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Safety—Always Safety!

The British Columbia Wildfire Service has a very strong “safe work” culture. Safety is something that is drilled into all employees from the moment they are hired, whether it’s someone working in an office or someone working in the field.

You cannot go anywhere in the organization without being bombarded with safety slogans (“One no is a no-go”, “When in doubt, back out”, etc.), participating in safety briefings or having the topic come up in conversation. Our first consideration is always the safety of our personnel and members of the public.

Fire crew training always includes an introduction to this safety culture, particularly the *Operational Safe Work Standards* that guide the work of all staff. These standards cover everything from working with heavy equipment and staff health to fatigue management and conducting planned ignitions.

Although there are only 10 *Operational Safe Work*



Standards, the theme of safety is woven into all of the staff training that we do. Officers, supervisors and crew leaders (who train our personnel) highlight safety messaging at each step. Instruction is always provided with an eye to ensuring that we use the best, most efficient and safest methods to conduct our operations.

One aspect of safety that is strongly emphasized is the idea of “situational awareness”, where staff must always be alert and be aware of what’s going on around them, whether it’s while riding in a helicopter, as a passenger in a vehicle or working on the fireline. Knowing what you are doing is not enough if you don’t see the unexpected coming your way.

The sense of camaraderie within the BC Wildfire Service underlines the organization’s commitment to safety, as looking out for the other people on your crew becomes second nature.

Fire Behaviour Advisories

Fire Behaviour Advisories are produced by Fire Behaviour Specialists to provide specific, local conditions on a particular fire. Fire Behaviour Specialists will often have crews take weather readings with portable weather stations from various parts of the fire to give the most accurate information possible.

A Fire Behaviour Advisory is an overarching prediction that describes the general area where crews should expect to experience a difficult fire. Based on a snapshot of weather, fuels and conditions the fire behaviour advisory notes the area where ground crews will be challenged when directly attacking the head of a fire. All of this is again based on scientific formulas using the ‘fire triangle’ as its basis.

Every Fire Behaviour Advisory must contain: the type of Advisory or Warning it is (fire behaviour or weather), the date and time the Advisory was issued, the specific geographical location it applies to, relevant fuel types, the expected time and duration that the advisory refers to or covers, a description of the conditions expected, and a list of who should receive the information and how it is to be distributed. The Advisory is then sent to all bases, crews working on

the fire or in the vicinity and all those working of the incident and in the general area.

A Fire Behaviour Prediction is a more detailed analysis of the fire including: the rate of spread, expected movement, both speed and direction, heights of flame, size and shape of fire over the burning period and the potential intensity that it will burn considering the interaction of the various fuels in the area, the forecasted weather and the topography. A Fire Behaviour Prediction is more specific to a fire.

An Extreme Fire Behaviour Warning is a level up and must include: the intensity of the disturbance, the expected effect on fire behaviour, the relevant fuel type and direction or specific instructions from the Incident Commander. This direction could include moving to another part of the fire, or in some cases leaving the fireline until it is safe to return. This is for a fire that is unlikely to be fought with a direct attack and large equipment and/or aircraft will certainly be utilized. The BCWS never puts staff in jeopardy and always work to a high standard of safety.

Suppression tactics and strategies are adjusted according to the advice provided in the Fire Behaviour Advisory. It is an integral tool used by Incident Commanders on fires and crews in the field. It is just one of the many tools used by the BCWS and has proven, on many occasions, to save lives.

‘When a Weather Warning or an Extreme Fire Behaviour Warning is issued, all affected resources WITHIN and ADJOINING the AFFECTED AREA will be advised by the most expeditious means.’

Occupational Safe Work Standard #5 Fire Behaviour Advisories and Warnings

See detailed weather forecast page 4

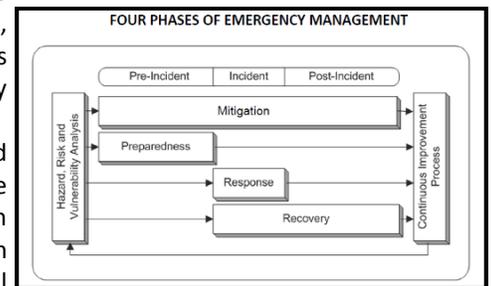


British Columbia Emergency Management System

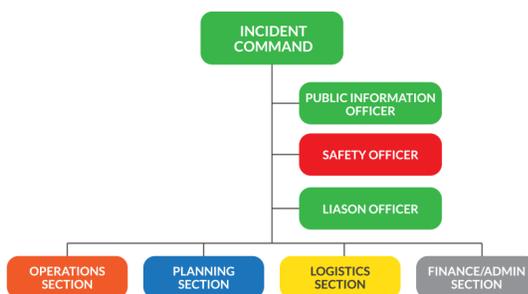
In an emergency situation, the BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) interacts with many branches of government, ministries and other agencies. It does this consistently and with relative ease because the Province uses the British Columbia Emergency Management System (BCEMS). This comprehensive framework helps co-ordinate and organize the Province’s response to emergencies and disasters.

Here’s how it works:

- 1) This framework allows several organizations and/or programs inside and outside of the BC Wildfire Service to work in concert. The diagram on the right indicates the four phases of emergency management and which parts of government are involved in each phase. Every branch of government uses various aspects of these four phases. In the BC Wildfire Service, for example, they are: Mitigation (prescribed burns); Preparedness (training); Response (fire response); and Recovery (rehabilitation).
- 2) The BCEMS framework provides a standardized approach to emergency management so everyone knows who is responsible for specific tasks if an emergency occurs. This pre-determined approach enables the BCWS and other organizations to fulfill their roles efficiently. When a wildfire forces the shutdown of a highway, for example, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) is responsible for doing that — not the BCWS. This allows firefighters to continue doing the work that they do best. The BCWS may recommend a road closure, but it is up to MOTI to make it happen and let the public know (e.g. updating the DriveBC website, making use of overhead highway signs).
- 3) The BCEMS also places a strong emphasis on communication and co-ordination. If everyone knows what they are responsible for and can communicate that information effectively, then the people who have the appropriate skills can do the job.



In an emergency, the BCEMS framework uses the Incident Command Structure (ICS) so that internal communications remain fluid and everyone speaks the same language. Legislation and regulations set out the responsibilities of the B.C. government, Crown corporations, stakeholders and local authorities in such an event.



The legislation also describes the powers and roles of various levels of government and institutions when mitigating, preparing for, responding to and recovering from an emergency or disaster. For more information, visit:

http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/embc/bcems/bcems_guide_2016_final_fillable.pdf

In British Columbia, Emergency Management BC (EMBC) is responsible for managing and co-ordinating government emergency planning, response, recovery and mitigation activities, and for ensuring an integrated approach to disasters or emergency events that could occur anywhere in the province. EMBC is also responsible for reviewing and updating the British Columbia Emergency Management System guide every three to five years.

When you break it down, the system’s framework and goals are fairly simple. That’s why it works. For the BC Wildfire Service, adherence to the BCEMS response goals is essential.

For Information about Wildfires go to:

Facebook
BC Forest Fire Info

Website
BCWildfire.ca

Twitter
BCGovFireInfo

Reminder

This is a good time to renew your property insurance. Do not wait until fire season to renew or take out a new policy. Insurers will not take on risk if there is a wildfire in the area.

To Report a Wildfire call:
1-800-663-5555
Or 5555
on your cell



British Columbia Emergency Management System cont'd

The first rule of the British Columbia Emergency Management System is to “ensure the health and safety of responders.” This rule is in place to safeguard the public as well as first responders. If first responders cannot perform their jobs safely, then they are not able to help anyone else (Response Goal 1).

If members of the public do not follow an evacuation order and first responders are required to stop working on the fireline to go and save them (Response Goal 2), then that may put other people or an entire community at risk.

That’s why a well-organized Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre (PREOC) and support from Emergency Social Services (ESS) are vital to the BC Wildfire Service. If members of the public are getting accurate information, have a safe place to go and are being cared for, then firefighters can do what they do best: fight wildfires.

The BCEMS framework and its components work on several levels, both internally and externally. That means that any organization that uses the same framework can easily integrate its resources into the emergency response if its help is needed. The goal is always to safeguard human life first, ahead of the protection of property.

Using a common language, structure and set of goals ensures that everyone knows what their role is in the big picture. Engaging multiple agencies, various levels of government, corporations and citizens provides the staff needed to deal with large-scale emergencies. There are simply not enough provincial government staff to manage a large-scale disaster or emergency incident on their own, so that is why we reach out to all levels of government and to stakeholders for assistance. Having a local response capability in place guarantees that expertise is developed within communities and is available as soon as it is needed.

When a wildfire occurs near a community, the BC Wildfire Service relies heavily on the expertise of Emergency Management BC. BCWS will recommend if an evacuation is necessary, but then it is up to the local government to activate its Emergency Operating Centre (EOC).*

When an interface fire affects a community, EMBC activates a Provincial Regional Emergency Operation Centre (PREOC) to support the local authority and co-ordinate response activities with the BC Wildfire Service.

EMBC can also deploy a Provincial Co-ordination Team (PCT) to enhance situational awareness on the ground, directly support the local authorities impacted, and/or serve as a liaison between the local authority, the BC Wildfire Service and the PREOC.



1. On arrival, the Provincial Co-ordination Team will assess the situation and advise the local government if anything may have been missed or could become a concern.

2. The Provincial Co-ordination Team provides expertise and staff in Provincial Regional Emergency Operating Centres (PREOCs) that are set up locally.

3. The Provincial Co-ordination Team promotes integration among local authorities and stakeholders so that information flows efficiently between them.

Emergency Management BC plays a crucial role in assisting people who are under an evacuation order and the agency is a vital source of information in the event of an

	Response Goals
1	Ensure the health and safety of responders
2	Save Lives
3	Reduce Suffering
4	Protect Public Health
5	Protect Infrastructure
6	Protect Property
7	Protect the Environment
8	Reduce Economic and Social Losses

For Information about Wildfires go to:

[Facebook](#)
BC Forest Fire Info

[Website](#)
BCWildfire.ca

[Twitter](#)
BCGovFireInfo

During a wildfire the BCWS supplies information to the PREOC so the public receives the most up-to-date information about the incident. People who are out of their homes are looking for any piece of news and are often susceptible to rumour and gossip. It is vitally important to provide as much information as soon as possible over the course of the day to the PREOC, which in turn supplies it to the ESS.

* A Tactical Evacuation may be carried out by BCWS prior to local government initiating their response but this is only done in emergencies when there is no time and no option but to remove people from the path of a wildfire.

To Date
in Coastal

Fires to Date

Person
Caused 77

Lighting
Caused 10

Total
Number
of Fires 67

Fire Danger
Rating today



Current Prohibitions
*(within BCWS
jurisdictional area)*

Category 2
Open Fires are
prohibited within the
Coastal Fire Centre
except in the
Fog Zone and
Haida Gwaii.

Campfires are
allowed.

To Report a
Wildfire call:
1-800-663-5555
Or 5555
on your cell

British Columbia Emergency Management System cont'd

evacuation alert. Its staff helps to co-ordinate emergency responses related to people, animals, businesses and industries affected by a wildfire.

Emergency Management BC also helps communities establish networks of volunteers to set up Emergency Social Services (ESS) sites in response to an incident. Multiple agencies, volunteer groups and non-government organizations may be called upon to provide assistance. EMBC helps communities prepare for an emergency incident and integrate all available resources to provide a co-ordinated response.

If required, Emergency Social Services may set up large shelters, supply hotel rooms or other accommodation, arrange for animal and pet



Animal Shelter in a
Reception Centre

shelters, or provide essential resources to people displaced during a wildfire.

Having this framework in place (and having other organizations to call on that work within the same parameters) is essential for a successful response to any large-scale emergency incident.

With other agencies taking care of the public, BC Wildfire Service personnel can concentrate on the wildfire.

Local Governments who are responsible for setting up and staffing Emergency Operating Centres are always looking for volunteers. They offer training and in some cases live, or tabletop scenarios for participants. Consider volunteering in your community.

At Coastal

It has been an unusual year in Coastal. There was a period of hot, dry weather in May followed by the usual June rains—not unusual. The rain continuing this late into July, although not typical is, not unprecedented. While doing some research, I came across a review of the 1917 season in the Provincial Sessional Papers which reads: ‘the summer weather on the Coast was unique, in that while July was wet, no rain fell in August, September, and nearly the whole of October, and during these months the hazard was serious’.

Crews in Coastal continue to do project work including brushing, pruning, and falling in specific areas. These projects are often at the request of local government or proposed by the zones when an area of hazard is identified. Other projects include reviewing and replacing prevention signs, maintaining fitness levels, completing any training or courses (this time of year any online courses that can be completed can be worked on), as well as ongoing equipment maintenance and review. Faller certification is ongoing and hours are being logged.

Weather

SYNOPSIS: (Today-tomorrow) The upper low that yesterday brought a band of showers and thunderstorms to eastern Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, Pemberton and Fraser zones has moved off to the West Kootenay’s where thunderstorms continued overnight. Most of Coastal is under a high level unstable northeast flow today and local weather will see a mix of clouds and sun and near normal (low 20s) temperatures. Late today bands of moisture and increased instability rotate into the local zones. There is little chance of thunderstorms or significant showers during the daytime and then overnight the chances increase. This pattern will sometimes lead to early morning convective activity. The pattern is pretty well the same tomorrow but computer analysis and models show a definite increase in thunderstorm potential. So the day could start off with a few thunderstorms and end with a few more as well. Generally speaking today and tomorrow see a mix of sun and clouds, near normal temperatures and mostly light winds. Convective build-ups could bring locally gusty winds.

OUTLOOK: (Sunday-Tuesday) Little change in pattern or weather. A new upper low moves into the south coast offshore waters by Sunday afternoon and this may trigger yet more thunderstorm activity. Showers increase Sunday and continue locally heavy through Monday but finally ease by Tuesday.