

# Emergency Management Branch Newsletter



The Best Place on Earth

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## Special Points of Interest:

First Emergency Management Branch Newsletter  
Premier's Award Win  
Current Projects/Programs

## Important Upcoming Dates:

NC4 Users Conference  
(April 21-23/08)  
Emergency Preparedness Week  
(May 4-10/08)  
Fifth Annual Bi-National Cross Boarder Workshop  
(May 14-16/08)

## Ministry of Health

The Emergency Management Branch (EMB) is part of the Population Health & Wellness Division of the British Columbia Ministry of Health located in Victoria. The Emergency Management Branch plays an important role in leading a coordinated and comprehensive provincial emergency management program within the BC health sector. The EMB provides leadership and facilitates a process through the BC Health Emergency Management Council (HEMC) which is comprised of the EMB, the BC Health Authorities and the BC Ambulance Service. The HEMC exists to establish and support priority projects and program planning initiatives as well as develop program consistent policies and standards. In addition to managing key planning initiatives throughout the province, the HEMC is responsible to be operationally integrated in response to a range of events throughout the province that have the potential to impact the continuity of health services or require an enhanced level of response from the health system.

This is an exciting time in emergency management in the BC health sector; with a number of new initiatives underway in a range of areas including training and education, hazardous substance response, emergency management information systems, pandemic influenza planning, business continuity, disaster psychosocial response, and preparedness for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The EMB is also currently planning for Emergency Preparedness Week taking place the first week of May. There will be a variety of events held at the Ministry to promote personal preparedness both at home and in the workplace.

This is the first EMB newsletter. I encourage you to take the time to read this and learn more about health emergency management in BC. Any feedback you would like to offer is greatly appreciated and if you are interested in submitting an article in the future please let us know. Comments and suggestions for future articles can be forwarded to Emily Nixon, Manager of Programs at [Emily.Nixon@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Emily.Nixon@gov.bc.ca)

Sincerely,

John Lavery, Executive Director, Emergency Management Branch.

## Premier's Award Win for the Emergency Management Branch

Chris Smith, Director, Planning & Programs

The Ministry of Health Emergency Management Branch was recently part of a team who won a Premier's Award for Cross Government Integration as part of the 2007 Flood Preparation and Response, Central Coordination Group (CCG) at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Premiers Innovation and Excellence Awards. The Ministry of Health was recognized along with the six other ministries, for leadership and proactive intergovernmental relations in managing and planning for the potential flood threat in the Spring of 2007.

The CCG initiated and led the largest integrated flood preparedness and response undertaking in BC history. The

EMB assumed a key leadership role on behalf of the entire BC Health Sector and is honoured to have been a part of the team who won this award. This recognition clearly demonstrates the importance of emergency management in the Public Sector and the vital role that is expected from the health system in managing and mitigating potential health consequences as part of the overall emergency management priorities.

Leadership at all levels of the health system contributed to this achievement as was evidenced by the significant scope of planning and operational activities during this time. The EMB would like to

once again extend recognition to all the health sector partners who contributed to this great team effort.



(Left to Right) Branch Director Chris Smith, Deputy Minister Gordon Macatee, and Branch Executive Director John Lavery at the awards ceremony on March 10th.

## Emergency Management - A Collective Responsibility

Kirsten Brown, Manager of Planning

### Vision

A provincial health system capable of preparing for, responding to and recovering from the impacts of extreme events, whether natural, accidental or intentional in nature.

### Mission

To deliver a comprehensive provincial emergency management program for the health sector, based on an all hazard, common consequence approach, which recognizes the uniqueness and requirements of individual health regions.

### Mandate

>> Identify and develop the infrastructure required to ensure emergency readiness sustainability

>> Identify and coordinate the business continuity plan for the ministry

>> Develop ministry emergency readiness plan(s) and emergency response protocols that are consistent with the Provincial standard and the ministry/healthcare system needs

>> Ensure ministry emergency plans are transparent with clear accountabilitys within the healthcare system and with British Columbians.

It only takes a quick glance through a newspaper to see the impact emergencies have on our lives. Fires, flooding, earthquakes, tsunamis, pandemics, as well as numerous other hazards frequently make headline news and recent, large-scale disasters have drawn attention to how we manage these events. Our ability to respond to hazards, as individuals, communities and organizations, has a direct bearing on how soon we can recover from their effects.

Emergency management is the term used to describe ongoing efforts to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies or disasters. Emergency management programs are found in all levels of government and throughout various sectors. Health Emergency Management encompasses both emergencies which increase the demand for health care services (e.g. a mass casualty event or a public health emergency like a pandemic), as well as other emergencies that disrupt the continuity of health services (e.g.

earthquake, flood or utility failure). Emergency Management is a relatively new field that has received considerable attention following several high profile events, such as the SARS outbreak in 2002/03.

The field of emergency management is increasingly being viewed as an established profession with more and more educational opportunities being developed for academics and practitioners. This is due in part to the recognition that we are becoming more vulnerable to the effects of disasters and that they seem to occur on a more frequent basis. Whereas emergency management has traditionally been reactive to events, it is now recognized that we need to be proactive in our approach to emergencies and disasters. Effective prevention and mitigation strategies can significantly reduce our vulnerability to certain hazards, while planning is needed to ensure that the systems and processes in place are the most appropriate possible for both response and recovery. This requires

extensive collaboration and coordination on the part of all organizations involved in emergency management.

While the practice of emergency management in the private and public sectors is becoming more professional, it is important to recognize that all individuals play a role in emergency preparedness, response and recovery. Indeed, one of the key challenges for professional emergency management programs is integrating a culture of preparedness throughout their whole organization or jurisdiction. During an emergency event, all members of an organization will have a role to play in managing the response and recovery. Furthermore, an organization is only as prepared as its members and a community is only as prepared as its individual citizens. We can be of no assistance to others if we are unprepared ourselves.

The EMB will be hosting a variety of events this May during EP Week to promote personal preparedness both at home and in the workplace

## Leading the Way in Worker Care - Prince George, BC

Jennifer Bonkowsky, Emergency Management Assistant

The 2008 flooding in Prince George, BC resulted in a great need for worker care. An extensive number of trained professionals and volunteers continuously provided support and emergency services since disaster response began in mid-December, 2007. As of January 30<sup>th</sup>, 24 families were on evacuation order, 47 families were on evacuation alert, and an estimated 47 businesses had been impacted.

The trend for emergency response workers is to put in very long hours with few days off in the event of an emer-

gency. It becomes difficult for workers to leave the site and take personal time off when their help is continuously needed. As a result ensuring that a strong foundation for worker care exists is an essential part of emergency management and disaster psychosocial planning.

The city of Prince George had discussed implementing numerous worker care initiatives that included providing coffee/ soup/ hot meals to outside workers from external agencies such as the Red Cross. Initiatives also included as-

signing two staff to provide outreach services to outside workers and the Emergency Operations Centre. Letters of recognition for workers, and packages that included information on disaster stress management, healthy snacks, and water were also distributed. A set of guidelines for scheduling emergency response workers has also been recommended to ensure that workers do not exhaust their personal limits or generate excessive stress.

Although the flooding in Prince George required a great deal



Photo of Prince George, Nechako Ice Jam. January, 2008.

of response services for an extended period of time the need for worker care was highly regarded. The city will now be incorporating a worker care plan into its Emergency Response Plans. This is the first of its kind in overall comprehensiveness. Outside

workers were out on the river monitoring the ice, the surge of water, and the flooding 24 hours a day in freezing cold weather. The 2008 flooding in Prince George has illustrated how important worker care is at the ground level, and the many ways it has been inte-

grated into emergency management planning throughout the province.

Information provided by: Heleen Sandvik, Provincial Coordinator, Disaster Psychosocial Project,

Emergency Management Branch.

## GIS for Health Emergency Management

Yoshimasa Ono, Emergency Management Information System GIS Analyst

Geographic Information System (GIS) is a computer system for capturing, storing, managing, analyzing, and displaying location-based information. Its ability to handle and process both location and attribute data gives GIS its power.

From estimating the number of people likely to be affected by toxic gas plume in densely populated areas to identifying optimal location for antiviral drugs distribution centre during a flu pandemic, GIS technology allows emergency managers to manage, visualize, and analyze a vast num-

ber of location based information efficiently and effectively. It provides tremendous potential to help health emergency managers make decisions faster during all phases of emergency management.

If a large scale earthquake strikes the Lower Mainland area, for instance, a significant number of people in the damaged area may require immediate medical care. Some health care facilities in the area, however, may be inoperable due to damage to building structure or utility lines, caused by the earthquake. In a situation like this,

health emergency managers can utilize GIS technology to instantly locate all health care facilities that are still in operation and have the capacity to accommodate the number of injured. These facilities can be displayed on a dynamic map as colour-coded symbols, which can also be labelled with the number of available beds. GIS technology can display the whole incident at once and provide emergency managers with critical information that they need to know to effectively manage emergency situations.

### Current Projects/Programs



Hazardous Substance Response Project



Training and Exercise Program



E-Team: Crisis Management Software Project



Business Continuity Planning



Special Events Preparedness



Disaster Psychosocial Project



Pandemic Preparedness Planning

## Act Now BC– Activity Challenge Winners!



In this Photo: (Left to Right) Yoshimasa Ono, Emily Nixon, Amy Sheridan, John Lavery, Mitchell Rowe, Jennifer Bonkowsky, and Kirsten Brown.

Missing: Chris Smith, John Blore, Wayne Dauphinee, and Christine Grist.

The Emergency Management Branch recently participated in the Act Now BC Activity Challenge and came out on top with the highest level of activity and 100% participation! All team members wore a pedometer and recorded the number of steps taken for a week. Below is the Emergency Management Branch team and the trophy!

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