on a strategic planning or advisory team such as Unified Command, the Regional Environmental Emergency Team (REET) or the Environmental Unit. In some cases they may want to have multiple representatives filling various Planning roles.

Include as many appropriate First Nation people as possible.

They may also be incorporated into other areas of the ICS structure such as:

- Operations – if they have been trained in emergency response, either before the incident or while response is ongoing, or approved as contractors.
- Logistics – can provide assistance finding potential local resources.
- Finance – if they are interested in filling a role in Finance (to track their own costs or otherwise), it could be an appropriate place for a First Nation individual with a financial background.

### **What if they have no capacity?**

Sometimes a First Nation may not have the capacity or people to aid response or may not want to be part of the decision making process, for whatever reason. Offer to keep them up to date via the Liaison Officer.

Make sure, however, that the Liaison Officer routinely updates them and keeps open communication lines in case the First Nation has any questions.

The offer to participate in emergency response is a standing offer and therefore a First Nation should be reminded of this opportunity in case they change their mind.

## **CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT / SACRED SITES**

### **What is a sacred site?**

A sacred site is a historical, cultural, archaeological or spiritually significant site. Some examples of sacred sites are, but are not limited to:

- Fishing, hunting and camping sites
- Village sites
- Plant and medicine gathering areas
- Food harvesting areas
- Spiritual sites or realms
- Burial or funerary sites
- Gathering places
- Archaeological sites
- Battle sites
- Some sites may be owned or associated with certain families or groups of people

It is important to appreciate the significance an aboriginal community may place on such sites. These sites may have the same relevance to Aboriginal people that a graveyard or cathedral might have to others.

**Sacred or sensitive sites are non-renewable and irreplaceable. This is especially the case for spiritual sites as disturbing one may destroy its inherent nature.**

## What should I know about protocols?

Sacred sites are dealt with in different ways by different First Nations. There is no way to describe all the protocols that various First Nations might have surrounding different sacred sites.

However, here are some things you might be able to expect if you must go to a sacred site during emergency response:

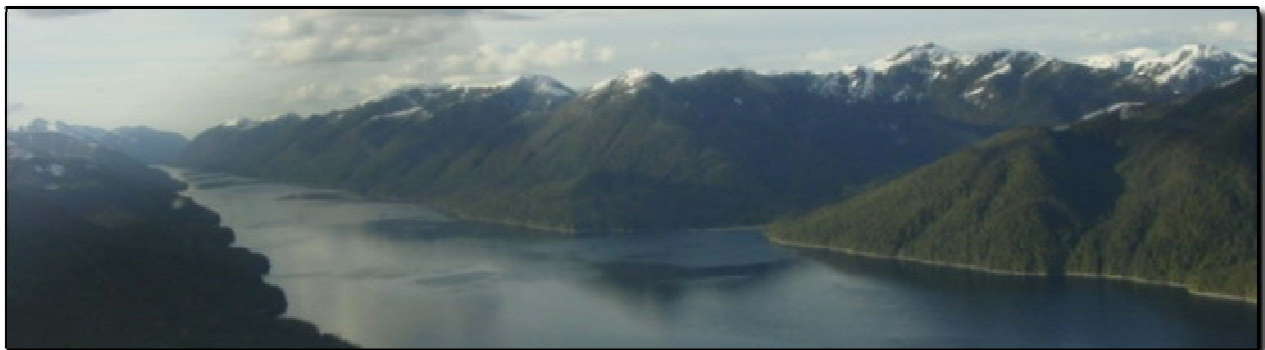
- You may need an elder or hereditarily designated person to accompany you.
- You may need to undergo a traditional cleansing. For example, you may be asked to participate in a smudge, say a prayer, or you may be brushed off with a sacred medicine, such as cedar.
- You may be asked to put down an offering of tobacco.
- You may be asked to ward off all negative thoughts while in the area.

Of course, there is a possibility that they may not ask you to do anything out of the ordinary except generally respect the land. As always, asking the First Nation for direction in this circumstance is essential. If they request that you perform a small ceremony of some kind, they will likely give you directions. Don't be afraid to ask for directions if you are unsure.

Ask what protocols you should know about and always follow their lead. First Nations who provided input to this guidance document stressed that contacting someone from the community and having them present while you work on or near a sacred site is the best way to be respectful of them and their sensitivities.

Also consider the following tips:

- Do not litter
- Don't park in undesignated areas
- Don't move or remove anything from the area without permission
- Don't take pictures or videos without permission
- In general – **RESPECT THE LAND**



## **Burial Sites and Found Human Remains**

Sometimes burial sites or the location of human remains may be unknown, even to the associated First Nation.

If emergency response uncovers a burial site, human remains, or what appears to be an archaeologically sensitive site, it may likely be significant to a local First Nation and is protected under the Heritage Conservation Act (1996, RSBC, Chap. 187). Under this provincial legislation, you may not disturb the site unless authorized to do so under permit. Ensure that you:

- Stop all work immediately.
- Do not touch or take pictures of the human remains.
- Have only essential personnel in the area. Prevent further impacts to the site. It may be sacred to a First Nation and the site's integrity is protected by law.
- Call the local law enforcement and coroner's office to ensure that remains are not recent or are a forensic concern.
- If there is no forensic concern, contact the Archaeology Branch (250-953-3334) and local First Nations (if for some reason they are not already there). The Archaeology Branch will discuss the situation with First Nations to determine how to proceed.

### **If the Remains are Moved**

It is very important that you do not touch the remains, move them or take pictures of them unless you are directed to do so by the associated First Nation or the Archaeology Branch. If neither is there and the remains are in imminent danger of being destroyed and must be moved for protection purposes, keep them as close to the original location as possible.

If this is the case, be sure to explain to the First Nation and Archaeology Branch what has been done, who touched or moved the remains, and why.

A First Nation may normally have a designated or hereditarily designated family to deal with human remains. If you have touched the remains for any reason, let the associated First Nation know and request direction. They may want to direct a cleansing ceremony or associated tradition for the person(s) who touched the remains.

# APPENDIX A – ABORIGINAL ORGANIZATIONS AND STRUCTURES

## Chief and Council

As per the Indian Act, a First Nation may have only one elected chief and one councillor for every 100 band members. The number of councillors, however, cannot be less than 2 and no more than 12. Additionally, chief and council can hold office for only 2 years until another election must be held.

For some aboriginal cultures, this type of structure was radically different from traditional governance structures they may have used.

To view the Indian Act, go to: <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/I-5/>

## Traditional Governance Structures

Pre-contact, indigenous groups often included hereditary chiefs whose powers were passed down via blood lines or other cultural protocols.<sup>13</sup> Some cultures had heads of houses or other traditional types of governance.

It is important to remember that hereditary chiefs, heads of houses or other may still exist today in some aboriginal cultures. They sometimes operate almost invisibly in the background and limit the authority of elected chiefs and band councils.<sup>14</sup>

For this reason, it is important to research a community you might collaborate with and make sure you are talking to all the right people.

## Treaty or Tribal Councils

Some First Nations have organized themselves into treaty or tribal councils. The First Nations who are coming together will usually have common roots and intentions such as location, language, indigenous heritage or treaty objectives.

Though treaty or tribal councils can sometimes be contacted in place of a specific First Nation, it is important to ask the First Nation in question how they were prefer to be consulted. Depending on the circumstance, they may want to be directly involved. Alternately, they may sometimes point you towards an individual employed by their treaty or tribal council (if applicable).

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<sup>13</sup> Cynthia F. Joseph and Robert P.C. Joseph, *Working Effectively with Aboriginal Peoples*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Vancouver: R.H. Printing Ltd.), 63.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## Major First Nations Governance Structures

### ➤ First Nations Leadership Council

The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the First Nations Summit, Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the BC Assembly of First Nations.

### ➤ First Nations Summit (FNS)

The FNS is comprised of a majority of First Nations and Tribal Councils in BC and provides a forum for First Nations in British Columbia to address issues related to treaty negotiations as well as other issues of common concern.

<http://www.fns.bc.ca/>

### ➤ Assembly of First Nations (AFN)

The Assembly of First Nations is the national representative organization of the First Nations in Canada. The National Chief is elected every three years by the Chiefs-in-Assembly. The Chiefs meet between the annual assemblies every 3 to 4 months in a forum called the "Confederacy of Nations" to set ongoing direction. The membership of the Confederacy consists of Chiefs and other Regional Leaders chosen according to a formula based on the population of each region.

<http://www.afn.ca/>

### ➤ Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC)

Founded in 1969 and comprised of various BC First Nation chiefs, the UBCIC works for the recognition of aboriginal rights and respect for aboriginal cultures and societies.

<http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/>



## **First Nations' Emergency Services Society (FNESS)**

FNESS provides assistance to BC First Nation communities to help them prepare for emergencies. Primarily funded through INAC, they can provide emergency management training and help prepare community emergency plans.

FNESS is a registered non-profit society that operates under the direction of a First Nations Board of Directors.

First Nations' Emergency Services Society  
Suite 1257 – 409 Granville Street  
Vancouver BC  
V6C 1T2

Tel: (604) 669-7305  
Fax: (604) 669-9832  
BC Toll Free 1-888-822-3388

Website: [www.fness.bc.ca](http://www.fness.bc.ca)

# APPENDIX B – MAPS AND RESOURCES

## Consultative Areas Database (CAD)

The CAD is an iMap available only to provincial government employees. It is an interactive map of British Columbia that illustrates where First Nations have established or asserted treaty or aboriginal rights or title, whether or not yet proven in court.

The CAD is intended as only one of the tools that may assist provincial government staff to make initial assessments of which aboriginal groups should be consulted in a specific area regarding activities involving land and resources.

Most boundaries have not been confirmed by the corresponding First Nation or received policy or legal review. Rather, the boundaries have been developed as based on other sources, such as:

- Maps provided by staff working directly with First Nations on consultation issues where territory maps are tabled (most common)
- Statement of Intent (SOI) Boundaries
- Traditional Use Study (TUS) Areas
- Boundaries included in treaties
- Maps included in Agreements from specific Ministries
- Legal protective writs

The CAD is not intended to create, recognize, limit or deny any aboriginal rights, including title, that First Nations may have, or impose any obligations on British Columbia or alter the legal status of resources within the Province or the existing legal authority of British Columbia.

**\*NOTE\*** - The CAD could be useful if you are trying to identify if a First Nation that might be impacted by an environmental emergency. You can simply search the spill's location and find out which First Nation(s) has asserted interests in the area and their office's contact information.

[https://apps.gov.bc.ca/int/cbd/jsp/Ministry/min\\_main.jsp](https://apps.gov.bc.ca/int/cbd/jsp/Ministry/min_main.jsp)

Click the link, scroll down the page and click on "Query Consultative Area Map."

## FNESS First Nations Emergency Atlas

This map, produced by the First Nations' Emergency Services Society (FNESS), displays all First Nation reserves in BC, broken down by region, along with their office contact information.

<http://www.fness.bc.ca/Emergencyatlas/default.htm>



## **MARR's Guide to Aboriginal Organizations and Services**

The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (MARR) is a provincial resource listing of community-based services and organizations. It includes contact information for:

- First Nations treaty governments
- First Nation communities
- Treaty offices
- Tribal Councils / Affiliations
- Metis organizations
- Umbrella organizations
- Aboriginal services and agencies

<http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr/services/guide.html>

# APPENDIX C – NET ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFIT EXAMPLES

## Russia

In 1994, a spill occurred in the Komi Republic of Russia. Spill responders took the opportunity to experiment with the principle of Net Environmental Benefit. They selected two test plots, “Test Patch A” and “Test Patch B.”

They performed aggressive cleanup techniques on Test Patch A to ensure all traces of oil were removed. The plot was basically bare when they finished.

In the spring of 1996, Test Patch A’s surface soil had been washed off with basically little to no re-growth of the plants; just a few scattered grass plants had managed to grow. No shrubs or plants re-grew – clear evidence of delayed recovery.

You can see in the pictures below that cleaning up ALL the oil actually delayed the recovery of this area.

Photo credit: Ed Owens, Polaris Applied Sciences, Inc.



After cleanup - all oil removed



One year later

Responders performed less aggressive cleanup techniques on Test Patch B, leaving visible amounts of oil on the plants and shrubs and in the surface soil layer.

In the spring of 1996, oil could still be seen on the branches of new growth plants. However, new growth leaves appeared to be quite healthy. The re-growth of a complete grass cover was also quite evident along with re-growth of bushes and shrubs.

This plot, which had oil left on it to recover naturally, had basically recovered in terms of plant cover.

Photo credit: Ed Owens, Polaris Applied Sciences, Inc.



After cleanup – some oil left

One year later

The lesson learned is that too much removal (Test Patch A) delayed the area's recovery by impacting plant roots and removing top soil. Partial oil removal, however, (Test Patch B) accelerated natural recovery and did not damage the perennial shrubs and bushes or annual grasses. They re-grew the next spring.



## Squamish Estuary

A more recent spill occurred in August, 2006 at the Squamish dock terminal north of Vancouver. The *M/V Westwood Anette* struck a metal piling and spilled 29,000 liters of Bunker C oil into the sea.

High winds blew oil into the estuary of the Squamish River and the estuary marshes were heavily contaminated.

After considering the Net Environmental Benefit of proposed cleanup techniques, spill responders decided to leave a large amount of oil in the marsh to allow the estuary to recover naturally.

Though the public and media heavily criticised spill responders for this decision, it had been determined that the marsh was extremely sensitive. To send 100 cleanup personnel tramping in with gum boots would damage the ecosystem more than leaving some product behind to degrade naturally.

