



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS
Fire Chiefs on the Hill, November 2024

Federal Pre Budget 2025 Consultations

The URGENT Need for National Fire Administration

From: The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs

President Ken McMullen, Fire Chief Red Deer
c/o Dr. Tina Saryeddine, Executive Director
1 Rideau Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N8S7
tsaryeddine@cafc.ca
613-324-1078
www.cafc.ca

Recommendations

That the Federal Government:

1. **Initiate a National Fire Administration** through \$2.4M in partnership with Canada's Fire Chiefs, as the nucleus of any future disaster/emergency management organization.
2. **Facilitate access to wildfire training standards** from the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) for fire departments in collaboration with provinces and territories.
3. **Fund critical infrastructure risk assessments and resiliency plans** through local fire departments, using common templates that can be rolled up provincially and nationally.
4. **Fund the spread and scale FireSmart™ through fire departments** in partnership with the provinces, territories, and local governments.
5. **Pause housing innovation funding to provinces and territories** on selective innovations involving single egress until the federal consultation is complete.
6. **Amend the Explosives Act** to restrict the sale and use of consumer fireworks to licensed professionals only.
7. **Expedite consumer protection legislation for lithium-ion batteries** given the proliferation and incentivization of green technologies.
8. **Reinstate a modernized Joint Emergency Preparedness Program** with net new monies to update and close the gap on the current cache of training and equipment.
9. **Fund environmental firefighting foam remediation** in collaboration with the provinces and territories.
10. **Amend the inclusion criteria to the Airport Rescue and Firefighting Fund** so that fire departments servicing any federally owned and leased airport/aerodrome can apply.
11. **Extend the Spectrum License for a Public Safety Broadband Network (PSBN)** to ensure eventual protected and interruption free communication for public safety.
12. **Fire Safety in Indigenous Communities:** Make fire protection a protected service in every community and address recommendations to improve fire and life safety.

Federal Budget 2025: The URGENT Need for a National Fire Administration

The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) represents Canada's 3,200 fire departments and 126,000 career and volunteer firefighters. Despite the word "fire", they are all hazard responders. About 80% of urban and 40% of rural areas rely on fire departments as designated emergency management coordinators and authorities having jurisdiction in an emergency.

Over 1,000 fire chiefs are members in good standing of the CAFC. Others are represented through the CAFC's National Advisory Council (NAC) of provincial and territorial fire chief associations and the relevant national affiliate organizations including the National Indigenous Fire Safety Council (NIFSC); the Fallen Firefighters Foundation; Canadian Volunteer Fire Service Association of Canada; the Department of National Defense, the Canadian Metro Chiefs, and Canada's provincial Fire Marshals and Fire Commissioners.

The CAFC NAC, Board, and [twenty-one \(21\) committees](#) made up of fire chiefs and supervisory officers from across the country meet monthly on everything from building codes to dangerous goods, emergency management to wildfire, cancer and mental health among others, to ensure the advice we provide is correct, timely, and relevant.

Recommendation 1: Implement a National Fire Administration

Long before the worst wildfire seasons on record, the pandemic, or the tragedies at Lac Mégantic, Île Verte, or Elliott Lake, a resolution at the 2006 Annual General Meeting of the country's fire chiefs noted that the size and technical complexity of events facing the fire service was changing so significantly that Canada needed a National Fire Administration. Nearly two decades later, the resolution has become prophetic.

While this brief contains several recommendations on very serious fire and life safety issues from housing to climate, a National Fire Administration would be the most consequential policy instrument in the history of fire and emergency management in Canada. It will allow Canada to recognize, address and coordinate, on a regular, systematic, and national basis, all fire and emergency management issues, such as those presented in our brief today and those that will inevitably continue to emerge.

Our proposal [Towards a National Fire Administration](#) was released in December 2023. The proposal provides for at least four types of relevant national coordination. First it would address coordination on national issues between wildfire which is a provincial jurisdiction united by the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC members) and structural fire protection issues at the national level which are the domain of local fire departments (CAFC members).

Second, it would coordinate between fire departments and the federal government's policy priorities most of which have a fire and life safety component that fire departments should be proactively aware of at the national level and should be able to advise the federal government upon. This type of coordination reduces adverse events and increases capabilities early. In this submission we are going to show you the very real problems that occur because of the absence of a national fire administration. These exist today, there will be others in the future.

Consider for example, in the development of federal policies related to wildfire response, affordable housing, electric vehicles or zero emissions technologies, explosives, consumer

protection, transportation, cancer prevention etc., that there are implications for the Federal Government that fire departments can advise on in collaboration with provincial and territorial fire chief associations and that fire departments need to be given heads up on in order to prepare. This type of coordination could also extend intra-governmentally, linking fire and life safety considerations within and between different federal departments and entities.

Since this coordination could either be bidirectional between *federal* departments and *fire* departments or in partnership with provinces and territories, the CAFC's NAC which includes all provincial and territorial (P/T) fire chiefs' associations and the P/T Fire Marshals and Fire Commissioners, would provide a 3rd coordinating mechanism.

Its 4th coordinating mechanism could be with other groups like Humanitarian Workforce members or any eventual Civilian Emergency Response Capacity but with the advantage that this would always be connected to the local authorities having jurisdiction. This eliminates duplication and improves impact and safety. Without this coordination, well-meaning attempts to remedy issues may collapse a system already reliant on volunteers.

National Fire Administrations exist in most comparator countries. They are the nucleus of any disaster management organization. They evolve. To achieve this rapidly and correctly, the CAFC is willing to offer its current infrastructure as an early adoption model that can be expanded and altered as needed. However, we need to start now, as will be shown below.

Recommendations 2-4: Fund wildfire training, risk, and resiliency plans, and FireSmart™.

Traditionally, forest fires were fought by provincial wildland firefighters. Today, 90% of fire departments participate in wildfire response. We are building further into the forest while more intense forest fires are reaching communities. Provincial wildfire firefighting and local structural firefighting are intersecting. Fire departments need new ways of managing risk.

To do so we recommend ensuring that fire departments can access interoperable wildfire training standards. The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) has a national training standard delivered by provinces and territories to provincial wildland agencies. Fire departments would like to ask the Federal Government, CIFFC and the provinces and territories, to facilitate closing the gap on interoperable wildfire training with fire departments.

Second, every fire department needs funding for critical infrastructure risk assessments and resiliency plans, using common templates. These can then be rolled up to the provincial and federal level to facilitate risk management and mutual aid agreements.

Finally, fire departments can implement FireSmart™ principles to help with wildfire resiliency. However, FireSmart™ has costs, requiring trained coordinators, certification, and sustainability. The items above can be achieved through \$10M to facilitate hiring coordinators across groups of fire departments.

Recommendation 5: Pause federal funding on provincial single egress related proposals.

Federal Budget 2024 wisely committed to a consultation with fire safety experts on [single egress construction](#). The going understanding of single egress proposals as spoken by industry, politicians, and media is that eliminating one exit from a six-story residential building makes it more affordable, attractive, better utilizes space, and is safe because it is done in Europe.

Single egress literally means “one way out”. That “one way out” becomes the same “way in” for firefighters if anyone needs help. If it becomes obstructed, there is “no way in or out” for anyone. Single egress is done in Europe because the construction is entirely different, historically brick or concrete, sprinklered, and having dozens of other contingencies not present here, including different fire operations and water supply considerations. However, even there, fire safety colleagues are rethinking this.

The intent to consult suggested this issue would be resolved rapidly once policy makers understood what they were proposing. However unintended consequences have arisen because the Federal Government is offering funding to provinces and territories who present housing innovations, such as single egress.

The Federal Government has no jurisdiction over provincial or territorial building codes. However, it can press pause on funding innovations from provinces that propose single egress until a fair consultation is complete. If high population provinces like British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec receive incentives from the Federal Government to include an innovation such as single egress and change their own codes, it will be very difficult to reverse.

Recommendation 6. Restrict the sale of consumer fireworks to licensed professionals.

Fire chiefs are appalled by Canada’s practice of permitting the [sale and use of fireworks](#) to the public. These cause countless examples of injuries and devastation. We have explained this to NRCAN. However, when we asked why fire chiefs’ advice on fire is not heeded, we were told that under the Explosives Act, fireworks are assessed by risk of explosion, not necessarily by any risk of injury, fire, or its consequences. This is a terribly dangerous idiosyncrasy and one that a National Fire Administration could have foreseen. In the meantime, the Minister of Natural Resources can choose to restrict sale and use of consumer fireworks to the public.

Recommendation 7. Expedite the regulation of lithium-ion batteries

[Lithium-ion \(li-ion\) batteries](#) are used to run electric vehicles and e-mobility devices. Current regulations will require all new vehicles to be electric within the next 10 years. Fire Departments are not prepared for this. When li-ion batteries catch fire, they are extremely difficult and toxic to extinguish. Fire prevention and response strategies are also required for current and future electrical infrastructure. A National Fire Administration could have identified and addressed this issue. In the meantime, consumer protection legislation should be expedited.

Recommendations 8-11: Funding for equipment, training, airports, foam, ports, PSBN

The former Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP) which provided federal funding to assist in cost shared expenses with provinces and territories for training and equipment was sunset in 2013. At the time, it was reported that needs had been met. The need for this program has now resurfaced.

[Our data show](#) that over 25% of fire departments are using personal protective equipment 10-15 years over industry standard, that 25% don’t have a means of cleaning the gear which creates cancer risk, and that over 50% of all departments in this country are deferring training and equipment purchases due to financial pressures. Reinstating the JEPP, cost shared with provinces and territories, will incent other levels of government to help close this gap nationally.

In addition, we are asking the Federal Government to modernize the criteria so that this can also support firefighting costs for the airports, PFAS foam remediation, firefighting considerations for ports, and ensure that the Public Safety Broadband Network license to ensure that future public safety communications are not competing with public broadband use.

Recommendation 13: Fire Protection in Indigenous Communities

Words can't express our concern about fire protection in Indigenous Communities. They are disproportionately impacted by wildfires and deaths in housefires. In consultation with the National Indigenous Fire Safety Council, we ask for legislation to make fire protection a protected service. All other recommendations in this brief apply.

Concluding Remarks

Thank you for considering our views on fire and life safety. We are counting on your continued support and welcome the opportunity to partake as a witness or meet December 2-3, 2024 while we are in Ottawa for our annual Government Relations Week.