

Factsheet: Definition of Emergency Management

Definition of Emergency

The definition of “emergency” is one of the most critical definitions in the Emergency and Disaster Management Act as it establishes the foundation for when a state of emergency can be declared. In turn, this determines when emergency powers can be used. Both of the following two components of the definition must be met for an event to be an emergency under the Emergency and Disaster Management Act:

- 1) Potential cause(s)
- 2) Threshold for action

New language not used in the previous Emergency Program Act definition of “emergency” is indicated below.

Regulations can be made to prescribe incidents, events, or circumstances for the purposes of this definition; however, no regulations have been made for this purpose.

POTENTIAL CAUSES	THRESHOLD FOR ACTION
<p>An emergency means a state that is the result of any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• an event that has occurred, is ongoing or appears imminent that is caused by one of more of the following:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ accident○ fire○ explosion○ technical failure○ force of nature○ rioting - NEW○ security threat¹ - NEW○ terrorist activity² - NEW○ prescribed incident - NEW	<p>An emergency means a state that requires the prompt coordination of action, or the special regulation or persons or property, to protect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• health, safety, or well-being of persons, or• safety of property, or• safety of objects or sites of heritage value - NEW

¹ Under the Emergency and Disaster Management Act, “security threats” mean actions that severely impair the functioning of a government or society, including actions relating to overthrowing a government.

² The meaning of “terrorist activity” is found in [section 83.01 of the Criminal Code](#).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presence, suspected presence or imminent spread of a transmissible disease or environmental toxin - NEW • prescribed type of event or presence or suspected presence of prescribed circumstances - NEW 	
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Examples of emergencies under this two-part definition

1. Interface fire
 - Meets the “potential causes” component of the definition because “fire” is included in the list of potential causes.
 - Can meet the “threshold for action” component of the definition because:
 - the prompt coordination of action may be required to protect the safety of property (e.g., by taking prompt firefighting actions to protect property, including land and structures); and
 - the special regulation of persons may be required to protect the health, safety, or well-being of persons (e.g., by evacuating them).
2. Flooding
 - Meets the “potential causes” component of the definition because flooding is a “force of nature.”
 - Can meet the “threshold for action” component of the definition because:
 - the prompt coordination of action may be required to protect the safety of property (e.g., by sandbagging or establishing other temporary water barriers to protect property, including land and structures);
 - the special regulation of persons may be required to protect the health, safety, or well-being of persons (e.g., by evacuating them).

More information

Online: gov.bc.ca/emergencymanagementact

Email: modernizeEM@gov.bc.ca

The information in this document is for your convenience and guidance and is not a replacement for the legislation.

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