

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Wildfires and First Nations Communities

July 14, 2017

- 1. Who has authority to issue evacuation orders on reserve lands during wildfires?**
 - Chief and council are responsible for the actions to be taken on reserve and are encouraged to consult and coordinate with EMBC.
 - They should also ensure community members are preparing to evacuate and that everyone is aware of how to register with local Reception Centres, if evacuated.

- 2. Is it true that infrastructure is being prioritized by firefighting crews over homes in First Nations communities?**
 - 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.

- 3. Will government pay for damaged or destroyed homes in First Nations communities to be rebuilt?**
 - The federal government (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada [INAC]) is committed to supporting First Nations during the recovery phase that will follow.
 - 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.

- 4. What about vehicles?**
 - ICBC has claims resources set up to help ICBC customers affected by the fires process potential claims.

5. 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 contact EMBC to request support and a task number is assigned at this time.
- Under the task number and through EMBC, INAC will reimburse eligible response and recovery costs for First Nations on reserve.

6. 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 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.

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

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

8. 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 CRD 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.

9. Who do I contact if I've got equipment available that might be useful for fire-fighting or fire-mitigation in the Cariboo?

- Contact First Nations Liaison Officer at the Cariboo fire centre. The number is 778-799-2062.
- 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.

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

- There is lots of information online about the status of both wildfires and evacuation alerts.

- For information on evacuation orders and alerts, visit www.bcwildfire.ca.
- You can also contact the local First Nations Liaison Officer at 778-799-2062.

11. 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.

12. How is government going to protect my home from looting while I'm evacuated?

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

13. How do we get groceries and fuel back to our communities?

- We want to ensure people are safe when moving to and from communities.
- The accessibility pass helps manage safe traffic flow and people driving into town to get groceries and fuel to take back to their community.

14. 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.
- Contact the Canadian Red Cross at 1-800-863-6582 or online at <http://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/current-emergency-responses>

15. Why can't we build a berm around the community, won't that work?

- Given the size of these forest fires, it is unlikely that a berm would stop sparks flying over top. Berms would also impede first responders.

16. Where can I find help with my medical needs if I'm 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 Non-Insured Health Benefits (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 has deployed a number of internal and contracted mental health resources to support evacuees in Kamloops and Prince George.
- 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.

Thompson Rivers University (TRU)

- Counsellors are available daily at the wildfire evacuee centre at TRU. Please go to the Secwepemc Health Caucus booth by the Sacred Space at TRU and staff will help you connect with a counsellor.
- Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) has a disaster psychosocial response program team available at TRU including a social worker, psychologist and other allied health professionals. Please locate individuals wearing purple shirts or ask reception centre staff to be connected to Disaster Psychosocial Volunteers (DPS Volunteers).
- Traditional and Elders support is available throughout the day. To access this service, see the Secwepemc Health Caucus booth.

College of New Caledonia

- In Prince George at the College of New Caledonia (CNC), FNHA has a table set up in the gym to support First Nations. Health and social support are available from 9:00 to 5:00 daily. Please contact Julie Morrison, Crisis Response Advisor, FNHA Northern Region (778-349-4376) with any questions.

18. What do I do if 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, impacted 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 Environmental Health Officers are available to work with impacted communities to create clean air stations in communities for vulnerable populations.
- FNHA Environmental Health Officers are available to support the development clean air stations and are currently contacting all impacted First Nations.
- The First Nations Health Authority 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.

20. What do I do if I'm having trouble registering with Red Cross?

- Red Cross has experienced some technical challenges with its online registration system. If you have been evacuated, please call the contact centre at 1-800-863-6582 to have an agent help you register. The call volume is high and people are experiencing long wait times.
- 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.