

# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

## Wildfires and First Nations Communities

Updated: July 27, 2017

---

### Wildfire Information

**1. Who should I contact about a wildfire emergency?**

- Emergencies can be reported through the **Emergency Management BC (EMBC) 24-hour emergency line 1-800-663-3456**.

**2. How does the BC Wildfire Service manage wildfires?**

- The BC Wildfire Service manages wildfires through a combination of wildfire prevention, mitigation and suppression strategies, on Crown, First Nations and private lands.
- A wildfire may not need a response if it does not threaten public safety, property or other values. Crews may only monitor it, rather than actively fight it.

**3. How do I get information about the status of fires in my area?**

- For information on wildfires, visit [www.bcwildfire.ca](http://www.bcwildfire.ca)
- For information on evacuation orders and alerts, visit [www.emergencyinfobc.gov.bc.ca](http://www.emergencyinfobc.gov.bc.ca)
- You can also contact the local First Nations Liaison Officer at the Northeast Provincial Regional Emergency Coordination Centre at 250-614-6322 or the Central Provincial Regional Emergency Coordination Centre at 250-371-5240.

**4. What infrastructure is being prioritized by firefighting crews in First Nations communities?**

- Fire crews are prioritizing:
  - i. working phone lines to ensure communication is maintained.
  - ii. roads and bridges to ensure evacuations can take place if needed.
- These pieces of critical infrastructure become priorities for firefighting crews when it becomes apparent that not protecting them puts the public's safety at risk. This may mean that, in some circumstances, this critical infrastructure must be prioritized ahead of other structures in any community.

**5. Who do I contact if I have equipment available to assist with fire management?**

- Contact your Local Authority or your regional Fire Centre, listed below:
  - Cariboo fire centre: 250-989-2600
  - Coastal Fire Centre: 250-951-4222
  - Kamloops Fire Centre: 250-554-5500
  - Northwest Fire Centre: 250-847-6600
  - Prince George Centre: 250-565-6124
  - Southeast Centre: 250-365-4040

- There is a specific procedure for registering equipment that might be used in the current emergency, staff at the regional Fire Centre can walk you through that process.
- There may be reasons why equipment is not used, but the offer of community help is always appreciated.

**6. If telecommunications infrastructure (e.g. communications towers) is affected by the wildfires, is support available to First Nations communities for alternate communications methods, e.g. satellite phones?**

- Yes, Emergency Management BC has some ability to support alternate communications methods when communications infrastructure is affected by wildfire.
- The communications towers support landline telephones, and often internet, cellphone, and data services. When such a tower is compromised, BC Hydro and Telus crews are deployed to repair the tower as soon as it is safe to do so.

**7. What are the concerns regarding air quality in my community?**

- Air quality due to smoke in some communities may be a concern and First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) Environmental Health Officers are available to provide up to date information and work with affected communities with vulnerable populations to create clean air stations.
- The FNHA may also make recommendations for vulnerable individuals to be evacuated or remain safely out of the community as a result of poor air quality.
- Contact a FNHA Environmental Health Officer at 778-875-3486 for more information.

## Road Access

**8. How do community members travel along closed or limited-access roads to retrieve and deliver supplies such as groceries and fuel during this emergency?**

- Please check DriveBC.ca for information about road conditions in your area.
- Checkpoints may be in place to monitor and control the flow of traffic on roads that are bordered by fires or are key access roads for fighting fires or supplying communities.
- An individual needing to travel to access essentials such as food, water and fuel will require access passes for closed roads or roads limited to essential services.
- The access passes help manage safe traffic flow and limit people driving. Even with a pass, there may be times when travel in/out of communities may not be safe.
- In some cases the Canadian Armed Forces has been asked to assist the RCMP in staffing checkpoints. These military personnel are unarmed and focused on the safety of people.
- To inquire about an access pass please contact the Local Authority in your area, or contact your regional Fire Centre, listed below:
  - Cariboo Fire Centre: 250-989-2600
  - Kamloops Fire Centre: 250-554-5500
  - Prince George Centre: 250-565-6124
  - Southeast Centre: 250-365-4040

- Northwest Fire Centre: 250-847-6600
- Coastal Fire Centre: 250-951-4222

**9. Why would the Province close access to the backcountry due to wildfire hazard?**

- When a wildfire risk is extreme, the Province may close the entire backcountry or selected areas of the backcountry such as recreation sites and trails to all users.
- The *Wildfire Act* allows for these closures, depending on the wildfire risk, and may also require individuals to leave an area where firefighters are engaged in fire control.
- Isolated areas can be difficult for people to exit when there is a wildfire situation.
- If you or your community members see a fire in the backcountry, please notify the BC Wildfire Service immediately with information about the location, size, appearance, rate of spread and type of fuel (grass, bushes, or trees) at 1-800 663-5555.

## Evacuations

**10. Who has authority to issue evacuation orders on reserve lands during wildfires?**

- Chief and council are responsible for the actions taken on reserve and are encouraged to consult and coordinate with Emergency Management BC (EMBC) during a wildfire.
- First Nations will be notified by the BC Wildfire Service, RCMP, or EMBC of the situation and provided information to assist the chief and council in making decisions regarding the health and safety of their community members.
- If chief and council agree the situation warrants further action, chief and council are requested to issue a Band Council Resolution (BCR) declaring a State of Local Emergency, which may be followed by additional BCRs for an Evacuation Alert or Evacuation Order.
- A copy of any issued BCRs should be provided to EMBC and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).
- Contact your chief and council to find out more information about evacuation preparations should an evacuation be required.

**11. Will Emergency Management BC and the BC Wildfire Service support communities who choose not to evacuate?**

- As safety of human life is the number one priority for EMBC and the BC Wildfire Service, we encourage all communities to issue evacuation orders when advised to do so by the BC Wildfire Service.
- We understand and recognize that evacuating is difficult and emotional, and people want to do everything they can to protect their homes.
- We are committed to supporting communities during an evacuation, and returning people to their homes and continuing that support after the danger is over.
- EMBC and BC Wildfire Service will not support decisions by communities which put first responders in harm's way or enable people in the community to remain in harm's way.

- Evacuations are to ensure community members are physically safe, and are intended to be temporary.

**12. Which agencies should a First Nation contact for work with when their community is directly or indirectly affected by an emergency?**

- Please contact the **Emergency Management BC (EMBC) 24-hour emergency line 1-800-663-3456**, who will provide a Task Number to help track the emergency incident and any costs associated with activities, including evacuations and emergency social services for your community or evacuees your community is hosting.
- Through EMBC, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada will reimburse eligible response and recovery costs for First Nations on reserve.

**13. What's an EMBC Task Number and why do I need one?**

- Task Numbers are used to track emergency incidents by jurisdiction.
- Communities experiencing emergencies should contact EMBC to request support. A task number will be assigned at this time.
- First Nations can also receive task numbers directly from the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre or their local First Nations Liaison Officer. Some communities may have already received a Task Number from INAC BC Region officials.
- Under the task number and through EMBC, INAC will reimburse eligible response and recovery costs for First Nations on reserve.

**14. Is there Wildfire emergency funding available to evacuated First Nations?**

- The Province has provided funding for the Canadian Red Cross to provide direct assistance to evacuees and communities affected by wildfires.
- To register contact the Canadian Red Cross at 1-800-863-6582 or online at [www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/current-emergency-responses](http://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/current-emergency-responses)
- The Province strongly encourages all evacuees to register with the Canadian Red Cross. At least \$600 for each household for every 14 days they are unable to return to their home is available to evacuated households that register.
- The registration process will ask for your basic information about you and your household, such as name, date of birth, email address and home address.
- The First Nations Health Authority can help verify your identity if you have lost your identification; they can be reached at 1-800-317-7878.

**15. Is there any provincial financial support available for First Nations communities outside the fire zone who are providing shelter to affected communities?**

- Support is available for host communities outside the fire zone. Host communities can request support by contacting the Northeast Provincial Regional Emergency Coordination Centre at 250-614-6322 or the Central Provincial Regional Emergency Coordination Centre at 250-371-5240.

**16. Will residents in communities that are evacuated be allowed to return to their communities after the fire danger is over?**

- Yes. The evacuation is about public safety and it is temporary.

**17. How is government going to protect my home while I'm evacuated?**

- The RCMP has offered additional officers to protect property from looters in areas where evacuation orders have been issued.

## **Health and Well-being of Evacuees**

**18. Where can I find help with my medical needs if I'm evacuated?**

- The First Nations Health Authority Health (FNHA) Benefits line is the key resource for seeking help or information such as verifying your identity if you have lost your identification; they can be reached at 1-800-317-7878.
- If you need to replace or refill a prescription, go to your local pharmacy and bring your identification. If possible bring your prescription or medication packaging. If you don't have details of your medication, the pharmacist can look it up for you or they can call the Non-Insured Health Benefits Drug Exception Centre at 1-800-580-0950.

**19. What resources are available in situations where individuals can't return to their home communities due to health reasons (smoke)?**

- Emergency Social Services (ESS) are available to those directly affected by the fires; each applicant is assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- Information will be available at your local Reception Centre, or you can contact your local authority or the ESS Call Centre at 1-800-585-9559.
- For this wildfire event, self-evacuated persons who are in the evacuation order or alert area or who are immediately adjacent to the wildfires, or are adversely affected by smoke due to health conditions, will be eligible to receive ESS.

**20. Are counselling services available to evacuees?**

- The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) has deployed internal and contracted mental health resources to support evacuees in Kamloops and Prince George with culturally safe trauma counselling, including counsellors who are visiting hotels with evacuees and evacuation centres.
- People can be connected with a counsellor by calling the FNHA Health Benefits line 1-800-317-7878, or the FNHA Northern Region Crisis Response Advisor at 778-349-4376.

**21. What do I do if my health centre is closed or my family is evacuated?**

- Evacuated community members are being asked to seek medical care from the nearest medical facility in the receiving community, health clinic or hospital.

- For those with loved ones in the hospital or long-term care, a central number has been established through Interior Health Patient and Quality Care Office to connect evacuees and families; please call 1-877-442-2001.
- Nursing Services will work alongside Interior Health to identify safe and appropriate care areas and, as able, affected nursing staff will be deployed to these areas.

**22. How does government assist those with special needs, such as Elders?**

- During evacuation, the needs of individuals can vary greatly. To best support the needs of Elders during an evacuation process, costs associated with accommodation, food and additional support will be covered as an eligible expense. For example, if an Elder is evacuated and requires hotel accommodation, this would be considered an eligible expense, even if group lodging is available.
- It is recognized that Elders have physical and emotional needs that may not be conducive to staying in a group lodging setting.

**23. Are there translation services available for First Nations at reception centres?**

- Yes, translation services are available upon the request of the local authority or First Nation hosting the reception centre.
- This is done through a standard resource request process through the local authority/First Nation via the PREOC. Being that the response is tied to response and in support of First Nations' communities, the response costs would be sent back to INAC.

## Re-entry

**24. Where can I find information about re-entry (returning home) to my community after the evacuation order is lifted?**

- First Nations can receive guidelines for organizing re-entry activities in their communities by contacting the Northeast Provincial Regional Emergency Coordination Centre at 250-614-6322 or the Central Provincial Regional Emergency Coordination Centre at 250-371-5240.
- Re-entry information is available to the public through Emergency Management BC: [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/emergency-response-and-recovery/returning-home](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/emergency-response-and-recovery/returning-home)
- Canadian Red Cross also provides a wildfire recovery guide: [www.redcross.ca/crc/documents/What-We-Do/Emergencies-and-Disasters-CDN/Home-and-Family/Fire-Recovery-Guide\\_2017.pdf](http://www.redcross.ca/crc/documents/What-We-Do/Emergencies-and-Disasters-CDN/Home-and-Family/Fire-Recovery-Guide_2017.pdf)
- Community Information Sheets will also be posted in Reception Centres.
- The First Nations Health Authority has information on safe re-entry home. Your home may be impacted by smoke, soot and ash, chemicals, structural damage and water damage. This information is a collection of health and safety considerations during initial work to restore your home: <http://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-Returning-to-Your-Home-After-Wildfires.pdf>

## Recovery

### **25. What is included in the recovery of a First Nations community damaged by emergency such as a Wildfire?**

- There are two main elements of a recovery phase for communities affected by a disaster, Infrastructure Recovery and Community Recovery:
  - i. Infrastructure Recovery includes restoring and repairing buildings and other infrastructure in communities;
  - ii. Community Recovery focuses on helping a community recover as a whole after an emergency and may include social, emotional, and economic recovery.
- Local Governments and First Nations lead recovery efforts by creating Recovery Plans for their communities, with support from the Province, through the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centres and the Emergency Management BC (EMBC) Recovery and Funding Unit.
- First Nations can receive support from EMBC and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada to develop recovery plans.
- For more information contact your local authority, or for specific questions about Community Recovery contact the Emergency Social Services Call Centre at 1-800-585-9559.

### **26. Will government pay for rebuilding damaged or destroyed homes in First Nations communities?**

- Yes. The Government of Canada has programs in place that will provide assistance to First Nations communities who have been affected by emergency events.
- After the immediate danger and response is over, INAC will work with on-reserve communities to put together recovery plans.
- All the impacts to the community should be detailed in the recovery plan; including everything that needs rebuilding or remediation.
- In general, where there is private insurance in place, that insurance coverage comes first.
- EMBC will examine recovery plans to determine what is eligible for reimbursement or replacement and process those claims.
- INAC will reimburse EMBC for the costs on reserve. For items claimed that are not deemed eligible by EMBC, INAC will work with the First Nation to determine the level of support required.

### **27. Will government pay for damaged or destroyed vehicles?**

- A dedicated team at ICBC is handling customers fire related insurance claims on a priority and individual basis. To make a claim, you can file online at [icbc.com](http://icbc.com) or call ICBC's Dial-a-Claim at 1-800-910-4222, which is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- You will not need to pay a deductible if your insurance claim is for vehicle damage sustained as a result of use on a non-traditional roadway (e.g. forest service roads) to evacuate.

**28. Is there provincial support through Disaster Financial Assistance for homes off-reserve?**

- Fire damage from wildfires is insurable and not eligible for Disaster Financial Assistance.
- The purpose of the Disaster Financial Assistance program is to help people and local governments recover after an uninsurable disaster, for example overland flooding, for which insurance is not readily available.

## **Donations**

**29. Do you have any recommendations for handling or making donations?**

- The preference to manage donations is up to each community; however keep in mind that donations of goods can present significant logistical challenges (such as needing systems and volunteers for receiving, storing and distributing the goods)
- People wishing to support a community may wish to do so through fundraising or by contributing to relief agencies supporting communities such as the Red Cross – [www.redcross.ca/donate](http://www.redcross.ca/donate)