

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT BC  
OFFICE OF THE FIRE COMMISSIONER

# IMPROVING FIRE SERVICES:

---

THE OFFICE OF THE FIRE COMMISSIONER'S RESPONSE  
TO THE FSLG REPORT

---

NOVEMBER 9, 2012

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE COMMISSIONER .....	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	4
INTRODUCTION .....	8
BACKGROUND .....	9
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 1: ESTABLISH A FIRE SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD.....	11
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 2: BROADEN THE MANDATE OF THE OFFICE OF THE FIRE COMMISSIONER.....	13
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 3: STANDARDIZE COMPETENCIES AND TRAINING STANDARDS .....	16
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 4: SUPPORT TRAINING, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION FOR VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS .....	19
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 5: IMPROVE THE FIRE INVESTIGATION AND INSPECTION SYSTEM .....	21
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 6: IDENTIFY AND FILL GAPS IN SERVICE COVERAGE .....	25
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 7: INVESTIGATE LOCAL AND REGIONAL EFFICIENCIES .....	28
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 8: PROVIDE ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT TO VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS .....	29
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 9: ESTABLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR FIRE/RESCUE SERVICES ....	31
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 10: UPDATE COMPENSATION AGREEMENTS FOR SERVICES TO PROVINCIAL AGENCIES .....	33
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 11: IMPROVE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES .....	36
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 12: ENFORCE COMPETENCY, TRAINING AND OPERATING STANDARDS .....	38
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 13: RESEARCH AND DEVELOP BEST PRACTICES .....	40
FSLG RECOMMENDATION 14: IMPROVE INTEROPERABILITY IN THE FIRE/RESCUE SERVICE .....	41
ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATION FROM THE LEADERSHIP GROUP: EXTEND IMMUNITY TO ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WITH FIRE DEPARTMENTS IN THE PROVINCE.....	43
APPENDIX A - FIRE SERVICES LIAISON GROUP REPORT LEADERSHIP GROUP – TERMS OF REFERENCE .....	45

## MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE COMMISSIONER

---

In 2010, the Fire Services Liaison Group (FSLG) officially presented its report titled “Public Safety in British Columbia: Transforming the Fire/Rescue Service” (FSLG Report) to government. The FSLG Report speaks to values that we all share - the importance of the fire/rescue service in British Columbia, concern for the safety of fire services personnel and the importance of fire and life safety for all residents and visitors to our province.

I would like to thank the FSLG for bringing its vision for the fire/rescue service in British Columbia to the attention of government in such a comprehensive manner. The FSLG has demonstrated leadership by creating a group that speaks with one voice on behalf of the fire/rescue service in British Columbia, and I am proud that the province contributed significantly towards its report.

I also want to thank the multi-stakeholder FSLG Report Leadership Group (Leadership Group) that has assisted my office in developing responses to the recommendations of the FSLG Report. Members of the Leadership Group have provided their valuable time, sage guidance and positive influence to assist in developing the practical and realistic positions outlined in this document “Improving Fire Services: The Office of the Fire Commissioner’s Response to the FSLG Report” (Response Report).

*Rebecca F. Denlinger*

Rebecca F. Denlinger  
Fire and Emergency Management Commissioner  
Emergency Management BC  
Ministry of Justice

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

### IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

---

#### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 1: ESTABLISH A FIRE SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General immediately establish a new Fire Services Advisory Board to provide policy leadership and coordination for B.C.’s fire/rescue service.”*

OFC Response: The Fire Commissioner will create one or more Fire Service Advisory Committees to fulfill the objectives identified under Recommendation 1.

#### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 2: BROADEN THE MANDATE OF THE OFFICE OF THE FIRE COMMISSIONER**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General immediately broaden the mandate of the Office of the Fire Commissioner to reflect the full range of services provided by B.C.’s fire/rescue service.”*

OFC Response: The OFC has identified a number of activities to strengthen its core mandate, such as a survey and a registry of fire departments, targeted use of the Fire Commissioner’s emergency powers, recommended updates to the *Fire Services Act*, and further exploration of the National Fire Incident Database initiative.

#### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 3: STANDARDIZE COMPETENCIES AND TRAINING STANDARDS**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate immediate action, through the Office of the Fire Commissioner and Fire Services Advisory Board, to clarify and specify training standards for the fire/rescue service, specifically interior firefighting”*

OFC Response: Local authorities require the flexibility to determine the fire services to be delivered and to set standards appropriate to those services. The OFC will continue to provide guidance and advice to local authorities with respect to training standards (e.g., the Interpretation Bulletin regarding Minister’s Order No. 268, the Local Authority Firefighter Training Program Checklist, and involvement with the planned LGMA fire service education program).

#### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 4: SUPPORT TRAINING, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION FOR VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General immediately provide support for training, recruitment and retention for volunteer fire departments in small and rural communities, including:*

- *Ongoing support for training and training opportunities*
- *Development of recruitment/retention programs and incentives”*

OFC Response: The Office of the Fire Commissioner is responding to Recommendation #4 by undertaking a number of activities with a particular focus on volunteer fire departments in small and rural communities including: contributing to a Fire Service Education Program "LGMA Program" to be delivered by the LGMA, assisting local authorities to understand the training needs of fire departments more thoroughly (See Recommendation #3), working with the Justice Institute

of BC and other stakeholders to ensure that existing provincial training funding is allocated in a fashion that meets future stakeholder needs (See Recommendation #3), and by continuing to provide information and advice to fire chiefs and fire departments on matters relating to fire suppression (e.g. training, recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters).

---

### **FLSG RECOMMENDATION 5: IMPROVE THE FIRE INVESTIGATION AND INSPECTION SYSTEM**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate and fund a joint study with the Office of the Fire Commissioner, local governments and the Fire Services Advisory Board on improving the fire investigation and inspection system in British Columbia, with particular attention to the Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner system. Improvements are needed to B.C.’s fire inspection and fire investigation systems, both of which are critical fire prevention services.”*

OFC Response: The Office of the Fire Commissioner has identified measures in a number of areas including: strengthening owner/occupier responsibility, clarifying inspection system flexibility, improvements to the Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner system, as well as enforcement and education relating to the *Fire Services Act* and BC Fire Code.

---

### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 6: IDENTIFY AND FILL GAPS IN SERVICE COVERAGE**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General immediately undertake the following initiatives in order to identify and fill service gaps in fire/rescue coverage in B.C.*

- *Initiate a study to clarify services and identify gaps in coverage for fire/rescue services in B.C., through the Office of the Fire Commissioner.*
- *Develop a joint strategy between the fire/rescue service and the Emergency Health and Services Commission to address gaps in medical first responder coverage.*
- *Make legislative changes that enable local governments to enact fire or building bylaws intended to improve public safety.*
- *Implement a province-wide public fire education strategy through the Office of the Fire Commissioner.”*

OFC Response: The Office of the Fire Commissioner is undertaking a survey of fire departments, and will establish a fire department registry. The Office of the Fire Commissioner will work with all service delivery partners on appropriate strategies to address identified service delivery issues and gaps.

### **IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES TO BE ADDRESSED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

---

### **FLSG RECOMMENDATION 7: INVESTIGATE LOCAL AND REGIONAL EFFICIENCIES**

---

*“That local governments and fire departments in B.C. initiate reviews of their operations and services with the goal of achieving efficiencies.”*

Local Government Response: The Local Government Management Association of BC and the Union of British Columbia Municipalities are working to identify and disseminate information on best practices.

---

### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 8: PROVIDE ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT TO VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS**

---

*“That local governments with support from the Office of the Fire Commissioner, ensure volunteer departments within their jurisdiction have the necessary administrative and management support.”*

Local Government Response: The Local Government Management Association will undertake to highlight the administrative and management requirements of volunteer fire departments as part of its fire service education program.

### **LONGER TERM PRIORITIES TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT**

---

### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 9: ESTABLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR FIRE/RESCUE SERVICES**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General undertake the following initiatives, through the Office of the Fire Commissioner, to improve accountability and oversight of the B.C. fire/rescue service:*

- *initiate a transition plan and make the necessary legislative changes to give local governments responsibility for all fire departments within their jurisdiction (except for industrial, federal and First Nation departments), and*
- *take steps to require local governments to file annual service plans for the fire departments within their jurisdiction.”*

OFC Response: Local authorities require the flexibility to determine what fire/rescue services each will assume responsibility for. The Leadership Group has identified a number of measures that will support the functioning of small and rural fire departments such as targeted advice based on a survey of fire departments, and the LGMA fire service education program currently under development.

---

### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 10: UPDATE COMPENSATION AGREEMENTS FOR SERVICES TO PROVINCIAL AGENCIES**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate and fund a joint study with local governments, the Local Government Management Association and the Union of B.C. Municipalities to review and update:*

- *the tariffs paid to fire departments for services provided to provincial agencies, and*
- *the requirement for fire departments to receive pre-authorization from the Provincial Emergency Program to be compensated for calls outside their service areas.”*

OFC Response: Emergency Management BC will review reimbursement rates for rescue where a task number has been obtained from the province, will work with Wildfire Management Branch to review reimbursement rates for wildfire deployments, is reviewing pre-authorization procedures, and will distribute information to clarify pre-authorization procedures.

---

### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 11: IMPROVE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate projects intended to improve access to firefighter training and to provide leadership training for the B.C. fire/rescue service. The Office of the Fire Commissioner should lead the projects.”*

OFC Response: The OFC will work with the FSAC to enhance coordination of existing training. Additional initiatives outlined under recommendations #3 and #4 (e.g. the OFC’s work with the JIBC and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Innovation and Technology to prioritize training) will also contribute to the objectives of Recommendation #11.

---

### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 12: ENFORCE COMPETENCY, TRAINING AND OPERATING STANDARDS**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate the development of a strategy for improving firefighter competencies over an extended transition period, including a deadline for all volunteer firefighters in B.C. to attain the Basic Fire Fighting Certificate, and mandatory fire department registration and certification. This work should be conducted by the Office of the Fire Commissioner and Fire Services Advisory Board. Voluntary registration and certification should also be offered to federal, private, First Nations and other fire services providers.”*

OFC Response: Numerous Leadership Group recommendations will contribute towards improved competencies for firefighters, particularly in rural and small departments, without imposition of a deadline for mandatory volunteer firefighter or fire department certification (e.g. elements discussed under Recommendation #3 and #4).

---

### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 13: RESEARCH AND DEVELOP BEST PRACTICES**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General direct the Office of the Fire Commissioner and Fire Services Advisory Board to research trends and issues, and to develop, publish and promote best practices guidelines for fire and rescue services, including information specific to volunteer departments.”*

OFC Response: The FSLG Report identified this recommendation as a longer-term priority. Some actions identified in this Response Report will already support Recommendation #13 (e.g. actions identified under Recommendation #7) and the OFC will work further with the FSAC on this issue.

---

### **FSLG RECOMMENDATION 14: IMPROVE INTEROPERABILITY IN THE FIRE/RESCUE SERVICE**

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate and fund, through the Office of the Fire Commissioner and Fire Services Advisory Board, initiatives to promote greater interoperability within the fire/rescue service.”*

OFC Response: Emergency Management BC is actively working with partners, through a number of initiatives, to increase interoperability for public safety service delivery agencies in British Columbia, including fire departments. The Office of the Fire Commissioner is also eager to work with local government and the fire service on interoperability initiatives in additional areas. Activities outlined in response to Recommendation #7 also contribute to the objectives of Recommendation #14.

## INTRODUCTION

---

The Improving Fire Services Report (Response Report) outlines the Office of the Fire Commissioner's (OFC) response to the recommendations of the Fire Services Liaison Group's (FSLG) document titled 'Public Safety in British Columbia: Transforming the Fire/Rescue Service' (FSLG Report). A copy of the FSLG Report can be viewed using the following link - <http://fslg.ca>

The Response Report, developed on behalf of the OFC, was completed under the leadership of Rebecca F. Denlinger, Fire and Emergency Management Commissioner (Fire Commissioner), Ministry of Justice. To assist the Fire Commissioner and the OFC to analyze the recommendations contained in the FSLG Report and to develop appropriate responses, an FSLG Report Leadership Group (Leadership Group) was formed. This multi-stakeholder Leadership Group included representation from provincial agencies, local government, FSLG, and industry (See Appendix A – Terms of Reference).

In its deliberations, key considerations of the Leadership Group were that the delivery of fire/rescue services in British Columbia is determined by local authorities (e.g. municipalities, regional districts, and improvement districts), and that recommended actions must be achievable and affordable. The Leadership Group was also committed to providing recommendations that reflected the interests of all fire departments, large and small, urban and rural, career and volunteer that exist across British Columbia. The Response Report reflects these considerations throughout.

## BACKGROUND

---

### **CREATION OF THE FIRE SERVICES LIAISON GROUP**

The FSLG was originally created in 2004. Chaired by the Fire Chiefs' Association of British Columbia (FCABC), the group is comprised of representation from the British Columbia Fire Training Officers Association, the Fire Prevention Officers Association of British Columbia, the Volunteer Firefighters Association of British Columbia, the British Columbia Professional Firefighters Association and the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM). The FSLG was created to advocate, with a single voice, to the provincial government in British Columbia on fire service issues.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPORT**

With the objective of addressing a number of identified concerns with fire service delivery in British Columbia, the FSLG developed the concept of a comprehensive report which would compile research, analysis, and solutions based around preliminary recommendations for fire service improvement.

This concept was presented to the UBCM at the 2005 UBCM Convention, where it was approved by delegates. In 2006 a proposal requesting \$1.5M in funding was presented to the provincial government to address thirty-six preliminary recommendations that the FSLG had identified at that time.

In May 2007, the FSLG received \$1.275M from government, with contributions from various provincial ministries and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, to complete the report.

The OFC and, later the Local Government Management Association of BC (LGMA), were ex-officio members of the FSLG during the project.

The completed FSLG Report was officially presented to government in April 2010. The report includes fourteen recommendations for consideration by government. Twelve recommendations are directed to the Provincial Government, while the remaining two are directed to local government. The FSLG also identified that six of the Provincial Government recommendations, and the two local government considerations were immediate priorities, while the remainder were longer term priorities.

### **CREATION OF THE FSLG REPORT LEADERSHIP GROUP**

At the 2010 FCABC annual conference in Penticton, the Fire Commissioner announced that just as the OFC had worked with the FSLG in the development of the FSLG Report, the OFC would continue to work together with the FSLG and other stakeholders in responding to the report. The Fire Commissioner further announced that a Leadership Group would be established to assist government to develop achievable, sustainable responses to the FSLG Report's recommendations that would reflect the resources, capacity, and priorities of the stakeholders involved. (See the attached Appendix A - Terms of Reference).

Chaired by the OFC, the Leadership Group was given a timeline of two years to assist in the preparation of a report to government, based on a commencement date of October 1, 2010. Subsequently, the Leadership Group, in consultation with the OFC, determined that a report to government by October 31, 2012 would be more appropriate.

### **REVIEW OF THE *FIRE SERVICES ACT***

The *Fire Services Act* establishes the OFC, and is the primary legislation in British Columbia with respect to fire inspections for public buildings, fire investigations, and fire safety and prevention. The last major revision of the *Fire Services Act* took place in 1978. This legislation is currently being reviewed by government with consideration being given to an update. As some elements of the FSLG Report touch upon matters in the *Fire Services Act*, and updates to the *Fire Services Act* provide a potential avenue to support improvements in the delivery of fire services in British Columbia, the Leadership Group was identified as a primary consultation body for this review.

While the review of the *Fire Services Act* continues, and final decisions with respect to any updates to the *Fire Services Act* have not yet been determined by government, this response report makes a number of references to areas where the Leadership Group has recommended updates to this legislation. Those recommendations that required legislative or regulatory change are included in this report to be considered for possible inclusion in a future legislative session.

## FSLG RECOMMENDATION 1: ESTABLISH A FIRE SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General immediately establish a new Fire Services Advisory Board to provide policy leadership and coordination for B.C.’s fire/rescue service.”*

### **Context:**

Recommendation #1 refers to the Fire Services Advisory Board (FSAB) which is provided for in the *Fire Services Act*. This FSAB is identified in the *Fire Services Act* a body that provides advice to the fire commissioner with respect to operational fire services issues.

The FSAB has not been convened by the Fire Commissioner for over ten years, as the expense of meetings and the administration of membership appointments proved to be problematic.

The FSLG report envisions and recommends a reinstated FSAB which would act as a single representative body to:

- speak on behalf of BC’s fire/rescue service;
- identify priorities for the fire service;
- provide advice to the Fire Commissioner; and,
- develop guidelines and best practices.

### **Discussion:**

The FSLG Report Recommendation #1 and the role of the FSAB have been discussed at length by the Leadership Group, and are being considered as part of an active review of the *Fire Services Act*.

The safety of the general public in British Columbia and of the first responders who provide fire/rescue service across the province are the fundamental goals of the Fire Commissioner and the staff of the OFC. To be able to fulfill this role, the Fire Commissioner is committed to developing and maintaining effective and mutually beneficial relationships with local authorities who have chosen to provide a fire service in their communities, and with the fire service.

The OFC believes success can best be achieved by soliciting and respecting advice of partners and stakeholders. Where fire services are concerned, key stakeholders include those authorizing fire services (e.g. local authorities) and those delivering fire services (fire departments and fire services associations).

The importance of an effective mechanism for the Fire Commissioner to access advice with respect to the fire service was unanimously recognized by Leadership Group representatives. Discussion thus focused on the appropriate vehicle for such advice.

The current model of the FSAB is a relatively inflexible structure, that requires members to be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, by Order in Council, and which does not provide the Fire Commissioner the flexibility to draw on those subject matter experts best suited to provide advice on a given issue.

The OFC has proposed, and the Leadership Group has supported, an approach whereby the Fire Commissioner will appoint one or more Fire Service Advisory Committees (FSACs) to fulfill the function outlined and highlighted by Recommendation #1 of the FSLG Report.

The Leadership Group has recommended, for government's consideration, that this FSAC model be reflected in the *Fire Services Act*, in place of the current FSAB.

**Response:**

***The Fire Commissioner will create one or more FSACs to fulfill the objectives identified under Recommendations #1.***

The Fire Commissioner will immediately implement the proposed model. Key members of the Leadership Group, including local authorities, FSLG, and fire services associations, will be asked to provide representation to the first FSAC. This committee will provide continuity of advice as the recommendations of the Leadership Group are implemented.

**Implementation:**

Terms of Reference for the FSAC will be finalized by December 1, 2012. The FCAC will meet twice annually at a minimum, with its first meeting to be held by March 31, 2013.

The duties of this Advisory Committee will include, among other things, provision of advice with respect to the ongoing review of the *Fire Services Act*.

## FSLG RECOMMENDATION 2: BROADEN THE MANDATE OF THE OFFICE OF THE FIRE COMMISSIONER

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General immediately broaden the mandate of the Office of the Fire Commissioner to reflect the full range of services provided by B.C.’s fire/rescue service.”*

### **Context:**

The recommendation refers to the fact that today’s fire service in British Columbia provides a greater range of services than those that have traditionally been viewed as the role and responsibility of a structure fire department. In addition to those traditional services that include fire suppression, fire investigation, fire inspections and public education about fire safety, many departments deliver a range of rescue and emergency services to their communities and, when their resources permit, outside their fire protection districts upon request. Such services include pre-hospital care in support of the BCAS, high angle technical rescue, and hazardous material responses.

The statutory duties of the Fire Commissioner are set out in Section 3 of the *Fire Services Act*. These duties also represent a mandate for the Fire Commissioner focused on the traditional fire service activities noted above.

The FSLG Report recommends that government update the duties outlined in Section 3 of the *Fire Services Act* in order that the Fire Commissioner would have responsibility to provide oversight of all aspects of fire/rescue services provided to British Columbians.

### **Discussion:**

The mandate of the OFC and the duties of the Fire Commissioner specifically, were discussed in detail by the Leadership Group. A diversity of perspectives were considered and discussed.

The Fire Commissioner recognizes the importance of having duties that are relevant and current to the fire service and ensuring the activities undertaken by the OFC contribute directly to public safety and the safety of firefighters in British Columbia.

The Fire Commissioner values the outstanding efforts of the fire/rescue service in British Columbia as it responds to emergencies, large and small, on a minute-by-minute basis across the province. The Fire Commissioner is committed to working with the local authorities who have chosen to establish and maintain fire departments to ensure safe and effective delivery of fire services.

A key objective of the OFC, in responding to Recommendation #2, is that the Fire Commissioner retain the ability to effectively support its core mandate, and a shared objective of the Leadership Group collectively is that proposed solutions be affordable. Based on these objectives, the Leadership Group’s recommendations focus on how the Fire Commissioner’s core mandate may be strengthened using existing resources.

The OFC also noted that the FSLG report, due to the timing of its creation, did not fully reflect the integration of the OFC within Emergency Management BC (EMBC), the lead agency for emergency management in the provincial government. The Fire Commissioner is, in fact, now the Fire and

Emergency Management Commissioner. While the mandate of the Fire Commissioner remains unchanged with respect to the fire service, this integrated fire service/emergency management role provides for extensive public safety oversight synergies. For example, the provincial information sharing, advice, and provision of support (e.g. liability protection) for fire services delivering approved out of boundary road rescue or other services, is now within the Fire Commissioner's broadened scope. With respect to direct fire services oversight and advice however, the focus of the OFC remains on its core mandate.

In support of its core mandate, the Leadership Group has recommended the following, with respect to the Fire Commissioner's activities and powers:

- Introduction of the discretion to facilitate and coordinate fire protection resources during a large emergency similar to Firestorm 2003. The Leadership Group has concluded, and has advised government that enhancing the Fire Commissioner's powers in this regard, could provide for more timely and effective coordination of fire service resources during a large emergency. Timely and effective coordination of structure protection resources province-wide is critical when significant events, such as wildfire, threaten buildings and other values and the ability of local structure fire departments has been exhausted. Consistent with this philosophy, the OFC has already pursued more robust and integrated plans for large-scale interface fire events. The Provincial Mobilization Plan, developed in consultation with fire departments, complements the activities, and supports the leadership, of the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO) Wildfire Management Branch during wildfire season.
- Implementation of a lower threshold (i.e. increased flexibility) for the Fire Commissioner to exercise emergency powers, such as the closure or evacuation of an unsafe building. Under the *Fire Services Act*, in order for the Fire Commissioner to invoke fire emergency powers a situation of imminent and serious danger must exist. This standard does not consistently allow the Fire Commissioner to act for example, to order the closure of a dilapidated building occupied as a flop house where fires have occurred on the premise. The Leadership Group has recommended that the Fire Commissioner be permitted to act in response to a serious fire danger, rather than waiting for the situation to be akin to a declaration of emergency. Implementation of this recommendation would require a change to the *Fire Services Act*.
- Creation and maintenance of a fire department registry (See Recommendation #6)
- Introduction of enhanced enforcement tools under the *Fire Services Act*, such as a wider range of Orders, and increased penalties for offenses.

Implementation actions set out in other sections of this Response Report also reflect a focus on strengthening the OFC's delivery of its core mandate, such as the issuance of guides and/or interpretation bulletins which will assist BC's fire/rescue service to provide services in a manner that focuses on the fire and life safety of the general public and the members of the fire/rescue service in particular.

Also relevant to Recommendation #2 is the OFC's participation in exploratory development of the National Fire Incident Database Project. This project was launched in August 2011 by the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) to explore the development of a database of fire statistics that would be available to fire departments and organizations across Canada. The OFC has actively worked with participating partners on this initiative, and supports continued exploration and refinement of the National Fire Incident Database concept. Development and implementation of such a database would be dependent upon the necessary resourcing at all levels of government."

**Response:**

*The OFC has identified a number of activities to strengthen its core mandate, such as a survey and a registry of fire departments, targeted use of the Fire Commissioner's emergency powers, recommended updates to the Fire Services Act, and further exploration of the National Fire Incident Database initiative.*

As noted above, a number of activities have been undertaken already that will contribute to this strengthened core mandate, and a number of others, outlined throughout this Leadership Group Response Report, will further contribute.

Some measures recommended by the Leadership Group such as the changes to the Fire Commissioner's powers, or creation of a mandatory fire department registry, would require changes to the *Fire Services Act* to fully implement. The Leadership Group has requested that government give consideration to these legislative changes.

**Implementation:**

In addition to the actions noted above, significant implementation actions will be undertaken immediately:

- The survey of fire departments will be complete by December 31, 2012 and the creation of a voluntary registry will be completed by March 31, 2013.
- An Information Bulletin will be prepared and distributed by the OFC on the subject of the evacuation and closure of buildings that threaten the life safety of residents and occupants due to the presence of fire hazards. This bulletin, which will be finalized in consultation with the newly formed FSAC, will reflect consultation to date with the Leadership Group, and will be consistent with the Leadership Group's desire for the Fire Commissioner to exercise additional leadership and a proactive approach in this area. This bulletin will be prepared and distributed by December 31, 2012.
- Government will consult with the FSAC with respect to the ongoing review of the *Fire Services Act*, including consideration of enforcement provisions and the Fire Commissioner's powers.
- The OFC will continue working with participating partners to explore and refine the National Fire Incident Database concept.

## FSLG RECOMMENDATION 3: STANDARDIZE COMPETENCIES AND TRAINING STANDARDS

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate immediate action, through the Office of the Fire Commissioner and Fire Services Advisory Board, to clarify and specify training standards for the fire/rescue service, specifically interior firefighting.”*

### **Context:**

The FSLG Report expresses a concern that there is no oversight of firefighter training in the province to ensure that firefighters are trained consistently and to a standard that ensures competency and safety in the delivery of services.

The position of the FSLG is that the lack of coordination and enforcement of standards for the fire/rescue service is resulting in inconsistent competency and training levels in BC's departments, placing the public and firefighters at risk and exposing local governments and departments to liability claims. The FSLG further recommends that a single agency should be in charge of establishing, monitoring and coordinating the various competency and training standards that apply to BC's fire/rescue service, to ensure a consistent level of service throughout the province.

### **Discussions:**

The significance of firefighter training was central to the deliberations of the Leadership Group. A dedicated working group of the Leadership Group was also formed to give specific focus to this issue and Recommendation #3 of the FSLG Report.

A key principle acknowledged in the Leadership Group's discussions is that delivery of fire services is a local authority function. The decision to create a fire department is a local authority decision. The determination of what services that fire department will deliver is also a local authority decision. While municipalities must provide for fire inspections, all other fire department functions are discretionary. It is also a local authority responsibility to ensure that, once a fire department is created, and tasked to deliver specific services, that the local authority's firefighters receive the training appropriate to deliver those services.

While the OFC does not mandate that local authorities adopt a specific training standard, the OFC does provide guidance in the selection and development of training. The Minister's Order No. 368 dated December 18, 2002 reflects the mandate of the Fire Commissioner to establish a minimum firefighter training standard, the standard being to use those developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). These training standards provide consistency and can be adapted to train firefighters to deliver whatever range of services a fire department is tasked by its governing body to deliver. Local authorities are free to selectively adopt or adapt elements of this standard as local circumstances may require or allow.

In addition to the FSLG report, and Order No. 368, two previous OFC undertakings to address issues relating to firefighter training provided context for the Leadership Group's deliberations:

- The first project was undertaken following the tragic death of a volunteer firefighter at a fire scene in 2004. The Fire Department Inspection and Audit Checklist document was developed in consultation with WorkSafeBC and members of the fire service, primarily the FCABC, the Volunteer Firefighters Association of BC and the Fire Training Officers Association of BC. This comprehensive document, developed with significant input from WorkSafeBC, and updated in 2010, is designed to assist local authorities with governance issues, training programs and operational guidelines related to the operation of fire services. It has been updated twice since it was originally introduced in 2008 and a further review is now under consideration to ensure its relevancy to the focus of Recommendation #3.
- The second project was the Fire Service Training Access Review Report (FSTAR Report), which was based on feedback from open forums held across the province and documented a number of priorities identified by fire departments and firefighters. The Report was completed in 2009 and highlighted many of the same sentiments expressed in the FSLG Report (e.g. desire for increased training funding, increased access to training opportunities in rural areas, concerns about the responsiveness of the Justice Institute of British Columbia's (JIBC) Fire and Safety Division to the fire service's training needs).

The Leadership Group has also identified that a forum for coordinated discussion among various agencies and associations involved in training would be advantageous. Initially, this objective will be incorporated into the objectives of the first FSAC. Subsequently, if warranted, a separate and dedicated Fire Service Training Advisory Committee may be created.

#### **Response:**

***Local authorities require the flexibility to determine the fire services to be delivered and to set standards appropriate to those services. The OFC will continue to provide guidance and advice to local authorities with respect to training standards (e.g., the Interpretation Bulletin regarding Minister's Order No. 268, the Local Authority Firefighter Training Program Checklist, and involvement with the planned LGMA fire service education program).***

The OFC has developed an Interpretation Bulletin to assist local governments and local authorities to establish minimum training standards for their firefighters that reflect the recommended provincial standard announced in the Minister's Order No. 368 dated December 18, 2002. The Interpretation Bulletin is designed to provide clarification of the OFC's position and interpretation of the Provincial Training Standard. It is being offered, not only in response to Recommendation #3 but to requests received from local authorities wishing to establish policies and standards for their fire departments. The Interpretation Bulletin also explains how any fire department may address the issue of compliance with this standard through the setting of achievable training standards that will effectively and efficiently prepare firefighters to provide the services they are asked to deliver.

A companion document to the Interpretation Bulletin has also been created to assist local authorities to review and define what services they wish their fire department to deliver. This document ("Local Authority Firefighter Training Program Checklist") will also help local authorities decide whether they wish their firefighters to provide offensive or defensive firefighting. If the community funding the fire department has limited means, a decision to deliver only defensive firefighting might be the appropriate choice. This would mean that interior firefighting would not be an option during a structure fire.

The OFC will continue to encourage all local authorities and fire departments to review the OFC's Inspection and Audit Checklist document on a regular basis.

The province currently provides funding annually to the JIBC to be used towards fire service training. The OFC, and representatives of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Innovation and Technology, in partnership with the JIBC, have initiated discussions aimed at determining how the future training priorities of the fire service can best be met.

**Implementation:**

The Fire Commissioner will distribute the Interpretation Bulletin regarding the Provincial Training Standard to the UBCM, LGMA and the FSLG for further distribution to their memberships by November 30, 2012.

The Fire Commissioner will also make the Local Authority Firefighter Training Program Checklist document available to all local authorities by November 30, 2012.

The Fire Commissioner will communicate with firefighter training service providers to invite comment and input on how the OFC might be better informed on issues of which they are aware with respect to firefighter training. This invitation for feedback will be circulated by March 31, 2013.

The OFC will investigate the ability to offer an electronic version of the Inspection and Audit Checklist by December 31, 2012.

The OFC will re-distribute the Inspection and Audit Checklist to all relevant stakeholders by March 31, 2013.

## FSLG RECOMMENDATION 4: SUPPORT TRAINING, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION FOR VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General immediately provide support for training, recruitment and retention for volunteer fire departments in small and rural communities, including:*

- *Ongoing support for training and training opportunities.*
- *Development of recruitment/retention programs and incentives.”*

### **Context:**

The recommendation addresses a concern that exists not only in British Columbia, but across North America, especially in rural communities, many of which have experienced a decrease in the number of individuals willing to volunteer in the fire service.

The position of the FSLG is that BC's volunteer fire departments lack the resources to meet recognized training standards and to recruit and retain volunteers, placing volunteer firefighters and citizens in small and rural communities across the province at risk.

### **Discussion:**

In discussion of each FSLG Recommendation, the Leadership Group acknowledged that the establishment and maintenance of a fire department is a local government decision. Further, the Leadership Group acknowledged that responses developed to address the FSLG Report's recommendations needed to be affordable and sustainable. Consistent with this, the proposed responses to Recommendation #3 focus on assisting local governments in making decisions to manage their fire services effectively, and ensuring that existing limited training funding is allocated efficiently.

As part of the Leadership Group's deliberations on Recommendation #4, the OFC conducted research on fire department recruitment and retention issues in other provinces and states. This research revealed a number of consistent concerns. Volunteer departments face challenges involving time commitment, the balancing of work with family and volunteering, availability of people who live and work in the small rural communities and the fact that employers are often unable to release employees for emergency call-outs.

Research also determined that those volunteer fire departments that have been successful in retaining sufficient numbers of volunteer firefighters, often have similar attributes. These include attributes such as flexibility with respect to time commitments, strong leadership, and an effective and rewarding training program.

To be successful, volunteer fire departments also need effective governance and support from their local authorities. The primary response element for Recommendation #4 is development and delivery of an education program by the LGMA. As noted previously, the LGMA has identified a need to provide education to its membership on the topic of capacity building for fire departments.

The LGMA has a very successful track record of providing such educational sessions through its Municipal Administration Training Institute. The membership of the LGMA reaches all municipalities and regional districts in the province.

Raising the awareness of local governments as to their role in the governance of fire departments will lay a solid foundation for the development of effective programs to address both the training of firefighters and the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters where the community relies on volunteers to provide its fire service. The OFC, along with the FSAC, will be extensively involved in providing input towards this education program.

As discussed under Recommendation #3, discussions between the Ministry of Advanced Education, the OFC, and the JIBC will also assist local authorities and the fire service in BC to ensure that limited training funding is allocated in such a fashion that best meets stakeholder needs. Further, the information resources discussed under Recommendation #3 will also assist local authorities to ensure that the appropriate training for those services to be delivered is identified and provided for.

**Response:**

*The OFC is responding to Recommendation #4 by undertaking a number of activities with a particular focus on volunteer fire departments in small and rural communities including: contributing to an LGMA Fire Service Education Program "LGMA Program" to be delivered by the LGMA, assisting local authorities understand the training needs of fire departments more thoroughly (See Recommendation #3), working with the JIBC and other stakeholders to ensure that existing provincial training funding is allocated in a fashion that meets future stakeholder needs (See Recommendation #3), and continuing to provide information and advice to fire chiefs and fire departments on matters relating to fire suppression (e.g. training, recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters).*

**Implementation:**

The Office of Fire Commissioner will continue to will meet with the LGMA on development of a curriculum for the LGMA Program. The Leadership Group has also met with the LGMA on this issue. A full day curriculum development workshop is expected to take place prior to January 30, 2013. The delivery of the program is expected to commence in Fall, 2013.

## FSLG RECOMMENDATION 5: IMPROVE THE FIRE INVESTIGATION AND INSPECTION SYSTEM

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate and fund a joint study with the Office of the Fire Commissioner, local governments and the Fire Services Advisory Board on improving the fire investigation and inspection system in British Columbia, with particular attention to the Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner system.”*

### **Context:**

The FSLG Report includes several sub-recommendations:

- That training for LAFCs should be enhanced and readily available.
- That fire inspections of public buildings should be carried out in a consistent manner across the Province.
- That fire cause determination investigations should be carried out in a consistent manner across the Province.

In British Columbia, municipalities are required, by the *Fire Services Act*, to have a system of regular inspections for public buildings. This requirement does not apply to Regional Districts. Thus, public buildings outside of municipalities are not required to have life safety or BC Fire Code inspections by a qualified inspector. The OFC does not have the mandate to conduct such inspections, other than in response to a complaint or if believed advisable, without a complaint.

Fire cause determination investigations are conducted by LAFCs within fire protection district boundaries. The LAFCs, typically a member of a fire department, are appointed by the Fire Commissioner, but do not receive any remuneration from the province for the tasks they undertake on behalf of the Fire Commissioner. OFC staff may assist with some such investigations. Investigations outside of fire protection boundaries are conducted by OFC staff, as required. The FSLG Report calls for consistent qualifications and enhanced training for Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner (LAFC) conducting investigations.

### **Discussion:**

The deliberations of the Leadership Group with respect to Recommendation #5 focused on three areas:

- Inspection system flexibility;
- LAFCs; and,
- Enforcement.

Inspection System Flexibility: As noted above, all municipalities are required to have a regular system of inspections. Local authority representatives on the Leadership Group (UBCM and LGMA) communicated that extension of this requirement to Regional Districts would not be practical or affordable, and could not be supported. Leadership Group discussion of inspections focused primarily on municipal inspection systems as a result. Some municipalities have a system of inspections whereby different classes of buildings are inspected at set intervals. Other municipalities

have implemented risk based systems, where the history of a given building, owner, or operator is taken into account when determining the appropriate inspection frequency for a building. The *Fire Services Act* provision with respect to a “regular system of inspection” by municipalities has, at times, been the subject of misinterpretation. The Leadership Group has recommended that the OFC provide clarity on what is met by a “regular system of inspection” under the *Fire Services Act*. Further, the Leadership Group has recommended that government reinforce, in the *Fire Services Act*, the already existing responsibility of owners to comply with the *Fire Service Act* and its regulation, the BC Fire Code.

Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner: As with the Firefighter training issues addressed under Recommendation #3, the significance of the LAFC program was identified and a working group was created by the Leadership Group to explore how the program might be improved. The LAFC Working Group was comprised of experience LAFCs from communities of various sizes representing a number of regions of the province.

The OFC has utilized the advice of this Working Group, and consultation with the broader Leadership Group to determine what changes might be undertaken to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the program. Key issues considered included funding to support the training of LAFCs to carry out investigations and inspections and the overall administrative support required to manage the program.

These discussions included consideration of a number of concepts:

- How to streamline the management and administration of the LAFC program (e.g. by reducing the number of LAFCs).
- Categorization of LAFCs with respect to experience and qualifications.
- Potential means and methods of providing additional training to LAFCs, particularly new LAFCs.

Enforcement: The Leadership Group discussed and considered a number of potential mechanisms for enhancing enforcement of the *Fire Services Act* and the BC Fire Code, in particular for cases when Orders of the Fire Commissioner are not complied with by building owners. Within some municipalities, violation tickets based upon municipal bylaws are an efficient and effective enforcement mechanism, and the Leadership Group recommends that the OFC provide the appropriate advice and guidance to municipalities who may wish to adopt the appropriate bylaws (e.g. through providing sample bylaws).

In cases where the use of violation tickets is not possible or has proven ineffective (e.g. in areas beyond a municipal boundary, or for persistent life safety violations), the use of the Fire Commissioner’s emergency powers under Section 25 of the *Fire Services Act* may be appropriate (e.g. evacuation of a building). The use of emergency powers can be used as a final step of enforcement to remedy conditions that pose a serious or imminent threat to life or property.

Property owners are given ample opportunity to address fire hazards before the Fire Commissioner utilizes such powers. The Leadership Group expressed support for more frequent use of Section 25 powers, such as building evacuations, where serious or imminent threats to life or property exist.

**Response:**

*The OFC has identified measures in a number of areas including: strengthening owner/occupier responsibility, clarifying inspection system flexibility, improvements to the LAFC system, as well as enforcement and education relating to the Fire Services Act and BC Fire Code.*

Inspection System Flexibility: The OFC will communicate with British Columbia fire departments to clarify the range of inspection system options open to them. In addition, potential changes to the *Fire Services Act* to provide for both greater clarity around inspection system flexibility, and broader uses of owner responsible inspection systems will be presented for government's consideration.

Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner: The Leadership Group has endorsed a number of OFC policy proposals for improving effectiveness and efficiency of the LAFCs system.

These policy proposals are:

- Reduction of the number of LAFC appointments through the identification of positions within the fire service which are critical for appointment as a LAFC. This would permit the LAFCs to be more effectively supported and managed by the OFC.
- The identification of desired qualifications for LAFCs to be appointed to carry out specific tasks and assignments. Under such a system, LAFCs could be categorized based on their expertise, as an investigator, an inspector, or a general LAFC. The intent of this proposed change is to create a regional structure of LAFCs, ensuring adequately experienced and trained individuals are available to respond within a region, while simultaneously ensuring that LAFCs are not asked to perform duties beyond their qualifications.
- The introduction of a new program of photo identification for LAFCs. This program would replace the current metal badges and identification cards. The new photo identification cards would state what tasks and assignments the LAFCs was authorized to carry out.

In the longer term, the OFC will pursue opportunities to fund additional training for LAFCs beyond the introductory online program currently offered.

Enforcement: The OFC is initiating more frequent and proactive use of the Section 25 emergency powers in cases of serious or imminent risk. Resource information on the use of such powers will be distributed to local authorities and fire departments by December 31, 2012.

High Hazard Occupancies: The OFC is also assessing opportunities to enhance education and enforcement with respect to *Fire Services Act* and BC Fire Code compliance in specific high hazard facilities such as sawmills. Additionally, the OFC is in discussions with WorkSafe BC and the BC Safety Authority regarding opportunities to enhance owner/operator risk awareness and voluntary compliance with safety requirements in such facilities.

**Implementation:**

Inspection System Flexibility: The OFC will distribute communications materials to fire departments clarifying inspection system flexibilities.

Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner: The OFC is currently assessing what elements of the policy direction for LAFCs endorsed by the Leadership Group can be implemented without changes to the *Fire Services Act*. Any legislative changes will be presented to government for consideration.

Enforcement: The OFC will distribute communications materials to fire departments clarifying enhanced enforcement, through use of the Fire Commissioner's emergency powers when appropriate, by December 31, 2012. The OFC will also provide information and assistance to local authorities wishing to introduce fire safety violation tickets based upon local bylaws.

## FSLG RECOMMENDATION 6: IDENTIFY AND FILL GAPS IN SERVICE COVERAGE

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General immediately undertake the following initiatives in order to identify and fill service gaps in fire/rescue coverage in B.C.:*

- *Initiate a study to clarify services and identify gaps in coverage for fire/rescue services in B.C., through the Office of the Fire Commissioner.*
- *Develop a joint strategy between the fire/rescue service and the Emergency Health and Services Commission to address gaps in medical first responder coverage.*
- *Make legislative changes that enable local governments to enact fire or building bylaws intended to improve public safety.*
- *Implement a province-wide public fire education strategy through the Office of the Fire Commissioner.”*

### **Context:**

This recommendation seeks to establish clarity regarding what services are available in different areas of the province and who is responsible for these services in order to inform service delivery strategies, and so that potential gaps can be addressed.

While police services and emergency health services are province-wide in nature and the Wildfire Management Branch of the FLNRO responds to wildfire (almost exclusively on crown lands), large parts of the province do not receive fire department services such as fire suppression, fire inspection and fire and life safety education that are delivered within defined fire protection districts.

### **Discussion:**

Study to Identify Services and Clarify Gaps: The recommendation to undertake a study of fire/rescue coverage was broadly supported by the Leadership Group. The City of Surrey, in cooperation with the University of the Fraser Valley, presented a project proposal, for a survey of fire departments, the services each department delivers, and the geographic service area for each department. This project proposal was supported.

The Leadership Group also supported creation of a provincial registry of fire department resources. Such a registry would detail the governance of each fire department and record each fire department's human and equipment resources. This would assist with an ongoing understanding and assessment of service gaps, and enhance the OFC's available information during major emergency events such as large interface fire incidents. Such a registry would also provide information regarding areas serviced by vehicle extrication rescue services, inspections, etc. It would also assist with other fire safety initiatives such as the investigation of fires, the delivery of public safety education and the mitigation of fuels in the wildland urban interface. The intent is to use the information collected through the survey, and maintained in the registry, to develop strategies for enhancing service availability within the mandate and resources of the province and local authorities.

The local authority representatives on the Leadership Group noted that it was not practical and affordable for Regional Districts to undertake a greater role in fire services delivery and coordination. Thus, this mechanism of addressing service gaps has not been pursued.

Address Gaps in Medical First Responder Coverage: The Emergency and Health Services Commission provides pre-hospital care throughout the province. In many areas, fire departments also provide pre-hospital care. The survey will provide valuable information to the Emergency and Health Services Commission in its service delivery planning, for example, by identifying which areas of the province currently benefit from pre-hospital care by fire departments. The Emergency and Health Services Commission participated in development of the survey.

Enable Local Governments to Enact Fire or Building Bylaws: The Building and Safety Standards Branch of the Office of Housing and Construction Standards met with the Leadership Group in April 2012 to discuss the issue of local fire and building bylaws.

Developing a modern building regulatory system based on a uniform BC Building Code continues to be a provincial priority. Proposals to achieve this are expected to be brought forward for consideration in summer 2013. A uniform Building Code would give the Province sole authority to adopt building standards, ensuring that they are substantially the same throughout British Columbia. The legislative changes recommended by the FSLG under Recommendation #6 (to enable local governments to enact fire or building bylaws intended to improve public safety) are not consistent with this priority.

However, consultation with stakeholders will be a key element in the development of proposals to achieve a uniform Building Code. To ensure that fire safety issues are adequately addressed, particularly with respect to fire sprinklers, the Building and Safety Standards Branch, the OFC and the FCABC plan to establish a Fire Sprinklers Working Group. This group will convene before any proposals are brought forward, and will develop recommendations for government's consideration on approaches to fire sprinkler requirements that increase consistency, while meeting the imperative of life safety and considering the needs of local governments and industry.

Implement a Province-wide Public Fire Education Strategy: There was agreement at the Leadership Group that such a public safety education strategy would be valuable and that, as resources permit, OFC leadership is appropriate. Other agencies play a significant partnership and support role in public safety education.

#### **Response:**

***The OFC is undertaking a survey of fire departments' resources and capabilities, and will establish a fire department registry. The OFC will work with all service delivery partners on appropriate strategies to address identified service delivery issues and gaps.***

The Fire Commissioner has accepted the proposal offered by the City of Surrey and the University of the Fraser Valley to assist the OFC to distribute a survey to all known fire departments in the province. Once service gaps or opportunities for service enhancements are identified, options for moving towards enhanced coverage for applicable services may include the application of mutual aid plans and mobilization plans as appropriate.

Once the results of the survey are available, the OFC will share the resulting data with the Emergency and Health Services Commission, with due consideration of provisions set out in the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The OFC will also offer liaison assistance regarding

any potential opportunities that the British Columbia Ambulance Service (BCAS) identifies which may allow the BCAS to request adjustments to pre-hospital care services provided by the fire/rescue service, or adjust its own services, to address potential service delivery issues.

The Fire Commissioner will also use the findings of the survey to identify fire departments, whose firefighting training standards are not consistent with the recommended provincial training standard. Appropriate advice will be provided to those fire departments.

The OFC will introduce a formal procedure to permit all fire departments in the province to register with the OFC. The procedure will include how fire departments will ensure that their profile is to be kept current in the registry. The Leadership Group has identified that mandatory fire department registration would be advantageous. Establishing such a requirement would necessitate consideration of a change to the *Fire Services Act*.

Before any proposals for a uniform Building Code are brought forward, the province will consult with local government and fire service associations, including focused consultation with the Fire Sprinklers Working Group.

The OFC currently has a vacant Public Education specialist position. When resources permit, this position will be filled, permitting OFC leadership of an enhanced provincial public safety campaign, including targeted fire safety messaging.

### **Implementation:**

The survey of fire departments is currently underway and it is planned that work on this project, including the analysis of information (identification of gaps, etc.) by the University of the Fraser Valley will be completed by January 31, 2013.

The OFC will review the results of the survey with the FSAC and other stakeholders in order to inform long term fire service enhancement strategies.

The Fire Commissioner will produce an initial registry of fire departments, and will establish procedures for its maintenance and renewal by March 31, 2013.

## FLSG RECOMMENDATION 7: INVESTIGATE LOCAL AND REGIONAL EFFICIENCIES

---

*“That local governments and fire departments in B.C. initiate reviews of their operations and services with the goal of achieving efficiencies. In order to cope with fiscal restraints and improve service delivery, the fire/rescue service in B.C. must seek regional efficiencies and revisit business models to review services and service levels.”*

### **Context:**

This recommendation was identified as one of the immediate priorities to be addressed by local government.

The position of the FSLG is that local governments and fire departments are facing a variety of significant challenges, many related to fiscal constraints, while demand for service is increasing.

The FSLG Report notes that the fire/rescue service in BC must seek regional efficiencies and revisit business models to review services and service levels, in order to cope with fiscal constraints and improve service delivery.

### **Discussion:**

The Leadership Group included representation of the UBCM and the LGMA. These associations are leading research and communication on best practices with respect to regional efficiencies. For example the North Shore municipalities (District of West Vancouver, City of North Vancouver, and District of North Vancouver) have conducted research on regional efficiencies in the delivery of fire services with specific attention to the following topic areas:

- Allocation of specialty services to reduce redundancy and overlap;
- Standardization of joint response protocols and training standards to enable optimized dispatch procedures;
- Standardization of truck specifications to allow joint tendering and other efficiencies;
- Consolidated mechanical service functions;
- Standardized risk-based fire inspection schedules; and,
- Consolidation of public education functions.

Research findings, implementation lessons, and associated best practices information will be communicated out to British Columbia local authorities through UBCM and LGMA, and will be included, as appropriate, in the LGMA fire department education program.

### **Response:**

*The LGMA of BC and UBCM are working to identify and disseminate information on best practices.*

### **Implementation:**

As noted above, best practices identified to date will be included in the LGMA fire department education program as appropriate. Additionally, the LGMA will disseminate information on the above matters to its membership by March 31, 2013.

## FLSG RECOMMENDATION 8: PROVIDE ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT TO VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS

---

*“That local governments, with support from the Office of the Fire Commissioner, ensure volunteer departments within their jurisdiction have the necessary administrative and management support.”*

### **Context:**

This recommendation was identified as one of the immediate priorities to be addressed by local government.

The position of the FSLG is that smaller volunteer fire departments frequently do not have sufficient administration and management resources to complete the record keeping and related management responsibilities that come with establishing and operating a fire department.

### **Discussion:**

As stated under Recommendation #7, the Leadership Group included local government representatives, which, in a working group format, discussed this issue. As previously stated under Recommendation #4, the Fire Commissioner recognized that the establishment and maintenance of a fire department is a local government decision. It is also recognized that determining the services to be provided by a fire department is also a decision of local government.

Discussions with the Leadership Group identified that Recommendation #8 is linked to the challenges that many local authorities operating volunteer fire departments are experiencing with governance, training, recruitment and retention, particularly within the ranks of their chief officers who are typically also volunteers.

The Leadership Group also supported the initiative introduced by the LGMA to develop a fire services education program. It is anticipated that this program will increase the awareness of local authority officials with respect to the administrative support and maintenance required to effectively manage a volunteer fire department.

### **Response:**

***The LGMA of BC will undertake to highlight the administrative and management requirements of volunteer fire departments as part of its fire service education program.***

The Fire Commissioner will assist the LGMA in the development of the fire department education program.

Consistent with its mandate set out in the *Fire Services Act*, the Fire Commissioner will continue to consult with, and give information and advice to, fire chiefs and fire departments in matters relating to the delivery of their fire suppression service.

Through avenues such as the FSAC, the OFC is prepared to assist local government to continue to address this issue.

**Implementation:**

The LGMA will begin development of a curriculum for the Municipal Administration Training Institute Program by November 30, 2012. The delivery of the program will commence by October 31, 2013.

## FLSG RECOMMENDATION 9: ESTABLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR FIRE / RESCUE SERVICES

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General undertake the following initiatives, through the Office of the Fire Commissioner, to improve accountability and oversight of the B.C. fire/rescue service:*

- *initiate a transition plan and make the necessary legislative changes to give local governments responsibility for all fire departments within their jurisdiction (except for industrial, federal and First Nation departments), and*
- *take steps to require local governments to file annual service plans for the fire departments within their jurisdiction.”*

### **Context:**

This recommendation is identified as a longer term priority by the FSLG.

The FSLG Report suggests that an initiative to address this recommendation should be planned for over the next five years.

In support of this recommendation, the FSLG report cites a number of concerns/suggestions:

- Accountability for public safety is not certain in locations where local governments are not responsible for the fire/rescue service provided.
- Giving local governments responsibility for all fire departments will ensure that the fire/rescue service has the appropriate oversight, accountability, more consistent protection levels, and greater opportunities to achieve efficiencies.
- Local governments should file annual service plans and make them available to the public, to provide transparency and accountability about the decisions they make about fire/rescue services.

### **Discussion:**

The establishment of a fire department is a local government decision, and operation of a fire department is a local government function. Local government, in the context of Recommendation #9, may be a regional district, a municipality, or an improvement district.

Recommendation #9 targets those fire departments (e.g. those operated by registered societies within regional districts) which are not accountable to a local authority.

Local authority representatives on the Leadership Group (UBCM and LGMA) indicated that it was not practical and affordable for local governments to assume responsibility for departments that are not currently governed by municipalities and regional districts, and that a measure to assign this responsibility could not be supported. Leadership Group discussion thus focused on other methods to support the objectives of Recommendation #9.

The Leadership Group also recommended that the LGMA should include reference to this topic in the proposed fire service education program.

**Response:**

**Local authorities require the flexibility to determine what fire/rescue services each will assume responsibility for. The Leadership Group has identified a number of measures that will support the functioning of small and rural fire departments such as targeted advice based on a survey of fire departments, and the LGMA fire service education program currently under development.**

The Fire Commissioner will use the results of the survey outlined under Recommendation #6 to define the number of fire departments that are currently not operated by a local government. The Fire Commissioner will also analyze the information provided by those fire departments to determine the level of training and service delivery these departments have in place, and provide advice to these departments as appropriate.

The Fire Commissioner supports the suggestion that all local governments develop annual service plans for their fire departments. The Fire Commissioner also acknowledges that this is a decision of the local government.

The Fire Commissioner will consider how a fire department registry may potentially capture selected information elements consistent with those typically included in a service plan.

A number of the other initiatives outlined in this Response Report will assist in raising the capabilities of departments that do not meet recommended provincial standards (e.g. see responses under Recommendations #3, #4 and #12).

**Implementation:**

The Fire Commissioner will consult with the FSAC, and the UBCM to learn how the OFC might assist in addressing issues that regional districts have identified regarding the delivery of fire services in rural areas.

The Fire Commissioner will consult with the FSAC to determine if formation of an Advisory Committee specific to Recommendation #9 would be valuable. If such a committee is created, its first meeting will take place by June 30, 2013.

## FLSG RECOMMENDATION 10: UPDATE COMPENSATION AGREEMENTS FOR SERVICES TO PROVINCIAL AGENCIES

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate and fund a joint study with local governments, the Local Government Management Association and the Union of B.C. Municipalities to review and update:*

- *the tariffs paid to fire departments for services provided to provincial agencies, and*
- *the requirement for fire departments to receive pre-authorization from the Provincial Emergency Program to be compensated for calls outside their service areas.”*

### **Context:**

This recommendation is identified by the FSLG Report as a longer-term priority.

In support of this recommendation, the FSLG report states a number of concerns and offers several suggestions:

- The current compensation structure for fire departments providing out-of-jurisdiction services to provincial agencies does not cover the full costs of providing these services, and also requires pre-authorization from the EMBC. These are disincentives for departments to provide out-of-jurisdiction services.
- The current requirement to receive pre-authorization from the EMBC increases fire departments response time.
- Registered and certified fire departments (see Recommendation #8), having met the provincially-required competency and training standards, should be considered “trusted service providers” and therefore should not be required to obtain pre-authorization to receive compensation for provincial calls.

The province, through EMBC, establishes policy and procedures for the “out-of-jurisdiction” responses to incidents qualified under the provincial *Emergency Program Act* and the Emergency Program Management Regulation.

### **Discussion:**

There are currently three types of mobilizations and three sources of reimbursement whereby the province will provide payment to fire departments responding to an emergency at the request of the province:

1. Mobilizations requested by the OFC (e.g. aid to another fire department during a provincial emergency)
2. Mobilizations requested by the FLNRO Wildfire Management Branch (i.e. aid with wildfire fighting)
3. Out-of-jurisdiction tasks authorized by EMBC’s Emergency Coordination Centre (e.g. out-of-jurisdiction road rescue tasks)

Reimbursement Rates: The Leadership Group indicated support for the current program in place for reimbursement rates provided by the OFC when the province requests the assistance of a fire department during a provincial emergency. This schedule of rates is prepared by an Inter-Agency Working Group chaired by the FCABC and is submitted for consideration to the Fire Commissioner. The rate schedule was introduced in 2004 and has been reviewed on an annual basis since then. It provides a consistent rate of compensation for use by the province when the Provincial Mobilization Plan has been activated. This occurs where local government services are either unavailable or are not adequate to effectively deal with a significant fire event.

FLNRO, Wildfire Management Branch has developed its own reimbursement rates for fire departments. These rates are outlined in conjunction with the Wildfire Management Branch's "Operating Guideline for Wildfire Suppression and Local Government." The Leadership Group has recommended that the Wildfire Management Branch adopt the reimbursement rates developed by the FCABC's Inter-Agency Working Group, in order to reduce confusion for fire departments and inconsistency in reimbursement.

The third rate schedule applicable to fire department mobilizations, is the schedule managed by the Emergency Coordination Branch of EMBC. These are the reimbursement rates paid by the province under the *Emergency Program Act* when a fire department responds to an emergency rescue incident under an approved task number. A number of local governments have expressed concern that the reimbursement rates for such mobilizations do not cover the associated incremental costs of responding. The Leadership Group has recommended that these reimbursement rates be reviewed and updated.

Pre-authorization: The Emergency Coordination Branch has also been asked to review procedures for the dispatching of fire/rescue services when a request for assistance "out-of-jurisdiction" is received from one of the agencies authorized to make such requests. Fire departments are sometimes unclear as to the type of incidents for which the province will authorize a fire department response. Additionally, fire departments have occasionally requested greater clarity regarding the level of response (i.e. the number of units and personnel), that the province will compensate for when tasks are approved.

#### **Response:**

***EMBC will review reimbursement rates for rescue tasks, will work with Wildfire Management Branch to review reimbursement rates for wildfire deployments, is reviewing pre-authorization procedures, and will distribute information to clarify pre-authorization procedures.***

The Fire Commissioner will issue a bulletin clearly outlining the role of fire/rescue departments with respect to calls outside of jurisdiction, and provincial procedures applicable to such mobilizations. The bulletin will confirm that the decision of fire/rescue departments to respond to calls outside their service areas is a policy decision of their local authority.

The Fire Commissioner confirms that the pre-authorization task number provided by the Emergency Coordination Centre of EMBC to fire/rescue departments is, and will continue to be the methodology that entitles the local governments to apply for a pre-determined level of reimbursement for the services the fire/rescue department provides. The task number also provides

WorkSafeBC coverage and civil liability coverage for the responders. This authorization is consistent with due diligence by EMBC, and given the speed with which authorization can be obtained, it does not appear to significantly impact response times. However, EMBC is reviewing the task number authorization process to ensure it is efficient responsive to public safety needs.

EMBC will undertake a review of the reimbursement rates for out-of-jurisdiction tasks. The intent of the EMBC road rescue reimbursement rates is to provide compensation to service providers for the actual incremental costs associated with out-of-jurisdiction road rescue responses. The OFC will work with Wildfire Management Branch to determine if there is an appropriate method to rationalize reimbursement rates.

**Implementation:**

EMBC will undertake a review of the reimbursement rates for out-of-jurisdiction tasks. Over the next eight months, EMBC/OFC will be collecting cost information from a variety of service providers to help inform a review of reimbursement rates. Recommendations based on this review will be prepared by June 2013.

The Fire Commissioner will consult with the Director of the Wildfire Management Branch to review policies and reimbursement rates in advance of the 2013 Wildfire Season. This consultation will be completed by April 30, 2013.

EMBC is reviewing the Task number authorization process to ensure it is streamlined and efficient in response to public safety needs. This review will be complete by March 31, 2013.

## FLSG RECOMMENDATION 11: IMPROVE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate projects intended to improve access to firefighter training and to provide leadership training for the B.C. fire/rescue service. The Office of the Fire Commissioner should lead the projects.”*

### **Context:**

This recommendation is identified as a longer-term priority by the FSLG.

In support of this recommendation, the FSLG report states a number of concerns and offers several suggestions:

- Many BC fire departments, especially those in small communities, have a significant challenge accessing the training required to safely protect the public. Further, there is no systematic process to develop leadership and management skills in the fire/rescue service.
- BC fire departments and local governments have identified firefighter training as one of their top challenges. For volunteer departments, common issues include access, costs and lack of consistency of training across the province.

### **Discussion:**

The OFC recognizes the critical need for access to training and strong leadership in the fire service. Access to training is a particular issue for the volunteer fire service. Decisions regarding firefighting training are made at the local government level. Training must necessarily match the services that the local government has instructed the fire department to deliver.

The Leadership Group note that the primary elements of this recommendation had been discussed under Recommendations #3 and #4.

### **Response:**

***The OFC will work with the FSAC to enhance coordination of existing training. Additional initiatives outlined under recommendations #3 and #4 (e.g. the OFC's work with the JIBC and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Innovation and Technology to prioritize training) will also contribute to the objectives of Recommendation #11.***

The direct delivery or funding of large scale training programs by the OFC is not practical or affordable. However, as noted above, a number of elements incorporated into the responses to Recommendations #3 and #4 also contribute to the objectives of Recommendation #11.

It is also anticipated that the issues identified under Recommendation #11 will be incorporated into the LGMA Program.

The Fire Commissioner will also commit to work with the FCABC and other fire service stakeholders to assist with and help coordinate continued efforts to deliver leadership courses such as “Beyond Hoses & Helmets” to their members. As mentioned previously in the report, this will be a key task of the FSAC.

**Implementation:**

As stated in Recommendation #4, a full day curriculum development workshop for the LGMA fire service education program is expected to take place prior to January 30, 2013.

As stated under Recommendation #3, the FSAC will meet by March 31, 2013. Its mandate will include voluntary inter-agency coordination of fire service training efforts.

## FLSG RECOMMENDATION 12: ENFORCE COMPETENCY, TRAINING AND OPERATING STANDARDS

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate the development of a strategy for improving firefighter competencies over an extended transition period, including a deadline for all volunteer firefighters in B.C. to attain the Basic Fire Fighting Certificate, and mandatory fire department registration and certification. This work should be conducted by the Office of the Fire Commissioner and Fire Services Advisory Board. Voluntary registration and certification should also be offered to federal, private, First Nations and other fire services providers.”*

### **Context:**

This recommendation is identified as a long-term priority by the FSLG.

In support of this recommendation, the FSLG report states a number of concerns and thoughts:

- There are significant problems ensuring all BC fire departments meet the competency standards necessary to protect the safety of the public and firefighters.
- The fire/rescue service believes the minimum mandatory training standard for all firefighters in BC should eventually be the National Fire Protection Association 1001 standard's Fire Fighter I for interior firefighting, but imposing this policy now would create extreme hardship for many volunteer departments.
- It is vital that departments that cannot meet minimum competency standards be given the time and resources to develop the necessary competencies. Enforcement of competency standards must be accompanied by funding to assist volunteer departments in meeting the standards.
- Registration and certification can help ensure departments meet the necessary standards.
- Voluntary registration/certification by other fire services providers – such as federal (e.g. airport, Department of National Defense), First Nations and private (e.g. industrial) – would help provide a network of resources in areas of the province that lack the resources to address specific emergency situations (e.g. working more closely with industrial hazardous materials teams and First Nations wildland firefighters).

The Fire Commissioner has the mandate to establish minimum standards for training of fire service personnel. This is outlined in the current *Fire Services Act* Section 3 (3) (b). The most recently established standard was introduced by Minister's Order No. 368 dated December 18, 2002.

The wording of the Minister's Order is as follows: “Further to the authority granted by Section 3 (3)(b) of the *Fire Services Act*, the training standards for fire service personnel in British Columbia are those published by the National Fire Protection Association, effective January 1, 2003. Previous editions of the British Columbia fire service training standard are hereby rescinded.”

The National Fire Protection Association is an international non-profit organization recognized as the leading advocate for fire safety in the world, producing over 300 consensus-based codes and standards including a standard which identifies the minimum job performance requirements for career and volunteer fire fighters.

### **Discussion:**

As has been noted under previous recommendations, the decision to create a fire department is a local authority decision. The determination of what services that fire department will deliver is also a local authority decision. When establishing fire services, local authorities have a responsibility to ensure that training and equipment standards can be met and sustained.

Local authority representatives on the Leadership Group (UBCM and LGMA) communicated that implementation of Recommendation #12 is currently not practical or affordable, and could not be supported. The Leadership Group noted that elements of responses to other recommendations would, however, contribute towards the objectives of this longer term recommendation (e.g. fire department survey and registry, training related initiatives, etc.)

The OFC has previously provided leadership in the development of generic operating guidelines with the support of the FCABC and WorkSafeBC. These guidelines are still applicable and have been made available to all fire departments in the province through the auspices of the FCABC. The Leadership Group also recognizes the continued value of the OFC's Fire Department Inspection and Audit Checklist, first introduced in 2008 and since updated thanks to the support of the Port Alberni Fire Department, as a valuable tool for all local governments to ensure the governance and operation of their fire service meets provincial guidelines and regulations.

### **Response:**

***Numerous Leadership Group recommendations will contribute towards improved competencies for firefighters, particularly in rural and small departments, without imposition of a deadline for mandatory volunteer firefighter or fire department certification (e.g. elements discussed under Recommendation #3 and #4).***

The Fire Commissioner supports the intent of this recommendation. However, implementation of Recommendation #12 is currently not practical or affordable. Elements of responses to other recommendations will contribute towards the objectives of this longer term recommendation (e.g. fire department survey, fire department registry, training related initiatives, etc.).

The Fire Commissioner will ensure that documentation of firefighter training standards adopted by individual fire departments is incorporated into the registry of fire departments.

The Fire Commissioner will request that the FSAC explore longer-term strategies to address this recommendation.

### **Implementation:**

The fire department registry, including documentation of firefighter training standards, will be implemented by March 31, 2013.

The FSAC will hold its first meeting by March 31, 2013.

By November 30, 2012 the OFC will share the Fire Department Inspection and Audit Checklist with the LGMA as an important reference document to be incorporated in the LGMA program curriculum.

## FSLG RECOMMENDATION 13: RESEARCH AND DEVELOP BEST PRACTICES

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General direct the Office of the Fire Commissioner and Fire Services Advisory Board to research trends and issues, and to develop, publish and promote best practices guidelines for fire and rescue services, including information specific to volunteer departments.”*

### **Context:**

This recommendation is identified as a longer term priority by the FSLG.

In support of this recommendation, the FSLG Report states that no organization is tasked with researching fire, emergency and rescue trends, issues and best practices, or with developing a fact-base for effective decision-making, and there is no systematic process to share best practices in the BC fire/rescue service. Further, small departments lack the capacity to effectively address the demographic, technical and other trends affecting their services.

### **Discussion:**

Initiatives in support of other recommendations (e.g. LGMA information dissemination efforts and the planned LGMA Program), will contribute towards this longer-term priority.

While the OFC does undertake data collection to assist in the identification of trends and hazards, the Leadership Group acknowledged that the implementation of FSLG Report Recommendations #1 to #8, must be given higher priority.

The FSAC may wish to explore opportunities to address this recommendation over the long term.

### **Response:**

*The FSLG Report identified this recommendation as a longer-term priority. Some actions identified in this Response Report will already support Recommendation #13 (e.g. actions identified under Recommendation #7) and the OFC will work further with the FSAC on this issue.*

Actions associated with other FLSG Report recommendations are expected to contribute to some degree, towards the objectives of Recommendation #13.

### **Implementation:**

Consideration of the FSLG Report Recommendation #13 will be included on the agenda of the FSAC meeting to be held by March 31, 2013.

## FSLG RECOMMENDATION 14: IMPROVE INTEROPERABILITY IN THE FIRE/RESCUE SERVICE

---

*“That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General initiate and fund, through the Office of the Fire Commissioner and Fire Services Advisory Board, initiatives to promote greater interoperability within the fire/rescue service.”*

### **Context:**

This recommendation is identified as a longer term priority by the FSLG. In support of this recommendation, the FSLG report provides the following details:

- A number of barriers limit the ability of BC fire departments to act cooperatively.
- With approximately 350 departments that each operates as a stand-alone entity, the BC fire/rescue service currently has limited interoperability, coordination and information-sharing.
- The fire/rescue service needs to fully embrace the need to improve interoperability.
- A variety of interoperability opportunities should be studied, including recommended practices for small and medium-sized departments, the sharing of fire service information, improved communications and information management, liability coverage for out-of-jurisdiction work, and joint purchasing.

### **Discussion:**

The Leadership Group, including the OFC fully supports the objectives of Recommendation #14. As noted in the FSLG Report, opportunities for improved interoperability span numerous areas of practices, such as operating procedures, procurement practices, equipment specifications, and communications.

The matter of public safety communications interoperability has been, and continues to be, the subject of significant discussion nationally, led and coordinated by Public Safety Canada. EMBC has been a key British Columbia representative in these discussions, and an advocate for enhanced public safety interoperability.

The focus of the considerable work underway nationally is to improve communications interoperability for public safety agencies including fire, ambulance, police and emergency management, through the sharing of radio spectrum, common best practices and equipment. A key milestone was reached recently, with the acquisition of 10 MHz of the 700 MHz spectrum that was allocated to public safety use in March 2012 by Industry Canada.

In addition, EMBC has been supporting Public Safety Canada's coordinated effort with provinces to obtain the second 10 MHz of 700 MHz spectrum to guarantee future public safety capabilities in wireless broadband communications. The second round of consultation has recently been underway.

EMBC also supports a number of other public safety interoperability initiatives, such as Public Safety Canada's work with industry and equipment manufacturers to develop "best of breed" hardware. These efforts are coordinated internationally with the United States to expand public safety communications interoperability across borders.

**Response:**

*EMBC is actively working with partners, through a number of initiatives, to increase communications interoperability for public safety service delivery agencies in British Columbia, including fire departments. The OFC is also eager to work with local government and the fire service on interoperability initiatives in additional areas. Activities outlined in response to Recommendation #7 also contribute to the objectives of Recommendation #14.*

**Implementation:**

BC is actively working with other Provinces and Territories, the National Chiefs Associations of Ambulance, Fire and Police and the Federal Government to obtain the second 10 MHz of spectrum in the 700 MHz range. The next step will be the establishment of a governance model to implement the new communication system across Canada. Implementation in BC will ultimately be contingent on both the national and US developments in the area, consultations with industry and municipal stakeholders, funding availability and operational requirements.

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATION FROM THE LEADERSHIP GROUP: EXTEND IMMUNITY TO ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WITH FIRE DEPARTMENTS IN THE PROVINCE.

---

### **Context:**

The Leadership Group has recommended that the province grant statutory immunity from civil litigation to fire departments operating in British Columbia. In practice, this would likely involve the granting of statutory immunity to all local authorities operating fire departments.

Individual members of the fire service, either as employees on a full-time basis or as volunteers, are provided with immunity in British Columbia under Section 287 of the *Local Government Act*. This coverage is extended to firefighters operating on behalf of municipalities, regional districts and improvement districts.

Fire departments and municipalities however, do not have statutory immunity in British Columbia.

Currently 167 of the 188 local governments in British Columbia belong to the Municipal Insurance Association of British Columbia (MIA) which provides insurance, including liability insurance, to local authorities. While this represents approximately 90% of the number of local governments it only represents 55% of local governments by population as the larger municipalities obtain their liability coverage from other sources.

Fire departments operated by local governments that are members of MIA, are covered by MIA's insurance. Fire departments established by improvement districts and registered societies are not eligible for coverage by MIA, even in cases where such fire departments offer fire service under agreement to a local government.

### **Discussion:**

The Leadership Group has expressed concern regarding the impact of civil litigation on the fire service in British Columbia. This impact manifests itself in higher costs, as fire services deal with specific claims, and with excessive risk aversion, which can reduce the availability of public safety services.

Alberta and Saskatchewan have both passed legislative amendments similar to those which the Leadership Group has requested be enacted in British Columbia. In Alberta, Section 535 of the *Municipal Government Act* was amended to limit the extent of potential liability of municipalities, their fire departments and district entities and the employees of such who provide fire services directly to municipalities. In Saskatchewan, Section 34 of the *Fire Prevention Act*, 1992, addresses the issue of immunity from liability against the minister, a fire inspector, a municipality, a fire department or a member of a fire department or a peace officer when acting pursuant to the authority of the *Fire Prevention Act* or related regulations. In Saskatchewan, this coverage is in addition to the protection outlined in Sections 354 through 357 of the *Municipalities Act* in that province, which protects individuals such as firefighters.

As part of the work done to prepare the FSLG Report, a background report on fire and emergency service liabilities was produced in 2008. The report states that “a number of trends have acted as catalysts to give liability and risk management greater prominence.” Examples include insurance company claims for negligence when major fire losses occur, the expectations of residents to increasing levels of performance from fire services and the fact that volunteer fire departments are increasingly treated by litigants and the courts in the same manner as fire departments staffed by full-time personnel.

Over the course of the past 25 years, there have been approximately 130 claims against fire services in British Columbia. The cost of these claims has been estimated at \$8,000,000. A single claim accounted for approximately one third of that amount. The FSLG has indicated that many claims are settled out of court and have “non-disclosure” clauses attached to them that make the extent of civil litigation’s impact on fire departments difficult to properly assess.

The OFC is reviewing the recommendation’s objectives, as it complements other responses to the FSLG Report’s recommendations, and the OFC’s overall objective to increase public safety in British Columbia. Further research and analysis is, however, required.

**Response:**

The Fire Commissioner will work with the FSAC to further research the implications of this recommendation, and implementation options. In addition, the legislative amendments required to implement this recommendation would require due consideration by government.

**Implementation:**

OFC staff will prepare a workplan to address this issue, for the review of the Fire Commissioner, by December 31, 2012.

## APPENDIX A - FIRE SERVICES LIAISON GROUP REPORT LEADERSHIP GROUP – TERMS OF REFERENCE

---

### VISION

To establish a new multi-stakeholder 'Fire Services Liaison Group (FSLG) Report Leadership Group' tasked with the evaluation, prioritization and potential implementation of the recommendations included in the Fire Services Liaison Group's report '*Public Safety in British Columbia: Transforming the Fire/Rescue Service*'. Actionable elements will include the identification of achievable and sustainable implementation options, timelines and agency specific responsibilities that reflect the resources, priorities and capacity of the respective partners.

### SCOPE

The Leadership Group's work will explore opportunities to implement the recommendations identified in the FSLG's report '*Public Safety in British Columbia: Transforming the Fire/Rescue Service*'. Central to these efforts will be the report's recommendations with respect to the following core fire/rescue activities provided by the province's approximately 350 independent community-based fire departments:

- Exterior firefighting (Training and Response)
- Interior firefighting (Training and Response)
- Emergency medical first responders
- Road rescue/automobile extraction
- Public Safety/Fire Prevention/Inspections

Agencies that directly contribute to the operations, regulation or governance and funding, as well as key partners in the delivery of fire/rescue services may be included in the Group's review and recommendations.

### OUT OF SCOPE

The following organizational fire/rescue services have not been included at this time in the scope of the Leadership Group's work, due to the independent nature of their operations, governance and funding models within the province:

- Airport fire departments (6)
- First Nations fire departments (82)
- Industrial fire departments (20)

Expansion of the initiative's scope to include elements of these fire/rescue services may be undertaken at a future date with the consensus of the Leadership Group's membership.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

To define an optimal implementation plan capable of realizing the full potential of the FSLG report that:

1. Meaningfully engages key 'owner', 'operator' and 'regulatory' partners from across the fire/rescue services continuum;
2. Reflects the respective jurisdictional roles and responsibilities of all fire/rescue service partners;
3. Defines an implementation model that prioritizes key reforms and accommodates critical interdependencies and maturing capacities;
4. Establishes clear deliverables, timelines and accountabilities; and,
5. Ensures that the evolution of fire/rescue services in the province is financially sustainable.

## DELIVERABLES

Based upon a review of the Fire Services Liaison Group's report '*Public Safety in British Columbia: Transforming the Fire/Rescue Service*' and taking into consideration relevant emerging best practices the Leadership Group will:

- Ensure that the Leadership Group and Working Group memberships include representation from all critical partner entities – as appropriate.
- Develop a work plan including:
  - Confirmation of the Group's meeting schedule and review and approval processes;
  - Prioritization of key fire/rescue reforms including the identification of all critical dependencies;
  - Establishment of required Working Groups and deliverables;
  - Consultations with key and contributing stakeholder groups;
  - Development of implementation recommendations including timelines and specific organizational responsibilities; and,
  - Identification of key metrics and deliverables to determine the impact and performance of any initiatives undertaken - as appropriate.
- Address potential activities identified during the course of the Leadership Group's deliberations, which may include support for the development of interim inter-agency planning actions and agreements.
- Develop a clear understanding of the resources required to support the leadership group, and the working groups, to achieve deliverables.

## LEADERSHIP GROUP

### MEMBERSHIP

The Leadership Group's membership will be composed of selected representatives from the continuum of owners, operators and regulators that sustain the province's fire/rescue services:

- **Emergency Management BC** (2 representatives)
  - Chair (Fire Commissioner or delegate)
  - Office of the Fire Commissioner

- **Fire Services Liaison Group** (3 representatives)
- **Local Government** (2 representatives)
  - Union of BC Municipalities
  - Local Government Management Association
- **Other Provincial Government Emergency Services** (2 representatives)
  - Ministry of Forests and Range
  - Emergency Health Services Commission
- **Business and Industry Representative** (1 representative)

## **CHAIR**

The Leadership Group will be chaired by the provincial Fire Commissioner or delegate.

## **EX-OFFICIO ADVISORS**

At the discretion of the Chair, and in consultation with Leadership Group members, subject matter experts from a diverse list of entities will be asked to contribute to discussions on specific issues.

The list of entities may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- BC Ambulance Service
- BC Road Rescue Service Agencies
- BC Safety Authority
- BC Search and Rescue Association
- Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) of Canada
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
- Insurance Bureau of Canada
- Insurance Brokers Association of British Columbia
- Insurance Corporation of British Columbia
- Justice Institute of BC/Vancouver Island Emergency Response Academy/College of the Rockies/District of North Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services
- Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development
- Ministry of Community and Rural Development
- Ministry of Housing and Social Development
- Ministry of Labour
- Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
- Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
- Provincial Emergency Radio Communications Service
- SCM Risk Management Services Inc. (Fire Underwriters Survey)
- WorkSafe BC

## **MEETINGS**

The Leadership Group will convene at the request of the Chair.

The Leadership Group will convene at least quarterly face-to-face or via telephone or video conference. Additional meetings will be called as required to meet the Leadership Group's vision.

Completion of the Leadership Group's deliverables will occur within a two-year time line from the commencement date of October 1, 2010. Working Groups will be directed to complete their assignments to ensure this overarching timeline is achieved.

## **REPORTING**

The Leadership Group will report semi-annually to the Deputy Solicitor General on its progress and the activities of the working groups.

Reports will be presented by the Leadership Group's Chair.

## **RESOURCES**

Emergency Management BC will provide administrative support to the Leadership Group as required. Participating representatives will be responsible for their expenses and every effort will be made to manage costs (i.e. teleconferences).

## **WORKING GROUPS**

Select working groups may be struck by the Leadership Group to achieve the vision, objectives and deliverables detailed in this Terms of Reference.

## **WORKING GROUP CHAIR**

Emergency Management BC will designate a Chair or Co-Chairs for each working group who will be responsible for the selection of working group members, achievement of specific delegated tasks and deliverables and regular reporting on performance.

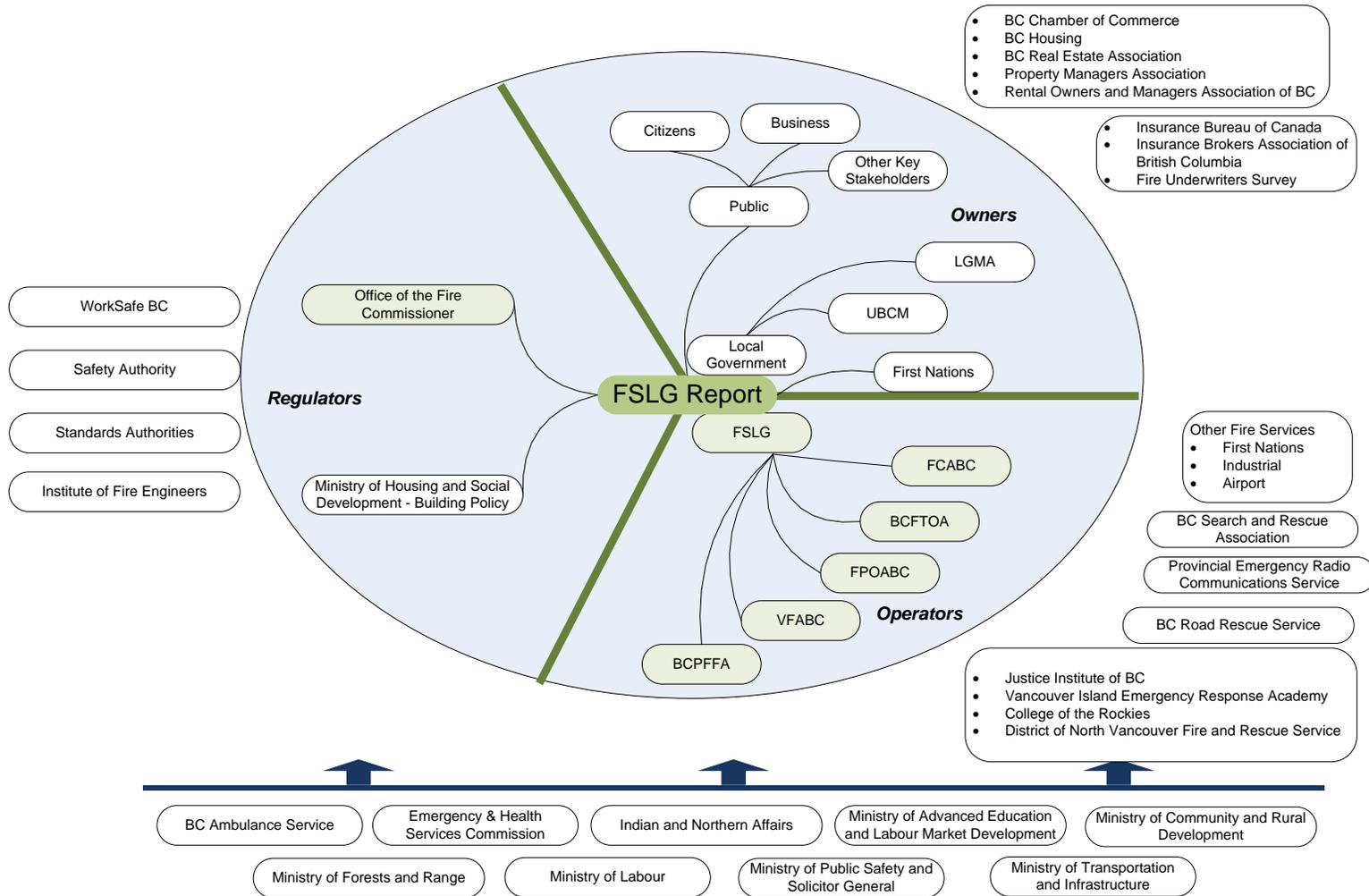
## **MEETINGS**

Working groups will meet at the request of their respective Chair.

## **REPORTING**

Working groups will provide an initial project plan, and within two weeks following each working group meeting, written status reports to the Leadership Group's Chair. The status of working groups will be reported at each meeting of the Leadership Group. Interim reports may be made at the discretion of the working group Chair.

# FIRE RESCUE SERVICES STAKEHOLDER MAP



## POTENTIAL WORKING GROUPS AND ASSOCIATED REPRESENTATIVES

Report Recommendation	Entity
OFC Mandate & Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EMBC, FCABC, FPOABC, MHSD, MPSSG (Policy), BCPFFA</li> </ul>
Training Standards & Firefighter Training & Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EMBC, BCFTOA, VFABC, JIBC, MFR, WSBC, BCPFFA, FPOABC</li> </ul>
Volunteer Recruitment & Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EMBC, VFABC, FCABC, LGMA</li> </ul>
Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner (LAFC) Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EMBC, FPOABC, BCPFFA, BCSA, MHSD</li> </ul>
Service Coverage Gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EMBC, MCRD, FCABC, LGMA</li> </ul>
Local & Regional Efficiencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EMBC, FCABC, UBCM, MCRD, LGMA, VFABC</li> </ul>
Volunteer FD Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EMBC, FCABC, VFABC, LGMA</li> </ul>
Engaging FD Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EMBC, MFR, FCABC, LGMA</li> </ul>
Best Practises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EMBC, FCABC, BCPFFA, LGMA</li> </ul>
Interoperability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EMBC, MFR</li> </ul>
Governance, Funding, Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UBCM, LGMA, FCABC</li> </ul>

### GLOSSARY

<b>BCFTOA</b>	British Columbia Fire Training Officers Association
<b>BCPFFA</b>	British Columbia Professional Firefighters Association
<b>BCSA</b>	British Columbia Safety Authority
<b>EMBC</b>	Emergency Management BC
<b>FCABC</b>	Fire Chiefs' Association of British Columbia
<b>FPOABC</b>	Fire Prevention Officers' Association of British Columbia
<b>JIBC</b>	Justice Institute of British Columbia-Fire & Safety Division
<b>LGMA</b>	Local Government Management Association
<b>MCRD</b>	Ministry of Community and Rural Development
<b>MFR</b>	Ministry of Forests and Range, Wildfire Management Branch
<b>MHSD</b>	Ministry of Housing & Social Development, Building & Safety Standards Branch
<b>MPSSG</b>	Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Corporate Policy & Planning
<b>UBCM</b>	Union of British Columbia Municipalities
<b>VFABC</b>	Volunteer Firefighters' Association of British Columbia
<b>WSBC</b>	WorkSafeBC

## EX-OFFICIO ENTITIES AND ASSOCIATED AREAS OF POTENTIAL ENGAGEMENT

<b>EX-OFFICIO ADVISORS</b>	
<b>Entity</b>	<b>Potential Area of Engagement</b>
BC Ambulance Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of medical first responder services</li> </ul>
BC Fire Training Officers Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firefighter Training and Standards issues</li> </ul>
BC Road Rescue Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of road rescue services in areas not served by established fire departments</li> </ul>
BC Safety Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of workplace and equipment standards</li> </ul>
BC Search and Rescue Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of search and rescue activities</li> </ul>
Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) of Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• British Columbia Fire Code and British Columbia Building Code</li> </ul>
Fire Prevention Officers Association of British Columbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire Inspections, Fire Investigations, Fire &amp; Life Safety Public Education related issues</li> </ul>
Fire Underwriters Survey (Private Company)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the capabilities and standards associated with the establishment and operation of a Fire Department</li> </ul>
Indian and Northern Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement in fire/rescue services on First Nations lands</li> </ul>
Insurance Bureau of Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire and Life Safety, FireSmart</li> </ul>
Insurance Brokers Association of British Columbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire and Life Safety Public Education</li> </ul>
Insurance Corporation of British Columbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road Rescue issues as per BC Road Rescue Service above and Motor Vehicle fire issues</li> </ul>
Justice Institute of BC/Vancouver Island Emergency Response Academy/College of the Rockies/District of North Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of related training and certification through the fire service training agencies listed</li> </ul>
Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult Education issues</li> <li>• Recruitment &amp; Retention</li> </ul>
Ministry of Community and Rural Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility for the local government affairs and the <i>Community Charter</i></li> </ul>
Ministry of Housing and Social Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility for Building and Safety Standards</li> <li>• British Columbia Fire Code and British Columbia Building Code</li> </ul>
Ministry of Labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firefighter Safety</li> </ul>
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistance with Mandate, Legislation issues</li> </ul>
Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highway traffic control</li> </ul>
Provincial Emergency Radio Communications Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications interoperability</li> </ul>
WorkSafe BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firefighter Workplace Safety Standards</li> </ul>

Note: Fire/Rescue Service Associations that are not represented as standing members of the Leadership Group may be involved as Ex-Officio Advisors.