

Indigenous knowledge and the Emergency and Disaster Management Act

This factsheet supports local authorities¹, with implementing requirements related to Indigenous knowledge described in the Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA). Specifically, it describes what is meant by Indigenous knowledge in an emergency management context and communicates what the requirements are in EDMA. The following information includes a summary of recommendations and activities in emergency and disaster risk management. In addition, examples are offered related to incorporating Indigenous knowledge into emergency management and resources to support implementation.


EDMA does not provide a definition of Indigenous knowledge. However, the [Indigenous Engagement Requirements Interim Guidance document](#) refers to Indigenous knowledge as the “traditional ways of knowing, beliefs, values, laws and practices of Indigenous peoples in Canada, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples” and clarifies that in the context of EDMA, Indigenous knowledge is land-based and refers to First Nations with traditional territory in B.C.

Indigenous knowledge in emergency management

In October 2018, the Province adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction that recognizes the impact of climate change on the frequency and intensity of disasters and calls for use of Indigenous knowledge to complement scientific knowledge in risk assessments. Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) tools for disaster risk reduction, such as the Hazard, Risk, Vulnerability Assessment Companion Guide (2020) recognize Indigenous knowledge particularly for identifying, understanding and assessing likelihood of hazards and to inform effective activities to reduce risk. In 2024, the Premier’s Expert Task Force on Emergencies released a Summary of Recommendations including the recommendation that all emergency partners recognize the value of and apply local and Indigenous knowledge in emergency management. The British Columbia Disaster and Climate Risk and Resilience Assessment builds on lessons from conventional risk assessment methods while encouraging a shift towards a more holistic understanding of risks.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act) and the Declaration Act Action Plan guide the Province in advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Many of the ministries with responsibilities in emergency and disaster risk management are implementing Declaration Act Action Plan priorities that are related to Indigenous knowledge

¹ Local authorities are defined in the EDMA as a municipality, regional district, the Nisga’a Nation, or a treaty first nation. Nisga’a Nation and treaty first nations may choose to prepare risk assessments and emergency management plans as described in, and governed by, the EDMA.



and traditional practices. For example, the Ministry of Forests leads action 2.11 to “integrate traditional practices and cultural uses of fire into wildfire prevention and land management practices and support the reintroduction of strategized burning.”

Emergency and Disaster Management Act requirements

The EDMA recognizes the importance of Indigenous advice, input and stewardship activities in emergency and disaster risk management as a key principle for effective emergency management in B.C. In the context of EDMA, Indigenous knowledge is land-based and refers to First Nations with traditional territory in B.C. This means that the provisions that describe requirements to include Indigenous knowledge are not referring to Inuit, Métis, or entities that represent them. Additionally, First Nations based outside of B.C. with traditional territory in B.C. are within scope of the EDMA provisions to include Indigenous knowledge.

Provisions in EDMA that describe Indigenous knowledge requirements are in relation to consultation and cooperation, risk assessments, emergency management plans. In addition, Indigenous knowledge may be provided in confidence by First Nations also in relation to provisions regarding property, objects or sites of heritage value. For example, information about sites of heritage value may be put forward for consideration in the case of an emergency where prompt coordination of action is required to protect the site.

Any entity that is required to develop a risk assessment or emergency management plan, including provincial ministry, public sector agency, critical infrastructure owner, municipality, or regional district, is required to incorporate Indigenous knowledge where available. Available information could include public and/or published sources of information and information provided through consultation and cooperation.

Local knowledge is defined in EDMA as “...the understandings and skills that people have developed over time with respect to their local environment.” Risk assessments described in EDMA must be based not only on Indigenous knowledge but also local knowledge if available. It is appropriate to consider Inuit, Métis in connection with local knowledge, cultural safety and intersectional disadvantage in the development of risk assessments and emergency management plans. For example, it is appropriate to include Inuit and Métis where cultural considerations, specific customs, anti-Indigenous racism or intergenerational trauma may impact evacuee care and supports. Local knowledge may be publicly available or obtained through engagement for the purpose of developing risk assessments and emergency management plans.

Risk assessment and emergency management planning requirements, as well as the associated consultation and cooperation requirements, are being brought into force through regulation.



Indigenous engagement requirements

Regulated entities are required to consult and cooperate with IGBs when preparing, reviewing and revising risk assessments and emergency management plans that span all phases of emergency management – mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Consultation and cooperation on risk assessments and emergency management plans is the process through which meaningful engagement with IGB about incorporating Indigenous knowledge can take place.

Currently, local authorities are required to make reasonable efforts to reach agreement with IGBs on areas for consultation and cooperation during the response and recovery phases. Local authorities are encouraged to uphold the intent of the legislation by consulting and cooperating with First Nations through existing relationships until agreements are reached and are encouraged to engage First Nations about accessing Indigenous knowledge for the purpose of developing risk assessments and emergency management plans. For more information, please refer to the [Indigenous Engagement Requirements Interim Guidance](#) document.

If information is not available through consultation and cooperation, regulated entities may continue to develop emergency management plans and risk assessments with publicly available information. Indigenous knowledge can be received and incorporated when or if it becomes available.


Indigenous knowledge and confidentiality

Currently, any Indigenous knowledge provided by Indigenous Peoples that is provided in confidence in relation to exercising a power or performing a duty under EDMA must be treated as confidential and only used for the purposes that it is provided.

It is the decision of the Indigenous Peoples, through their chosen representative, regarding when and how their knowledge is provided as Indigenous knowledge and if it is being provided in confidence. Indigenous knowledge that is shared in confidence can still be disclosed in the circumstances described in EDMA. For example, if information is already publicly available, if written consent is provided, or if the Indigenous knowledge is necessary for the exercise of the power or performance of the duty.

There is currently no requirement to seek permission to use and share Indigenous knowledge other than in relation to exercising a power or performing a duty² under EDMA; however, as regulated entities are required to consult and cooperate with IGBs on the development of risk

² Performing a duty under the EDMA refers to anything the EDMA requires an entity to do. For example, a duty includes completing a risk assessment, preparing emergency management plans, and consultation and cooperation in the development of risk assessments and emergency management plans are all considered to be performing duties.



assessments and emergency management plans, regulated entities can work closely with IGBs to ensure that Indigenous knowledge is applied appropriately and shared with permission.

An example might be when developing risk assessments an IGB shares information about the location of traditional harvesting grounds which are not public and identifies a need to keep the location confidential. The local authority developing the risk assessment can work with the IGB to identify cultural assets in the vicinity without identifying the exact location, but the local authority would know there are cultural assets of importance in the area.

An example during response and recovery might be an IGB provides Indigenous knowledge in confidence to a local authority regarding the nature and location of a heritage site for the purpose of protecting the heritage site from a wildfire. The information may still be disclosed if necessary for the exercise of a power, or with written consent, but any public-facing documents could refer to the site generally without divulging the nature or location of the site.

Incorporating Indigenous knowledge into emergency management

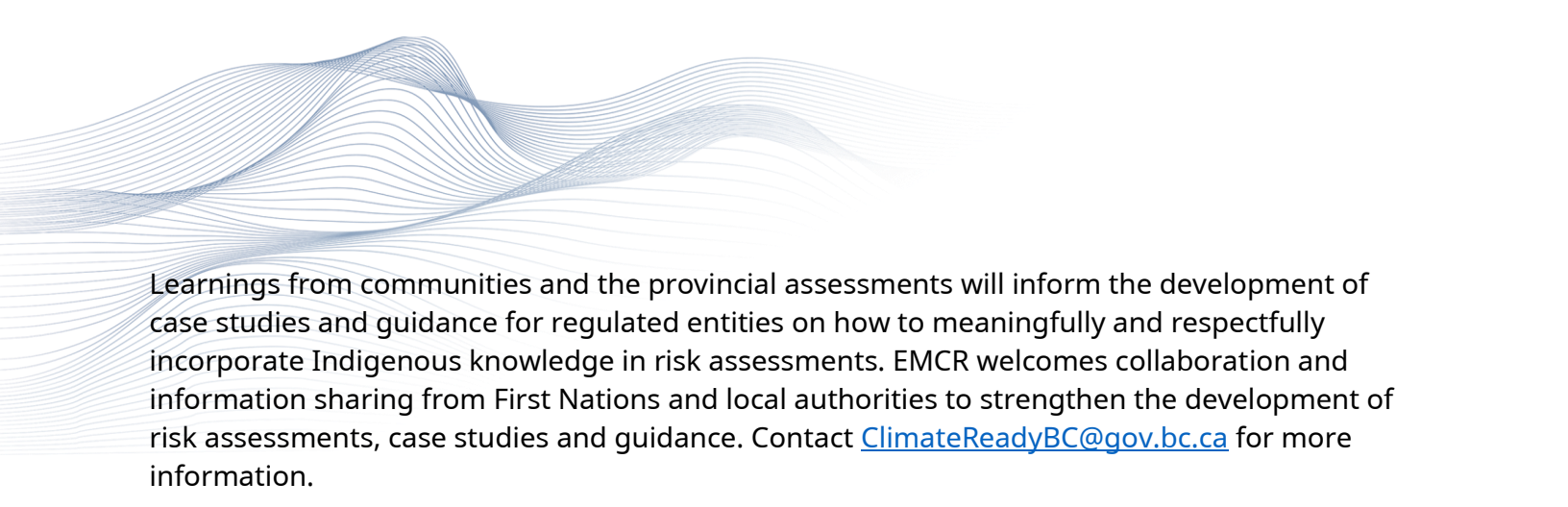
There are several opportunities available through the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) programs where local authorities can begin to identify, gather and incorporate Indigenous knowledge into emergency management.

Hazard, Risk and Vulnerability Analysis tool

EMCR hosts the Hazard, Risk and Vulnerability Analysis (HRVA) tool, which supports First Nations and local authorities to identify and understand hazards, risks and vulnerabilities. The findings can inform disaster mitigation strategies and emergency management plans. The HRVA tool encourages the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge, recognizing that they can provide critical insights into hazard identification, place hazards within a culturally relevant context, and support more effective risk mitigation measures. For more information, please refer to the [HRVA document library](#).

Advancing the practice of risk assessment

EMCR is developing resources to support provincial and regional disaster and climate risk and resilience assessments that include available Indigenous knowledge. EMCR is also piloting approaches that incorporate available Indigenous knowledge in future work.



Learnings from communities and the provincial assessments will inform the development of case studies and guidance for regulated entities on how to meaningfully and respectfully incorporate Indigenous knowledge in risk assessments. EMCR welcomes collaboration and information sharing from First Nations and local authorities to strengthen the development of risk assessments, case studies and guidance. Contact ClimateReadyBC@gov.bc.ca for more information.

Evacuation planning

In an emergency event, Indigenous knowledge keepers may provide recommendations on evacuations, including determining the geographic area, evacuation route and when an evacuation alert or order should be rescinded. Indigenous knowledge keepers are hazard-specific subject matter experts whose ancestral knowledge spans centuries, including details of past emergencies that pre-date formal documentation. For more information, refer to the [Evacuation Operational Guide for Local Authorities](#).

Wildfire risk reduction


The Crown Land Wildfire Risk Reduction program is administered through the Ministry of Forests in collaboration with the BC Wildfire Service, Natural Resource Regions and Districts, BC Parks and Mountain Resorts Branch. The program includes engagement with First Nations communities to incorporate Indigenous knowledge or traditional use information in cultural and prescribed fire projects.

Upholding Indigenous knowledge in disaster mitigation

Indigenous knowledge can support place-based understanding of the land, water and climate, informed by generations of observation, experience and stewardship. This knowledge can help shape our understanding of risk and resilience, inform the development of disaster mitigation strategies, and implement structural and non-structural mitigation measures. For example, Indigenous knowledge can guide the restoration of wetlands, riparian areas and natural buffers, which can help absorb climate shocks and reduce vulnerability to flooding, sea-level rise and extreme weather events. The application of Indigenous knowledge can contribute to more sustainable land use decisions and help communities work with the natural environment as they adapt to the changing climate.

Master of Disaster school program

The [Master of Disaster](#) program is a free classroom program designed to teach youth in grades 4 to 8 about emergency preparedness. The program is aligned with BC curriculum and inclusive of oral tradition in emergency management. Local authorities are encouraged to



promote the delivery of Master of Disaster within their school district. To learn more, email masterofdisaster@gov.bc.ca.

Resources

This is not an exhaustive list of all available resources.

Legislation & policy

- [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#)
- [Draft Principles that Guide the Province of British Columbia's Relationship with Indigenous People](#)
- [Emergency and Disaster Management Act](#)
- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

Guides, plans & toolkits

- [British Columbia Disaster and Climate Risk and Resilience Assessment](#)
- [Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction: By First Nations in BC](#)
- [Emergency Support Services](#)
- [Evacuation Operational Guide for Local Authorities](#)
- [Guide to Indigenous Knowledge in Environmental Assessments](#)
- [Hazard, Risk and Vulnerability Analysis \(HRVA\) Document Library](#)
- [Yellowhead Institute's From Risk to Resilience: Indigenous Alternatives to Climate Risk Assessment in Canada](#)
- [United Nations Sendai Framework: Using Traditional and Indigenous Knowledges for Disaster Risk Reduction](#)
- [Indigenous Engagement Requirements Interim Guidance](#)
- [Justice Institute of British Columbia Community Disaster Resilience Knowledge Sharing Toolkit](#)


Online libraries

- [UBCIC Digital Collections](#)
- [UBC Indigenous Digital Collections](#)

Funding for Indigenous knowledge in emergency management

Indigenous Engagement Requirements Funding Program (IERFP)

In 2024 and 2025, EMCR offered funding to all First Nations in B.C. and local authorities to support the implementation of the Indigenous engagement requirements described in EDMA. This includes incorporating Indigenous knowledge and cultural safety across emergency management practices. See the [Indigenous Engagement Requirements Funding Program](#)



[\(IERFP\)](#) website and program guide for more information about program timelines and eligible expenses.

Disaster Resilience and Innovation Funding (DRIF) program

[Disaster Resilience and Innovation Funding \(DRIF\)](#) program is an expression of interest-based funding program that supports First Nations and improves their resilience to natural and climate-driven disasters through:

- improved understanding of risks, vulnerabilities and risk-reduction options; and
- the development and implementation of structural and non-structural risk-reduction projects.

Activities that support Indigenous knowledge in emergency management might include engagement costs (e.g., honoraria for Indigenous knowledge holders). Additionally, EOIs and progress reporting can be submitted orally or through an interview rather than online. The DRIF program was designed based on feedback from communities and is continuously improved. If there are ways the program can better support integration of Indigenous knowledge in disaster risk reduction, contact emcr.drifprogram@gov.bc.ca.

Community Resiliency Investment (CWI) program

[Community Resiliency Investment](#) program funds the Crown Land Wildfire Risk Reduction (CLWRR) program, which includes cultural and prescribed fire projects. Funding is allocated by the Ministry of Forests and can be used to engage with First Nations communities to incorporate Indigenous knowledge or traditional use information in cultural and prescribed fire projects.

Community Emergency Preparedness Fund (CEPF)

[Community Emergency Preparedness Fund \(CEPF\)](#) is an application-based funding program intended to support First Nations and local governments to better prepare for disasters. The funding is provided by the Province and is administered by the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM). Funding for eligible activities includes, but is not limited to, honoraria for cultural leaders, Elders, Indigenous knowledge keepers and/or cultural keepers.



More information

Online: www.gov.bc.ca/EmergencyManagementAct

Email: EMCR.IER@gov.bc.ca

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

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