



Indigenous and  
Northern Affairs Canada

Affaires autochtones  
et du Nord Canada

# **Wildfires and First Nations Communities in British Columbia**

**July 18, 2017**

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**



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# General

## 1. How do I get information about the status of fires in my area?

- For information on evacuation orders and alerts, visit Emergency Info BC: <https://www.emergencyinfobc.gov.bc.ca/>
- Keep up-to-date on the provincial wildfire situation: [www.bcwildfire.ca](http://www.bcwildfire.ca)
- You can also contact the local First Nations Liaison Officer at 778-799-2062.

## 2. Who has authority to issue evacuation orders on reserve lands?

- Chief and Council are responsible for the actions to be taken on reserve and are encouraged to consult and coordinate with Emergency Management BC (EMBC). EMBC's emergency contact line is 1-800-663-3456.
- During a wildfire event, First Nations will be notified by BC Wildfire Service, RCMP and/or EMBC of the situation and provided information to assist Chief and Council in making a decision regarding evacuation.
- If Chief and Council agree that evacuation is in the best interest of the community, they are requested to issue a Band Council Resolution declaring either an evacuation alert or order or state of emergency and to provide a copy to INAC and EMBC.
- Chief and Council should also ensure community members are preparing to evacuate and that everyone is aware of how to register with local Reception Centres, if evacuated.

## 3. What's an EMBC Task Number and why do I need one?

- Communities experiencing emergencies should contact EMBC to request support and will be assigned a Task Number.
- First Nations can also receive task numbers **directly** from the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre or their local First Nations Liaison Officer.
- Task Numbers are used to track emergency incidents by jurisdiction.
- Under the Task Number and through EMBC, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada will reimburse eligible response and recovery costs for First Nations on reserve.

## Roles

### 4. What is Emergency Management BC's role?

- EMBC is the lead for coordinating response and recovery activities.
- Through the joint Emergency Management Agreement with the Province of British Columbia, INAC works collaboratively with EMBC to ensure First Nations are fully integrated into the Province of British Columbia's emergency management structure to receive equivalent emergency management services as those provided to other British Columbia residents.

### 5. What is BC Wildfire Service's role?

- The BC Wildfire Service is leading fire suppression efforts.
- Through the joint Wildfire Response Agreement with the Province of British Columbia, INAC also works collaboratively with BC Wildfire Service to ensure First Nations communities are provided equivalent fire suppression services as other British Columbia communities.

### 6. What is INAC's role?

- INAC works with First Nations, provinces and territories and emergency services partners to ensure that First Nation communities at risk of wildfire have the financial resources they need and are able to respond in the event of an emergency.
- INAC participates on regular provincial coordination calls with key emergency management partners, including First Nations; receives and responds to calls from First Nations directly; communicates issues raised by First Nations to our provincial partners, such as EMBC; and provides up-to-date information to senior officials, including the Minister's office regarding the well-being of BC First Nations.
- INAC also provides communities with immediate funding so that they can address urgent needs such as lack of power, or working with Chief and Council to assist in issuing Social Assistance (SA) payments.

## Wildfire Response

### 7. Can a First Nation be forced to evacuate without a Chief signing off on the order?

- When the Province issues a provincial state of emergency, regional districts may follow suit and/or issue an evacuation alert or evacuation order after consultation with EMBC.
- Chief and Council are responsible for the actions to be taken on reserve and are encouraged to consult and coordinate with EMBC. If a Chief and Council issues a Band Council Resolution (BCR) declaring a state of local emergency, and/or advises Band members of an evacuation alert or order, they, in consultation with EMBC, should also ensure community members are preparing to evacuate and that everyone is aware of how to register with local Reception Centres, if evacuated.
- It is recommended that Chief and Council get the most up-to-date information and advice from BC Wildfire Service on current conditions to make the most appropriate decisions.

### 8. Who is entitled to Emergency Social Services?

- Emergency Social Services (ESS) assistance is available to support individuals or families forced from their homes because of an emergency or disaster. ESS is intended to meet the immediate basic needs of evacuees including food, lodging, clothing, transportation and incidentals and is available to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people both on or off reserve.

### 9. Do I have to go in person to get Emergency Social Services?

- Yes, during an emergency event that requires an evacuation, individuals must present themselves at the designated reception centre in order to register as an evacuee and receive ESS.

## 10. Do I have to register for services from the Red Cross, as well as Emergency Social Services?

- Yes, the Red Cross can also be a source of emergency food and clothing and emergency lodging. In addition, the Red Cross can provide information, personal services and family reunification services.
- If you have been evacuated, please call the contact centre at 1 800 863-6582 to have an agent help you register. You can also register online at [www.redcross.ca](http://www.redcross.ca)
- 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.

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

- Yes, support is available for host communities outside the fire zone.
- Host communities should request support as soon as possible 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.

## 12. How does the BC Wildfire Services prioritize which fires to fight?

- In determining how to prioritize which fires to fight, BC Wildfire Service considers the following priorities:
  - Safety of human life
  - Telecommunications - often, the safety of individuals in an emergency depends on protecting things like working phone lines so people can call for help.
  - Critical infrastructure - the safety of residents also often depends on roads and bridges that 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.

### **13. Is infrastructure being prioritized by firefighting crews over homes in First Nations communities?**

- The safety of human life is the number one priority for BC Wildfire Service staff and all response agencies.
- Often, the safety of individuals in an emergency depends on protecting things like working phone lines so people can call for help.
- The safety of residents also often depends on roads and bridges that 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.

### **14. How is government going to protect my home from looting while I am evacuated?**

- The RCMP is bringing in additional officers to protect property from looters.

### **15. How do we get an accessibility pass so that I can travel to and from my community to get groceries or other essential supplies in the Cariboo?**

- You can get a pass by contacting the First Nations Liaison Officer at the Cariboo fire centre. The number is 778 799-2062. Even with a pass, there may be times when travel in/out of communities may not be considered safe.
- The Cariboo Regional District is allowing essential services to pass through checkpoints if you have a pass. They are for essential services only, such as food and water, not for people.
- A list of equipment or supplies that are in communities is being compiled so they can be used if needed. Phone the Cariboo fire centre for more information: 778 799-2062.

## 16. Where can I find help with my medical needs if I am evacuated?

- We recognize that evacuation can be traumatic and that some people may not have access to their medications and other medical services, equipment and supplies.
- If you need to replace or refill a prescription for medication, 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 NIHB Drug Exception Centre.
- The First Nations Health Authority Health Benefits line is a key resource for people seeking help or information on:
  - Medical transportation, including routine transportation to dialysis and other appointments;
  - Medical supplies and equipment, including oxygen tanks and eyewear;
  - Dental items
  - Mental health resources.
- The First Nations Health Authority Benefits line is 1 800 317-7878.

## 17. Are counselling services available to evacuees?

- Yes, the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) has deployed a number of internal and contracted mental health resources to support evacuees.
- Mental health counsellors are visiting hotels with evacuees and evacuation centres.
- People can also call 1 800 317-7878 to be connected with a counsellor.

## 18. What do I do if I need medical care and my health centre is closed or my family is evacuated?

- Nursing Services will work alongside Interior Health to identify safe and appropriate care areas and, as able, nursing staff will be deployed to these areas.
- 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: 1 877 442-2001 to connect evacuees and families.

### **19. 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 work with impacted communities to create clean air stations in communities for vulnerable populations.
- The FNHA Environmental Health Officers are available to support the development of clean air stations and are currently contacting all impacted First Nations.
- 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 Environmental Public Health Services Regional manager Casey Neathway at 778 875-3486.

## **Recovery**

### **20. What is the Emergency Management Assistance Program?**

- INAC's Emergency Management Assistance Program reimburses provinces and territories, First Nations and third party emergency management providers 100 per cent of eligible response and recovery costs, including evacuation costs, for First Nation communities.
- INAC assumes responsibility for costs for on-reserve emergency events. This single window provides First Nations, provinces and territories with access to emergency funding when needed.
- INAC's Emergency Management Assistance Program reimburses provincial and territorial governments, First Nations and non-government organizations for eligible costs incurred in the delivery of emergency management services to First Nations.
- The Emergency Management Assistance Program manages all of the Department's emergency management funding with the exception of the structural mitigation component, which is delivered through INAC's Capital Facilities and Maintenance Program.

### **21. Will any of the \$100 million announced by the Province as part of the declaration of emergency go to First Nations?**

- Yes. The Province is providing \$100 million in funding for the Canadian Red Cross to provide direct assistance to evacuees and communities impacted by wildfires.

- The Province strongly encourages all evacuees to register with the Canadian Red Cross. At least \$600 is available to evacuated households that register. Details on how the funds will be dispersed are in the final stages of planning.
- Contact the Canadian Red Cross at 1 800 863-6582 or online at: <http://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/current-emergency-responses>

## **22. Will the federal government help pay for damaged or destroyed homes in First Nations communities to be rebuilt?**

- 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.

## **23. Who is responsible for putting together the recovery response plans?**

- The affected First Nation is responsible for developing its recovery claims and associated plans. INAC and EMBC will work with the First Nation and provide support and guidance for developing the claim and work plan.

## **24. What about vehicles?**

- ICBC has claims resources set up to help ICBC customers affected by the fires to process their potential claims.

## Wildfire Management Services (also known as Forest Fire Suppression) Activities and Preparedness

### 25. Who do I contact if I have equipment available that might be useful for fire-fighting or fire-mitigation?

- Contact First Nations Liaison Officer at your local fire centre.
- There is a specific procedure for registering equipment that might be used in the current emergency. The liaison officer can walk you through that process.
- There may be reasons why equipment is not used, but community help is always appreciated.

### 26. What costs are covered before an evacuation alert is issued either for individuals who may have left communities due to health reasons for example, or, for communities who may be incurring costs?

From Province public info bulletin <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2017TRAN0201-001316>

- Emergency Social Services (ESS) are available to those directly affected by the fires; there is an identifying process to ensure legitimate need and each applicant is assessed on a case-by-case basis by hardworking volunteers.
- Under regular circumstances, those who have self-evacuated do not normally receive Emergency Social Services.
- Due to the scope and scale of this current wildfire event, self-evacuated persons who are in the evacuation order, alert or who are immediately adjacent to the wildfires, or are adversely affected by smoke due to health conditions, will be eligible to receive Emergency Social Services.
- Support is also 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.

For more information regarding Local government and First Nation guide for financial assistance (see pages 37-42):

[http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/embc/dfa/financial\\_assistance\\_guide.pdf](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/embc/dfa/financial_assistance_guide.pdf)

### *Support from federal government*

- If your community is directly or indirectly impacted by an emergency event, your first point of contact is Emergency Management BC's (EMBC) 24 hour emergency line at 1 800 663-3456.
- This will allow you to report the incident and request a Task Number, which is used to track emergency incidents and costs associated with activities, including evacuations and emergency social services for your community or evacuees your community is hosting.
- Eligible costs will be reimbursed post-event through EMBC, and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) will reimburse EMBC.
- Provincial Regional Emergency Operation Centres have First Nation calls daily during the wildfires to share and collect information in order to ensure community needs are being appropriately supported.