

Proposed Fire / Rescue System Model



Fire Services Liaison Group

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A NEW MODEL FOR THE FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM

Fire / rescue departments across the province protect the lives and property of British Columbians. The Fire Services Liaison Group is proposing some important changes to how these services are governed, delivered, and supported. These recommendations are presented in the form of a new "Model" for the Fire / Rescue System in B.C.

The Fire / Rescue System is a joint responsibility of the provincial government, local governments, and fire / rescue departments. Each of these parties has an important role to play in improving public safety. This Model makes recommendations to each of the groups that reflect their roles and responsibilities.

While most of the recommendations contained in the Model apply to both career and volunteer fire / rescue departments, there are several that are focused specifically on the needs of the volunteer sector. In its research, the Fire Services Liaison Group identified the critical fact that small volunteer fire / rescue departments face some major and urgent challenges as a result of economic and demographic stresses impacting many smaller communities. Specifically, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit and retain volunteers, employment bases from which volunteers are drawn are shrinking and training access and related funding is lagging as training needs are growing. The Fire Services Liaison Group recognizes the critical role volunteer firefighters play and the immeasurable value they provide to the province and believes it is essential to ensure the ongoing vitality of this critical service. The Fire Services Liaison Group recommends that priority be given to assisting the volunteer sector.

In recognition of the fact that larger fire / rescue departments have different needs and concerns than the small, volunteer sector, the Fire Services Liaison Group is undertaking additional research to identify the specific issues and concerns of urban / suburban departments. This research will continue for some months so the results will be incorporated into the Model as it progresses. However, it is important to begin to deal with the Fire Services Liaison Group's research and recommendations to date in order to initiate needed consultation and change planning.

The Model necessarily focuses on problems. This should not be taken to mean that everything about the present way of doing things is wrong or broken. Much of the present system is performing well and should be retained and built upon. It is important to recognize the skill, capabilities and commitment of firefighters in the career and volunteer departments across the province. The Fire Services Liaison Group appreciates the dedication of firefighters to protecting their communities. The recommendations in this Model have been designed to deal with shared challenges and make the system in which these firefighters serve more effective.

1.2 FIRE SERVICES LIAISON GROUP AND THE MODEL PROJECT

This report has been prepared by the Fire Services Liaison Group. The Fire Services Liaison Group was formed to bring together representatives of the key stakeholder

groups with direct interests in the Fire / Rescue System to develop joint solutions to issues facing the fire service.

The Fire Services Liaison Group includes the five associations whose members are directly involved in fire service delivery in B.C. These are:

1. The Fire Chiefs' Association of B.C
2. The Fire Prevention Officers Association of B.C.
3. The Fire Training Officers Association of B.C.
4. The B.C. Professional Fire Fighters Association
5. The Volunteer Fire Fighters Association of B.C.

The sixth member is the Union of British Columbia Municipalities which represents local governments who have jurisdiction over most fire departments.

The Fire Services Liaison Group is endorsed by the Office of the Fire Commissioner and funded by the Ministry of Public Safety and the Solicitor General.

Soon after it was formed, the Fire Services Liaison Group determined that the current structure or model for fire and rescue service delivery in the province is deficient in a number of areas. To address this situation, in April 2007 the Fire Services Liaison Group launched a major project funded by the provincial government to develop recommendations for improving the Fire / Rescue System. This project is known as the *British Columbia Fire Services Model Development Project* (the "Model Development Project").

The Model Development Project work was directed by a steering committee made up of the presidents of the member Fire Services Liaison Group associations. Also on the committee was a representative of the Local Government Management Association, the professional organization representing municipal and regional district managers. The Union of B.C. Municipalities chose to not participate in development of the Model.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

This report sets out findings and recommendations to improve the Fire / Rescue System in B.C. and to enhance public safety. This is presented in the form of a new Model of the proposed Fire / Rescue System for the province. The Model is intended to provide the provincial government, local governments, and members of the Fire Service with a comprehensive set of recommendations for proposed improvements to the province-wide Fire Service.

The Fire Services Liaison Group considers this report to be a work-in-process. As discussed in section 6, the Fire Services Liaison Group intends to discuss the proposed model with the provincial government, local governments, and members of the Fire / Rescue System. This dialogue, and other ongoing research, will certainly lead to an improved version of the Fire / Rescue System Model.

1.4 TERMINOLOGY

Fire departments in British Columbia do more than fight fires. They also provide a broad range of rescue and emergency services. In recognition of this fact, this document refers to B.C.'s fire departments as "*fire / rescue departments*".

Fire and rescue services are provided by hundreds of different, independent volunteer and career fire / rescue departments around the province. These fire departments in total have traditionally been referred to collectively as the "Fire Service". This term is somewhat misleading as it implies that there is a single entity responsible for delivery and management of fire and rescue services.

To avoid any misunderstandings associated with the term "Fire Service", this document uses the term "*Fire / Rescue System*" when referring to British Columbia's fire / rescue departments collectively. The focus is on province-wide challenges facing the Fire / Rescue System. The issues dealt with are not the specific problems of individual departments or local governments. Rather, they are issues that are systemic and arise as a result of how all the independent yet interdependent components of the Fire / Rescue System interact and interrelate.

The term "*local government*" is employed to refer to municipalities and/or regional districts in British Columbia.

1.5 REPORT FORMAT

This report presents issues and recommendations for consideration by Fire / Rescue System stakeholders. The document is organized into the following major sections:

- An assessment of the current Fire / Rescue System
- A summary description of the proposed Fire / Rescue System Model and related recommendations
- Explanation of the implications of the Model for the key stakeholders

Attachments present detailed descriptions of the specific elements of the proposed Fire / Rescue System Model with supporting justification and explanatory material.

2. ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM

2.1 THE FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM IN BC

There are approximately 350 community based fire / rescue departments throughout B.C. (See Attachment 1) which collectively employ about 4,000 career firefighters and 10,000 volunteer firefighters. (This count excludes 110 airport, First Nations and industrial fire departments). About 180 of these fire / rescue departments are based in municipalities and regional districts. The remaining 170 fire departments operate in small unincorporated communities under the direction of improvement districts and societies.

There is no mandatory legislative requirement for a community to have a fire / rescue department and essentially all decisions relating to fire service operations are made at the community level.

Most of the province is covered by small volunteer fire / rescue departments. Their funding is frequently tight and these departments find it challenging to deliver required training. Most small fire / rescue departments are also finding it difficult to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. This is caused by many factors including: declining volunteerism; call out and training time demands; growing requirements for volunteers to work out of town, declining employment in resource-dependent communities and the significant risks and responsibilities required of firefighters.

The provincial government utilizes highway rescue, first responder and interface fire services provided by fire departments across the province. Fire / rescue departments frequently operate outside their specified area at the request of the Provincial Emergency Program, the Ministry of Forests and Range, the B.C. Ambulance Service and the RCMP. The Provincial Emergency Program and Ministry of Forests and Range provide compensation for call responses that they authorize.

The provincial government has also built fire / rescue resources into its planning for large scale emergency events but with limited consultation with local government and no funding to improve local fire service resources and interoperability.

Fire services come under the umbrella of the Office of the Fire Commissioner which is part of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. The Ministry's vision is to make the province the safest place to live in Canada. The Fire / Rescue System's vision is fully aligned with that of the Ministry. The primary roles of the Office of the Fire Commissioner are to oversee fire safety legislation, fire investigations, fire inspection, collect fire incident data and coordinate major fire emergency response. The Office of the Fire Commissioner has very limited field operations.

In regard to emergency responses (i.e. excluding fire prevention and investigation activities) fire / rescue departments generally deal with 10% fire calls, 50% or more first responder and rescue calls, and 40% other requests. The Office of the Fire Commissioner deals solely with fire issues (i.e., a small proportion of what fire / rescue departments do). Thus, the Office of the Fire Commissioner has a limited role related to operations within the B.C. Fire / Rescue System as it is presently constituted, although it has a much larger role in fire prevention activities.

Each volunteer saves the local community and the provincial government significant costs each year. This means that residents, community leaders, administrators, and the provincial government should pay close attention to the needs and issues facing volunteers.

Essentially all costs of fire / rescue services are born by local residents either through tax funding or donations. The provincial government collects approximately \$375 million annually from a tax on property and other insurance premiums and this money goes to general revenues. Originally, some of this tax was intended to support the Fire / Rescue System. Today, the provincial government spends approximately 67¢ per capita on the Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire / Rescue System (See Attachment 2). In comparison, the provincial government spends \$68.79 per capita for the provincial ambulance service.

2.2 VIEWS FROM BC COMMUNITIES

The Fire Services Liaison Group undertook a survey that covered both local governments and fire / rescue departments to identify and prioritize the key issues as viewed by these groups. Completed questionnaires were received from more than 175 fire / rescue departments and 67 local governments, a greater than 35% response rate for both groups.

Consistently, three aspects of the Fire / Rescue System were seen as problems above all other issues:

- *Training.* Many departments, but particularly those that are small and staffed by volunteers, are experiencing significant difficulty getting affordable and accessible training at needed, consistent standards for firefighters
- *Volunteer Staffing.* Recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters is a significant problem for every small- and medium-sized department surveyed
- *Funding.* Many factors are increasing the costs of fire / rescue services and creating budget pressures on fire departments. Many communities are experiencing funding pressures and are having difficulties meeting these cost pressures and maintaining fire service resources at needed levels.

Strikingly, municipalities and regional districts completely agree with fire / rescue departments in identifying these as the “big 3” challenges facing the Fire / Rescue System.

In addition to the “big 3”, the survey determined there were a number of issues that the Fire / Rescue System also considered to be important:

- Increasing demand for services / growing call volumes
- Lack of support from the provincial government / underfunding of the Office of the Fire Commissioner
- Unrealized opportunities for regional efficiencies/cooperation/partnering/sharing of resources / Interoperability
- Service gaps / coverage gaps
- Provision of services that are the responsibility of other agencies

- Issues related to liability and legal requirements

Other important issues identified in the survey were:

- Inadequate capital funding / equipment replacement / high cost of capital equipment
- Code enforcement / investigations
- Outdated/inadequate legislation
- Issues related to EMS First Responder / specialty rescue
- Interface fires / wild fires

This survey clearly demonstrates that both local governments and fire / rescue departments agree that there are significant issues facing the Fire / Rescue System and that changes are needed to ensure that public safety is protected.

2.3 FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM CHALLENGES

The Fire Services Liaison Group took several steps to clarify and more tightly define the problems that need to be addressed. This included creating a number of task groups composed of Fire / Rescue System and local government stakeholders from around the province to define the problems and identify potential solutions. This “bottom up” analysis was complemented by several directed studies by experts from around North America in critical aspects of fire / rescue service operations and management.

This work identified eight key areas that must be addressed. These are:

1. Responsibility for fire and rescue services
2. The need to improve governance of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System
3. Fire / rescue service gaps
4. The challenge of province-wide competency standards
5. Inadequate Fire / Rescue System Information
6. Operational Implications of Independent Fire / Rescue Departments
7. Budget pressures
8. Heavy stress on the volunteer sector

The following sections explain these issues in more detail.

2.3.1 RESPONSIBILITY FOR FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES

There are 350 independent fire / rescue departments in B.C. which are directed and funded by their respective communities. Each department operates as a stand-alone entity in regard to services, policies, standards, equipment and performance.

The types and levels of fire / rescue services to be provided are decided at the local level by the elected representatives of the residents who pay for the services. There are no specific, clear, objective guidelines that stipulate what services are needed to protect lives and property. As a result, some very small communities provide no services at all. Some communities provide basic services. Others

provide a broad range of fire and rescue services. However, there are no accepted guidelines about what services to provide and what service levels are appropriate.

This situation has arisen, mainly, because fire and rescue services are community-based. Each community has determined what services are wanted, or that it can afford, based on local needs and priorities. An additional factor that has contributed to this situation is the ongoing expansion in the role of fire / rescue departments. Traditionally, "fire departments" put out fires, investigated fires, and performed fire inspections. Over time, departments began to provide more rescue and emergency services.

There are certain consequences that result from the lack of clarity about what services fire / rescue departments should provide. The Fire / Rescue System as a whole does not provide consistent protection levels around the province. There is no assurance that, when comparing communities, even if the same service is provided, that similar service levels or protection are provided. In view of this, the Fire Services Liaison Group considered the question of whether there should be guideless or even requirements regarding the specific fire / rescue services that should be provided.

The Fire Services Liaison Group concluded that fire / rescue departments must continue to be responsible to local community priorities and needs. This community-driven decision-making combined with the fact that fire / rescue departments are funded by their communities means that decisions about the types and levels of services to be provided must rest with the community. In this, it must be recognized that although the decision to provide or not provide a particular service should remain "permissive", once it is decided to provide a service, compliance with the specific mandatory standards associated with that service are not optional.

In considering this, the Fire Services Liaison Group concluded there needs to be greater transparency regarding decisions to provide, or not provide, fire and rescue services. Community members need to be able to easily access information and understand decisions regarding the services provided and the basis on which decisions have been made. The Fire / Rescue System Model includes several recommendations to ensure that there is clear accountability regarding decisions affecting fire and rescue service levels.

Other consequences that result from community level decision-making regarding the types and levels of services provided include gaps in service provision and limitations on joint action between departments. These aspects are covered later in this section. The Model also includes recommendations for improved mechanisms to identify and deal with service gaps and for improving joint action between departments.

2.3.2 NEED TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE OF THE PROVINCE-WIDE FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM

While individual fire / rescue departments have a clear chain-of-command with clearly defined decision-making, the existing province-wide Fire / Rescue System model does not have any means of collectively addressing province-wide issues. The *Fire Services Act* creates a "Fire Commissioner" with a province-wide mandate.

This mandate is restricted to the traditional services of fire prevention, inspection, investigation, and suppression, but only in specific areas related to major fire emergencies and provision of advice to local governments. The Fire Commissioner does not have a mandate relating to rescue and emergency services which now represent the majority of responses by many departments.

There is also no mechanism for the Fire / Rescue System, local governments, and the provincial government to work together to address province-wide issues and challenges. The *Fire Services Act* provides for a "Fire Services Advisory Board" that could play this role, but the board has not been active for a number of years.

There are two specific governance problems in the existing model from the perspective of the overall Fire / Rescue System. First, the expansion of services beyond traditional fire services has not been matched by any province-wide oversight or tracking of those services. The other problem is the lack of any province-wide governance structure or decision-making forum to address common challenges and needs.

Governance deficiencies contribute to some significant problems within the Fire / Rescue System, including:

- Several different provincial government agencies make individual decisions that affect the Fire / Rescue System. These include WorkSafe BC, which makes decisions affecting firefighter safety, the Ministry of Forests and Range, which makes decisions regarding interface firefighting, and the Emergency Health Services Commission, which makes decisions regarding first responder services. However, there is no mechanism for the province-wide Fire / Rescue System as a whole to consult with and coordinate decisions with these various bodies
- The Fire / Rescue System is not a single entity with central authority and responsibility ultimately vested in one organization. As a result, the Fire / Rescue System lacks the processes and structures needed for harmonized decision-making and coordination for the whole system
- The Fire / Rescue System also lacks a forum and mechanisms to identify emerging issues and pressures that may impact it and proactively and strategically decide how to deal with them

There are important elements and aspects of the Fire / Rescue System that will benefit from province wide consultation, planning and action.

2.3.3 SERVICE GAPS

There are some major gaps in the fire and rescue services provided in B.C. today. However, the absence of comprehensive information about fire / rescue departments across the province makes it difficult to quantify the problem.

The key service gaps include:

Description	Size/Scope
Gaps in 911 emergency calling services	Northern Rockies Regional District; Kitimat Stikine Regional District
Absence of fire inspections of public buildings in electoral areas	About 150 of 165 electoral areas in B.C. have no regular fire inspections of public buildings
Absence of building plan and/or onsite inspection services to ensure compliance with fire and building codes	Many electoral areas have no or limited plan and/or onsite inspection services to enforce fire prevention standards in new or renovated buildings
Emergency service coverage on major highways	Highway rescue services are available through nearby fire / rescue departments or search and rescue societies
Long highway rescue response times on isolated roads	Northern B.C.
Fire/ rescue societies operating at below acceptable performance and safety standards	There are a few fire / rescue departments that are operating below acceptable standards
Absence of vehicle fire suppression coverage	No coverage outside of fire protection areas unless the fire threatens Crown forests
Absence of proactive province-wide public education for fire prevention	No coordinated Provincial program for public education (although a strategic approach for delivery is being developed by the B.C. Public Fire and Life Safety Education Advisory Committee)

If a fire starts outside the approved service area of a department, no firefighters may respond. There are examples where this has led to significant and costly wildfires. If a traffic accident occurs on the highway where a nearby fire / rescue department does not provide road rescue service, the response time by whoever provides the service may be long.

Service gaps arise from the decentralized nature of fire and rescue services in the province. Each department has been created to protect its particular service area. Local decisions have appropriately been made by local governments regarding what services are to be provided, what area is to be protected, and what service levels are to be achieved. In addition, liability concerns about responding out of area reduce the willingness of departments to "fill in the gaps". These liability concerns

relate both to providing out of area services and the fact that protection within the community is reduced while firefighters are out of town.

It is to the credit of many local governments that they have authorized their fire / rescue departments to respond to rescue, emergency and interface fire incidents beyond their boundaries. However, despite this, there are still gaps in some areas and in some types of fire / rescue services.

Two other important gaps in fire services are related to fire inspections and fire investigations. Regular fire inspections of public buildings are only mandated for those located in municipalities. However, there is no similar requirement for public buildings in unincorporated areas.

The fire investigation system has significant problems. In many locations, qualified fire investigators are not available. This reduces the ability of the Fire / Rescue System to prevent, respond to, and mitigate the consequences of fires and to investigate suspicious fires.

Given the size of British Columbia and the fact that most people are concentrated in a few regions, some service gaps are inevitable. It is impractical to be able to provide fire and rescue services everywhere. However, the service gaps are more extensive than they should be.

2.3.4 THE CHALLENGE OF PROVINCE-WIDE COMPETENCY STANDARDS

Competency standards have a critical role in delivery of fire and rescue services. These standards establish what firefighters need to know, how they need to be equipped and what they need to do to provide safe and effective fire / rescue services.

It is important to appreciate the difference between “recommended practices” and “standards”. A recommended practice (sometimes called a guideline) is a set of recommendations regarding the competencies, equipment, and management of fire and rescue services. A standard has the same content, but when formally adopted, it is mandatory. This implies that there is some mechanism for ensuring that a standard is met.

Currently, a variety of mandatory standards apply to the Fire / Rescue System. These include:

- WorkSafe BC regulations concerning equipment and competencies regarding operating procedures in the provision of certain fire suppression services
- Ministry of Forests and Range standards for fighting wildfires and interface fires
- The Emergency Health Services Commission standards for the provision of first responder services
- The Motor Vehicle Act sets standards for licensing and driving vehicles
- The provincial government has stipulated that the training standards for fire service personnel in British Columbia are those published by the National Fire Protection Association (“NFPA”). This is central to both life safety and the effective operation of a fire / rescue department. There are a number of

critical issues regarding the British Columbia Training Standard that are covered later in this section

There are a number of important issues relating to standards in general. Currently, many smaller fire / rescue departments are not able to meet NFPA training standards. Recently a "Basic Fire Fighting Certificate Program" was launched to improve volunteer firefighter training in B.C. However, this initiative does not bring trainees up to the NFPA Firefighter I level, the minimum implied standard for British Columbia, but does contain the essential core elements from the program.

Another issue arises because there is no mechanism for ensuring that fire / rescue departments are competent and comply with standards. There may be "after the fact" enforcement or liability if a standard is not met resulting in a negative outcome. However, nothing in the current model ensures regular checking of competency and standards compliance.

Finally, at present a variety of agencies set competency requirements for fire and rescue services. There is, however, no mechanism for the Fire / Rescue System to coordinate the impact of or the system response to those standards on departments. More importantly, no organization is charged with establishing standards specific to fire and rescue services.

Because the enforcement of standards for the Fire / Rescue System is weak, there is no certainty that fire / rescue departments meet minimum competency and safety standards. Weak standards and weak standards enforcement may expose departments and local governments to liability for injuries to people or damage to property.

Probably the most critical issues raised by the Model project are those related to training standards for firefighters because they are directly related to life safety. There is a great deal of misunderstanding in this critical area.

The pertinent facts are:

- At present, as directed by Minister's Order dated December 18, 2002, the British Columbia Training Standard for firefighters in B.C. are those published by the National Fire Protection Association which specifies in *NFPA 1001 – Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications*. This "... identifies the minimum job performance requirements for career and volunteer fire fighters whose duties are primarily structural in nature."
- Since the minimum standard for firefighter training in *NFPA 1001* is *Fire Fighter I*, a reasonable assumption would be that *Fire Fighter I* is the minimum competency standard for firefighters in the province. However, this is not the case. Apparently, the Minister's Order has been interpreted to mean that fire / rescue departments must train to *NFPA 1001* which means they must employ this training material but are not required to attain any particular competency standard (including Fire Fighter I)
- Fire Fighter I is generally accepted as the minimum competency level required for fire fighters to undertake an interior attack in a burning structure, although this has not been formally specified

- A "Basic Firefighter Certification Program" is presently being offered across the province to improve volunteer firefighter training. The program contents are based on NFPA Fire Fighter I but the course only covers a portion of the training modules (the core elements). As a result, it does not bring course participants to Fire Fighter I level competencies. Additional training and evaluations (a "bridging" program) are required for individuals to achieve Firefighter I certification
- A small proportion of volunteer fire fighters presently have completed Fire Fighter I (estimated at 10%). Excluding the recently added HazMat operations element, it requires approximately 250 hours of training to attain Fire Fighter I certification (which translates into a training period of three years if this training takes place only once per week)
- The Volunteer Firefighter's Association of B.C. states that the two major impediments to volunteers training to Fire Fighter I are (i) the high cost, and (ii) limited volunteer time availability. They also believe that there would be mass volunteer firefighter resignations if the Fire Fighter I competency was mandated at this time

It is essential that the misunderstandings and inconsistencies in training standards for firefighters be dealt with quickly and directly.

2.3.5 INADEQUATE FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM INFORMATION

An important consequence of the decentralized nature of the Fire / Rescue System is the lack of comprehensive, timely, accurate information about the province-wide service. A specific example of this lack of information is the fact that it is not possible to identify every fire / rescue department in British Columbia. Also, there is no information that identifies what fire and rescue services are provided across the province and where the gaps exist.

Each department maintains records to meet the needs of that department or its Authority Having Jurisdiction and / or that reflects its administrative capabilities. Some keep very good records; others, especially very small departments, focus their resources on delivering service and not on administration.

At present, fire / rescue departments are supposed to report fire incident data to the Office of the Fire Commissioner. This requirement is intended to allow the Fire Commissioner to prepare province-wide statistics on fire incidents and to provide a foundation for fact-based policy development and decision-making. However, compliance with this requirement is low and the available information is incomplete and thus of limited usefulness.

Inadequate information makes it impossible to determine quantitatively if the Fire / Rescue System is effectively and efficiently delivering on its mandate of protecting the public. The ability of government officials to make rational decisions to allocate resources to fire and rescue services is undercut.

All of the consultants retained by the Fire Services Liaison Group to carry out studies for the Model development work reported they were hampered by lack of basic Fire / Rescue System data. Improving the quality of information is an

important building block for improving Fire / Rescue System decision-making and governance.

2.3.6 OPERATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF INDEPENDENT FIRE / RESCUE DEPARTMENTS

Fire / rescue services are provided by hundreds of different, independent fire / rescue departments around the province. As a result, fire / rescue departments in British Columbia are frequently limited in their capability to cooperate effectively with other departments. Some of the operational challenges resulting from a completely independent fire / rescue structure are:

- Operating procedures of different departments can differ in important aspects. This makes it difficult for departments to work together and can produce confusion and disruption on a joint response
- When service gaps occur in and between communities, it is not clear how they should be resolved. This has created a 'patchwork quilt' of coverage
- There is little focus on interoperability to enable departments to effectively jointly operate to deal with big, unusual or multiple incidents
- There are no formal mechanisms to proactively pursue or promote opportunities for regional efficiencies
- There are no formal processes for quickly sharing essential operating information, ideas, innovations and lessons learned among all departments (e.g., dealing with a new type of drug lab).
- Individual fire / rescue departments have limited bargaining power in negotiating the terms and conditions of their work with provincial agencies such as Provincial Emergency Program and B.C. Ambulance Service
- There are substantial unrealized benefits that could be generated through collaboration, teamwork, partnering and sharing within a broader Fire / Rescue System
- Equipment and apparatus may be incompatible. For example, the Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus used by one department may be incompatible with those in neighbouring jurisdictions
- Firefighter training may differ between departments with resultant differences in how tasks are performed
- Policies may not permit a department to go out of their service area to assist another

These issues arise because each department is autonomous, because common standards are not in place and because decisions are made locally, driven by local needs. Also, interoperability and cooperative action has generally not been encouraged.

This limited ability to undertake fully coordinated or integrated cooperative action has important consequences for public safety and the taxpayer. For example, the ability of the Fire / Rescue System to respond to regional or provincial emergencies is compromised as a result of this problem.

From a taxpayer perspective, improving interoperability and cooperation can create efficiencies and savings which include:

- Joining forces to purchase equipment and apparatus may generate savings through increased leverage with vendors while at the same time promoting standardization
- In urban areas with several departments, specialization by department in specific areas of technical rescue services may be more effective and reduce overall costs (for example, one department might provide high angle rescue while another focuses on confined space rescue)
- The costs (capital and operating) of support services such as communications, records management, and dispatch systems could be shared by several departments
- Additional mutual aid agreements between departments could improve protection levels

Any new model for the Fire / Rescue System needs to include measures to overcome negative consequences of independent operations and improve cooperation and interoperability between departments.

2.3.7 BUDGET PRESSURES

Fire / rescue departments and local governments across the province have significant concerns about costs. This problem is most pronounced in smaller communities, where funding is limited, but it is also a concern for larger centres, especially in the longer term.

There are a variety of factors that are increasing pressures on department budgets, including:

- *More stringent standards.* For example, training firefighters to the NFPA Firefighter I standard will improve firefighter safety, but significantly increase training costs
- *Record keeping obligations.* Fire / rescue departments are facing increasing obligations to maintain detailed records about equipment maintenance, training, and other matters. This is increasing the administrative burden, particularly for smaller departments
- *Expanding services.* While providing new services improves public safety, it also increases costs
- *Increasing call volumes.* Many departments are experiencing increased call volumes for first responder, road rescue, and other non-suppression services. This is a particular problem for departments in small communities and rural areas adjacent to suburban areas

Costs to provide fire and rescue services are increasing. However, the ability to pay for these services is constrained. In larger urban departments, fire / rescue departments must compete with other demands for municipal services. Many smaller communities are affected by closures of mills, mines, and other businesses, which in turn are reducing the tax base and the availability of suitable firefighter candidates. In these communities, maintaining existing fire / rescue budgets is a challenge.

In addition to departments that are funded by municipalities, improvement districts, or regional districts, there are about 80 departments operated by societies that are dependent on fund raising or grants. These departments have limited funding and limited ability to increase budgets. Interviews with fire chiefs from small communities revealed that some of these departments may be forced to reduce their service area, cut services, or even shut down if funding does not improve.

2.3.8 HEAVY STRESS ON THE VOLUNTEER SECTOR

The volunteer sector of the Fire / Rescue System is vital to public safety. While career departments protect more people, volunteer departments protect more communities. If a fire or accident occurs outside a major urban centre, the firefighters that respond will almost certainly be volunteers.

Volunteer departments are being affected by external forces that are straining their capacity to protect public safety, including:

- Economic forces are reducing the economic base that supports many of these departments. Small fire / rescue departments have always struggled to raise the operating and capital funds required to deliver desired services at appropriate competency levels but economic pressures are increasing the financial pressures on them

In the Fire Services Liaison Group survey of fire departments, 76% of responding fire / rescue departments serving populations of less than 5,000 identified "inadequate funding to support desired service levels and funding inconsistencies between jurisdictions" as an "extremely important" or "somewhat important" issue. Their local authorities were equally concerned as 60% rated this issue as important

- In addition to creating budget pressures, business closures in smaller centres are reducing the pool of potential volunteer firefighters as people move away or work outside the community. The surveys of both fire / rescue departments and local governments found that challenges created by firefighter recruitment and retention problems were one of the top two most important issues facing fire / rescue departments in small and medium-sized communities across B.C.
- Training standards have become more stringent, but small departments have limited access to training resources. In addition to the costs of training, volunteers frequently need to pay out of their own pockets to travel to attend courses and / or forgo employment wages. In the survey of fire / rescue departments, every small- and medium-sized department listed "Deficiencies accessing/maintaining training; Lack of consistent training; High cost of training" in the top two most critical issues. Local governments rated this issue as being equally important
- The growing number of first responder and rescue calls is placing a significant burden on the work and family life of volunteers. This has the potential to cause volunteers to reduce their involvement or even quit. In response, some fire / rescue departments have been forced to alter the number of firefighters available for shifts to avoid firefighter burnout

- People with “urban expectations” about services are moving to areas subject to interface fire risks. At the same time, the pine beetle problem is increasing the potential for interface and wildfires fires in infected areas

While larger departments may face some of the same challenges as small departments, the pressures are much greater for volunteer departments. There is a developing tipping point in the volunteer sector. Without support to help attract, train and retain volunteer firefighters, public safety in smaller communities can be expected to suffer.

2.4 UNDERLYING CAUSES

Three main factors contribute to the issues described in the previous section. These are:

1. The lack of a common vision about the role and functions of the Fire / Rescue System
2. The decentralized structure and responsibility of the Fire / Rescue System
3. External factors affecting smaller communities and rural areas

These underlying causes are described briefly below.

2.4.1 LACK OF COMMON VISION

While the roles of fire / rescue departments have clearly expanded, they have not done so in a harmonized manner across the province or even by region. Instead, local decisions have driven how the services are provided to individual communities. This is appropriate for local fire / rescue departments but it does not provide coordinated direction for the province-wide Fire / Rescue System. The overall system is evolving without a plan to take it to its desired future.

At the same time that departments have evolved, the governance of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System has failed to match this evolution. As a result, there is no province-wide oversight of the Fire / Rescue System or forum for developing shared policies, strategies, plans and answers to common problems. With increasing complexity and growing interdependence, there is need for overall Fire / Rescue System cooperation, coordination, planning and governance.

2.4.2 DECENTRALIZED STRUCTURE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Many of the challenges the Fire / Rescue System is facing arise from its fragmented structure. Municipalities and regional districts appropriately decide if they are going to provide fire and rescue services. Moreover, where these levels of government decide *not* to provide services, improvement districts have often been established to do so. In other cases, societies have been created where groups of individuals decide to act cooperatively to provide fire / rescue services.

Responsibility for fire and rescue services in British Columbia today may be held at the regional district level, at the municipal level, by an improvement district, or even by private citizens or organizations. Although it appropriately aligns with local government authority, this situation clearly contributes to problems associated with

service gaps, lack of common standards, inadequate information, limited ability to cooperatively respond, and increased budget pressures.

Moreover, there are areas where the current Fire / Rescue System model lacks clear accountability to elected officials (i.e., small communities with fire / rescue societies). In addition, outside of areas where municipal and regional district fire departments operate, the existing model lacks transparency (that is, residents do not know what services are provided, to what level and what they cost).

2.4.3 CHANGES AND CHALLENGES IN SMALL COMMUNITIES

Studies conducted by the Fire Services Liaison Group for the Model project as well as analyses in numerous jurisdictions around North America have found that external forces are creating an "impending crisis" for small, volunteer fire / rescue departments, related to recruiting, training and retaining firefighters. In referring to the growing stress being experienced by the volunteer sector, it is important to recognize that there remain many high performing, effective volunteer departments. Many volunteer departments continue to perform at a commendable level.

A range of external factors are exerting pressure on the volunteer sector of the Fire / Rescue System and leading to a potential tipping point for many in the sector. In particular, the ability to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters has become a critical issue. In addition, the ability of many volunteer departments to train its members to appropriate standards has also become a severe challenge. This problem is partially a result of the cost of training, but it also is a result of inadequate access to needed training for departments in many communities.

The use of the term "impending crisis" should not be taken as an overstatement. But this does not mean that it is too late to address the recruiting, training and retention challenges faced by the volunteer sector. These issues are time critical as they must be acted upon expeditiously. Corrective action must be taken quickly to avoid system damage that could be irreparable.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM

3.1 A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

There is no single organization or entity that is responsible for the overall Fire / Rescue System in British Columbia. The provincial government, local governments, and the Fire / Rescue System share responsibility for fire and rescue services. If the Fire / Rescue System is to be as effective as possible, the relationship of the responsible parties must be positive and they must fully understand, be committed to and appropriately perform their roles and they must understand and support the roles of the other players. In other words, it must be a true partnership.

In this partnership, the provincial government's responsibilities include:

- Providing the statutory framework within which fire and rescue services operate. This includes the *Fire Services Act*, the building code, and other enactments
- Fighting forest fires, including interface fires
- Delivering emergency medical prehospital care and setting standards for medical first responder services
- Dispatching fire / rescue departments to provide road rescue, medical first responder, and other services in designated areas
- Setting standards for fire and rescue training
- Through third party institutions, offering training courses for fire and rescue services to augment and support training undertaken by local fire departments

Local governments are responsible for forming and funding fire / rescue departments where such services are warranted. Local governments also determine where services are to be provided and what service levels are appropriate.

The Fire / Rescue departments collectively are responsible for the competent delivery of fire and rescue services within the framework established by the provincial government and at the direction of local government.

The Fire Services Liaison Group believes that improvements to the Fire / Rescue System must recognize this shared responsibility. The Fire / Rescue System Model asks the provincial governments, local governments, and all components of the Fire / Rescue System to act cooperatively to improve public safety.

3.2 THE ROLE OF THE PROPOSED MODEL

The Model for the British Columbia Fire / Rescue System proposed by the Fire Services Liaison Group is summarized in this section of the report. It is important to recognize this new Model is a target or ideal for the future and is intended to guide the ongoing development of fire and rescue services. Once implemented, many of the changes will take several years to produce results. Some initiatives will require legislative changes or place new responsibilities on governments and

fire / rescue departments. Without additional financial resources from government, some changes proposed in the Model would not be productive or could be counter-productive.

As noted, fire and rescue services are a joint responsibility of the provincial government, local governments, and fire / rescue departments. Changes to the Fire / Rescue System, therefore, require coordinated action by these three groups.

The Model addresses requirements of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System and makes recommendations about the future of the System. Several of the high priority recommendations involve initiatives to support the volunteer sector. The Model initially focuses on this sector because the stresses being experienced by it require rapid action if they are to be effectively addressed. The Fire Services Liaison Group is also undertaking additional research to identify issues specific to larger departments for inclusion in the model.

The purpose of the new Model is to recommend changes to the Fire / Rescue System. The objective is to describe what the elements of the Fire / Rescue System should look like in the future, not the transition process. The Fire Services Liaison Group anticipates that all the stakeholders will work together to phase in the changes in a prudent fashion that will give all concerned time to appropriately adapt. The Fire Services Liaison Group also understands that discussions between governments and stakeholders in the Fire / Rescue System are likely to result in changes to the proposed Model.

3.3 OVERVIEW OF NEW FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM MODEL

The main features of the proposed Fire / Rescue System Model are:

1. A shared vision for fire / rescue services
2. Improved policy coordination and governance of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System reflecting the vision
3. Measures to support volunteer departments
4. Reduction in service gaps, where justified
5. Initiatives to improve cooperative action and interoperability
6. Improving adherence to competency standards
7. Improved accountability and transparency for fire / rescue services
8. Measures to address budget pressures
9. Improved Fire / Rescue System information

Each of these aspects of the proposed Fire / Rescue System Model is discussed in the following sections.

3.3.1 A SHARED VISION FOR FIRE / RESCUE SERVICES

The Fire Services Liaison Group developed the following vision statement for the Fire / Rescue System of British Columbia:

"To have a competent level of fire and rescue services that is supported by sustainable resources for all residents of and visitors to the province of British Columbia"

This vision statement emphasizes protecting people as the central purpose of the Fire / Rescue System. The vision also establishes a goal of (within reason) extending protection to more people in more places in British Columbia. The vision statement received significant support with 79% of local government representatives surveyed supporting it and 96% support from fire / rescue department representatives.

This statement also recognizes that fire and rescue services must be sustainable. Funding and other constraints, including the limited availability of trained firefighters, will limit the ability to deliver services.

Finally, the vision statement underscores the need to ensure that fire / rescue departments have the competencies to operate safely and effectively.

This vision statement is intended to define a desired future for the ongoing development of the Fire / Rescue System. The Fire Services Liaison Group recognizes that it is impossible to provide fire suppression in remote, unpopulated locations. Alternative strategies such as improvements in public education, fire inspection, or fire mitigation bylaws could improve public safety in these cases.

The Fire Services Liaison Group is seeking a commitment by all stakeholders to accept this vision as the basis for improving public safety across the province. A shared vision is a prerequisite to long term meaningful progress in the Fire / Rescue System.

3.3.2 IMPROVED POLICY COORDINATION AND GOVERNANCE

Two key changes are needed to improve the policy coordination and governance of the Fire / Rescue System across B.C. First, the advisory / oversight mandate of the Fire Commissioner should be expanded to include all fire and rescue services. The governance roles of the Office of the Fire Commissioner with this expanded mandate should include:

- Advising the provincial government on matters affecting fire services and fire department-delivered rescue services in British Columbia
- Liaising with all components of the Fire / Rescue System regarding common issues and initiatives
- Coordinating with other provincial government entities on matters affecting the Fire / Rescue System. In particular, the Office of the Fire Commissioner should coordinate with organizations that establish and enforce standards that affect fire and rescue services (such as WorkSafe BC)
- Tracking and reporting information about the full range of fire and rescue services

The other critical governance change is the creation of a Fire Services Advisory Board as provided for in the Fire Services Act. This board should include representatives of the Union of B.C. Municipalities, the Local Government Management Association, Fire Chiefs' Association of B.C., Professional Firefighters Association, Fire Prevention Officers' Association of B.C., Fire Training Officers' Association of B.C., and the Volunteer Firefighters' Association of B.C. The Fire Services Advisory Board should be chaired by the Fire Commissioner.

This board will bring together all of the key parties responsible for fire and rescue services in the province in order to:

- Provide the provincial government with advice about matters affecting fire and rescue services
- Identify priorities for changes to the Fire / Rescue System
- Advise the provincial government on standards or proposed standards that affect the Fire / Rescue System
- Advise the provincial government on policies and programs relevant to the Fire / Rescue System
- Develop guidelines and "best practices" recommendations for fire and rescue services

The Fire Services Liaison Group recommends that the Fire Services Advisory Board be put in place immediately. This will provide a forum for assessing the proposed Fire / Rescue System Model which includes both levels of government and representatives of the Fire / Rescue System. It can also play a key role in further developing and refining the proposed Fire / Rescue Model and preparing a transition/implementation plan.

These governance changes will provide a major building block of the foundation required for changing the Fire / Rescue System in the coming years.

3.3.3 MEASURES TO SUPPORT VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS

Maintaining and improving the vitality of the volunteer sector of the Fire / Rescue System lies at the heart of these recommendations. As stated previously, this sector, which is critical to public safety in British Columbia, is approaching a situation that will have critical consequences if not addressed. The Fire Services Liaison Group urges local governments and the provincial government to take action on the recommendations regarding volunteer departments.

This report has raised the issue that a portion of the volunteer sector of the Fire / Rescue System is approaching an impending crisis because many departments are experiencing difficulties recruiting, training and retaining volunteers. The Fire Services Liaison Group recommends that the Fire Services Advisory Board, supported by the Office of the Fire Commissioner, undertake as quickly as possible a project to identify, evaluate and document successful approaches to volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention. The goal will be to quickly progress to designing actionable programs that fire / rescue departments around the province may adapt to local circumstances. Representatives of the volunteer sector must be

heavily involved this project and central to solution development, in order for any recommendations to be workable with realistic chance for success.

If, for any reason, the Fire Services Advisory Board is not able to act on this initiative as quickly as the situation requires, the Fire Services Liaison Group will consider initiating the project with the expectation of turning it over to the Fire Services Advisory Board when appropriate.

The other major aspect that is critical to addressing the impending crisis in the volunteer sector is determination of approaches to make training accessible and affordable to volunteer departments. The Office of the Fire Commissioner is planning to carry out a project to identify impediments to training across the province. Once the impediments have been identified and understood, this research will form the information base upon which to make decisions regarding how to address training challenges. The Fire Services Liaison Group strongly supports the Office of the Fire Commissioner training initiative and recommends that the Fire Services Advisory Board do everything possible to support and participate in this initiative once it is launched.

While the measures to address budget pressures will assist volunteer departments, additional steps are needed. The new Fire / Rescue System Model calls for the provincial government to fund basic volunteer firefighter training to meet standards that it has set. This should be pursued through the trades training system, for which the province provides funding through the Industry Training Authority. An additional component of the new Model includes a project to improve management and administrative support in small fire departments.

Given the importance of this sector and the significant, ongoing challenges it faces, the Office of the Fire Commissioner should create a dedicated unit within the Office of the Fire Commissioner to focus on the issues and needs of smaller departments.

3.3.4 REDUCTION IN SERVICE GAPS

The proposed Model includes measures to reduce gaps in service where justified by resident needs and risk. Some of the proposed measures include:

- Having the Office of the Fire Commissioner inventory, document, and publish information about services provided and service levels around the province, including rescue services
- Negotiating tariffs with the provincial government for out of area services that better reflect the costs departments incur to provide these services, including all operating costs and a contribution to capital costs
- Identifying and adopting a risk assessment / risk management methodology for fire / rescue departments that addresses the need to reduce service gaps where risks warrant
- Publishing, through the Fire Services Advisory Board, "best practice" recommendations for fire / rescue departments that will provide guidance with respect to what services should be provided and where

- Ensuring that the public better understands where services are available and where they are not (such as by making department service plans readily available to the public)
- Redesigning fire investigation and fire inspection services

These measures will reduce service gaps over time. Even with these initiatives, given the location and nature of the causes, there will continue to be areas where fire and rescue services will not be feasible.

3.3.5 INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE COOPERATIVE ACTION AND INTEROPERABILITY

The proposed Model includes measures to improve inter-departmental cooperation and interoperability. It is recommended that the Fire Services Advisory Board, with the support of the Office of the Fire Commission, undertake a project to identify and develop actionable plans to reduce barriers to cooperative action. This should consider and recommend the types of incentives that will be required.

The Fire Services Liaison Group recognizes that the Fire / Rescue System has not fully embraced the concepts of interoperability and cooperative action. It is the responsibility of the Fire / Rescue System, and its component departments, to take responsibility for building the commitment needed and driving change.

This will be accomplished through the Fire Service Advisory Board but, if there are delays in setting up the Board or if it not able to assign a high priority to this recommendation, the Fire Services Liaison Group will consider taking on the start-up of the project to reduce barriers to cooperative action and promote interoperability.

The Fire Services Advisory Board should also develop detailed recommendations for equipment and apparatus standardization and operating procedures directed at small and medium-sized fire / rescue departments. While individual departments could decide to depart from these recommendations, it is anticipated that many will view these recommendations as “best practices”. This should lead to improvements in interoperability. The provincial government should consider linking new funding for the training system to acceptance by local governments of the need to standardize equipment and procedures over time.

The Model also proposes that departmental service plans be required to address mutual aid and interoperability considerations, including how departments would function in response to a regional or provincial emergency. Local government or the department may, under the proposed Model, decide to take no actions to improve interoperability, but this decision would be required to be documented in the service plan.

3.3.6 ADHERENCE TO COMPETENCY STANDARDS

There are three types of mandated province-wide standards that apply to fire / rescue departments. They are:

- Operating standards for fire services. These are set by WorkSafe BC
- Firefighter training standards. These are set by the Solicitor General

- Other standards that relate to the work performed by firefighters and the services they provide (e.g., first responders, driving firefighting apparatus, and safety regulations relating to various types of rescue services)

Action is required immediately as well as over the longer term in regard to specification of training and competency standards for the Fire / Rescue System. In the immediate term the proposed fire / rescue model assumes continuation of the present standards in the other areas.

Immediate Action

As explained in Section 2.3.4, it is essential that misunderstandings and inconsistencies that have developed regarding training standards for firefighters be dealt with quickly and directly. This specifically applies to clarification of exactly what standards apply to fire fighting training and the associated competency levels.

The Fire Services Liaison Group recommends that the Fire Commissioner initiate immediate action to clarify and specify the British Columbia Training Standard. This should not merely involve taking unilateral action to specify the needed clarification. Rather, the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board should immediately address the issue of training standards for firefighters. In the event that there is any delay in appointing the Fire Services Advisory Board, then a working group of representatives of the Fire / Rescue System drawn from management of volunteer and career departments, training officers, local governments, and the union should be immediately appointed to deal with this issue.

This group should also deal with important related matters at the same time the training standards decisions are made, including:

- What will the training standards be?
- Will the mandatory aspect be deferred to allow departments to undertake needed catch up?
- What assistance will be provided to departments to assist them to catch up? For volunteer departments, this would need to address both costs and time availability
- Will the standards apply equally to volunteer and career departments?
- Will a standard be specified for the critical interior fire attack area?

Once the above has been addressed, it is recommended that:

- The volunteer sector focus on ensuring that all its firefighters attain the Basic Fire Fighting Certificate
- Training funding be made available to assist volunteer departments to attain this
- The Fire Services Advisory Board set a deadline for volunteer fire / rescue departments to attain compliance with all firefighters trained to the required level. The specific date must take into account the availability of funding and overcoming the impediments to accessing training as determined by the study being carried out by the Office of the Fire Commissioner

Over time, the Fire Services Liaison Group expects that volunteer fire / rescue departments will train increasing portions of their firefighters to the full Fire Fighter I standard.

Long Term Action

The Fire Services Liaison Group believes that the minimum mandatory training standard for all fire fighters in the province should eventually be Fire Fighter I for interior firefighting. However, it recognizes that this is not possible at this time. Imposing this policy would create an extreme hardship for many small departments and would exacerbate recruitment / retentions problems if this caused many volunteer firefighters to resign.

To achieve the envisioned quality of service, the Fire Services Liaison Group proposes that a set of training and operating standards should eventually be developed and enforced for fire and rescue services. This includes minimum standards for:

1. Exterior firefighting, incorporating requirement for the Basic Fire Fighting Certificate
2. Interior firefighting, incorporating Fire Fighter I
3. Emergency medical first responder
4. Road rescue / automobile extraction

The Fire Services Liaison Group expects that, over time, standards for other fire and rescue services will be developed and implemented based on the recommendations of the Fire Commissioner working with the Fire Services Advisory Board.

For a "standard" to be truly a required standard and not a "recommended practice", there needs to be an enforcement mechanism. The new Model proposes that enforcement become the responsibility of either the Office of the Fire Commissioner or an independent enforcement authority.

This aspect of the new Fire / Rescue System Model should not be implemented if new resources are not provided to ensure that small departments can meet the standards. In fact, without funding for and access to training to meet the standards, this aspect of the proposed Model should *not* be implemented.

The transition to these standards for fire and rescue services will require several years to achieve and must not be enforced until properly funded remediation training has been completed. The result, however, will be improved competency and public safety.

3.3.7 IMPROVED ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

The proposed Model provides for continuation of authority by municipalities and regional districts to determine if, where, and how fire and rescue services should be delivered. That is, fire and rescue services will continue to be "permissive" in the sense that local governments can decide whether services will be provided.

While the Fire Services Liaison Group supports the principle that fire and rescue services are permissive, it also believes that these are public services that should be accountable to local government. The proposed Model calls for local governments to take responsibility over time for all fire / rescue departments, other than industrial, federal government, and First Nations departments, within their jurisdictions. This means that, over an extended time to provide for a reasonable transition period, regional districts would become responsible for departments currently run by improvement districts or by self-directed societies.

This is a major recommendation for regional districts. It is recognized that there will be debate over this issue. However, over the longer term, the Fire Services Liaison Group believes this is the most appropriate local governance and accountability structure for fire / rescue departments currently operating under the direction of improvement districts and societies. It will take some years to achieve this aspect of the Model. However, some regional districts already appear to be moving this way in order to ensure fire / rescue services are properly led, funded, trained and deployed.

This proposal does not mandate that regional districts must provide services. Nor does it require fire / rescue societies to be merged into the local government since regional districts could meet their responsibilities by contracting with existing societies. This aspect of the new Model clarifies and matches government authority with responsibility. That is, the authority of regional districts to decide if and where fire and rescue services are provided should be linked with accountability for all fire and rescue departments within their jurisdictions.

It is also important that there be greater transparency about the delivery of fire and rescue services. The Fire Services Liaison Group proposes that municipalities and regional districts be required to develop "service plans" for each department that specify:

- The area(s) where services will be delivered
- What services will be delivered in those areas
- The response time targets for responding to calls for service

Fire / rescue department service plans need not be complex or detailed documents. A simple description or checklist could be used to document services that are to be provided in each service area. In addition to publishing these service plans, the public should be invited to comment on the plans as part of the regular municipal or regional district budget approval process.

As part of the process to improve the competency and functioning of the fire / rescue system and recognize and deal with it as a system, the Model proposes that fire /rescue departments will be registered and certified. The registration process is expected to be implemented in the short term to allow the Office of the Fire Commissioner to better enumerate and understand the attributes of the fire /rescue system. Certification would only be implemented in the long term after mandatory competency standards are in place. Certified fire / rescue departments will be able to objectively substantiate that they are able to perform at the required level for the specific services they provide.

3.3.8 MEASURES TO ADDRESS BUDGET PRESSURES

The proposed Fire / Rescue System Model incorporates several components to address budget pressures by improving efficiencies. For example, the Model recommends creation of a purchasing cooperative for departments to pool their purchasing power to negotiate better prices for equipment and apparatus. In addition to reducing per unit costs, this should increase interoperability because departments that participate would acquire the same or compatible equipment.

The Fire Services Liaison Group undertook some preliminary research into opportunities to achieve regional and other efficiencies as an approach to addressing budget pressures. While there appears to be interesting opportunities for regional efficiencies, more directed investigation is needed to develop specific and "do-able" recommendations. Regionally-shared resources would also directly support improvements in interoperability.

The Fire Services Liaison Group recommends that focused, actionable projects be undertaken by the Fire Services Advisory Board to identify and implement efficiencies. These initiatives would need to reflect the different population distribution-driven issues and circumstances of:

- The Vancouver or Victoria metropolitan areas
- Regional urban / suburban situations
- Rural and smaller communities

The Fire Services Liaison Group believes that efficiency and cost containment initiatives must be owned and spearheaded by the Fire / Rescue System if solutions are to be effective and actually result in successful implementation. This is another area that the Fire Services Liaison Group is willing to initially spearhead and eventually turn over to the Fire Services Advisory Board if project implementation delays are experienced.

The Model proposes that projects be carried out to evaluate the technical, financial, and operational feasibility of improvements in 9-1-1 service, radio systems, computer-aided dispatch, and records management technologies across the province. This aspect of the new Model directly supports improvements in cooperation and interoperability.

As part of the above, the Fire Services Liaison Group also recommends that the potential for linked regional records management systems be pursued. Once this opportunity is evaluated, and determined to be technically and financially feasible, implementation would improve operating efficiencies of fire / rescue departments and substantially improve availability of information about individual departments and the Fire / Rescue System as a whole. For very small departments that typically lack administrative support resources, local governments should be responsible for data input and maintaining records.

3.3.9 IMPROVED FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM INFORMATION

It is important to improve the quality and comprehensiveness of information about the Fire / Rescue System. Under the new Model, the mandate of the Fire Commissioner should be expanded to include all fire services and the full range of rescue services. The objective is to have comprehensive, province-wide information about the services provided by fire / rescue departments.

The Fire / Rescue System needs to recognize and support the value of accurate, comprehensive information about the performance of the System. The Fire / Rescue System should play a role in improving the completeness, accuracy and timeliness of reporting by fire / rescue departments. The Fire Services Liaison Group will examine ways to encourage and increase submission of fire loss statistics by departments across B.C.

Merely expanding the information management role of the Fire Commissioner to include a broader range of services will not improve the quality of information about the Fire / Rescue System. The Fire Services Liaison Group believes that regional records management systems ("RMS") that are interfaced with one another should be implemented. Shared RMS systems would significantly improve and simplify the ability to provide accurate and timely information about the province-wide Fire / Rescue System. This information is critical for developing provincial fire / rescue regulations, policies, programs and prevention initiatives.

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3.3.10 SUMMARY

This proposed new Model has been designed to address the underlying drivers of change and current challenges and to provide solutions, particularly as they impact the volunteer sector. The differences between the current Fire / Rescue System structure and the proposed Model are summarized below:

Model Aspect	Current	Proposed
Vision	No coherent, planned vision	A shared vision for the Fire / Rescue System
Service-wide governance	Limited oversight role by OFC (fire only)	OFC oversight mandate for fire & rescue services Fire Services Advisory Board as policy board Fire Services Advisory Board is the "single forum" to address province-wide issues Fire Services Advisory Board is a leadership body for departments and local governments
Responsibility for local service delivery	Local governments Improvement districts Self-directed societies	Local governments (Improvement district and society fire / rescue operations eventually move to regional districts)
Requirement to provide fire, rescue & emergency services	Permissive (a decision of local government)	Permissive (remains a decision of local government)
Service coverage	Locally determined Some gaps	Remains locally determined. Encouragement to close gaps Reduced gaps Opportunities for public input regarding decisions to provide or not provide service

Model Aspect	Current	Proposed
Public education	Local, tactical approach to public fire education	Province-wide risk-management based strategic approach to public fire education
Fire investigation	Inconsistent approach to fire investigation	Standards driven approach to fire investigation "Local assistant" system reengineered
Fire inspections	Fire inspections of public buildings only required within municipalities Fire inspections rely on local resources	Fire inspections of all public buildings Regional approach to share inspection resources; contracting approach
Training & competency standards	Standards set by variety of organizations (EMHC, WorkSafe BC, etc.) with little involvement of local government or the Fire / Rescue System No systematic monitoring or enforcement of standards	OFC & Fire Services Advisory Board to coordinate with standard setting bodies OFC & Fire Services Advisory Board to recommend any additions or changes to standards Methods to build adherence to competency standards
Responsibility for interoperability / regionalization	Local option if and to what extent to support interoperability No focus on this issue Little regionalization	Part of the emergency planning process Common operating procedures, apparatus, equipment encouraged Opportunities for regionalization identified and assessed

Model Aspect	Current	Proposed
Communications and information management systems.	Local communications with some consolidated Computer Aided Dispatch Systems (CAD)	Interoperable communications Linked regional Record Management Systems (RMS) Shared CAD systems
Information about the Fire / Rescue System	Limited, incomplete, not reliable	Broad range of reliable information provided to / from OFC Shared RMS
Training	Individual departments fund, provide training Impediments to accessing training (cost and distance)	Provincial government to support volunteer training Expanded access to training; impediments reduced
Volunteer Department Key Issues	Reaching tipping point regarding firefighter recruitment, training & retention Budget pressures	Support for training, recruitment, and retention to address high stress on the volunteer sector Initiatives to address budget pressures
Funding	Municipalities, regional districts, improvement districts, and / or societies fund all aspects plus (i) fees for services provided to provincial agencies, and (ii) limited provincial government grants	Municipalities and regional districts fund but there is provincial support for cost of mandated, standards-driven training of volunteers Improved provincial funding for out of area services to agencies
Purchasing	Every department on their own	Mechanisms for joint purchasing of apparatus, equipment and supplies to reduce costs and improve interoperability
Administration	Each department sets up and maintains its own administration systems	Common administration systems (RMS) are developed and supported

A detailed description of the elements of the proposed Fire / Rescue System Model is presented at Attachment 4. Attachment 3 illustrates how the elements of the Model align with problems and the underlying causes within the Fire / Rescue Service.

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4. MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The detailed description of the proposed Model set out in Attachment 4 includes thirty six recommendations. Key recommendations to the provincial government, local governments, and the Fire / Rescue System are summarized below.

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

The Model supports the following initiatives presently underway by the provincial government:

- Amend the *Fire Services Act* (but include elements to support the proposed Model)
- Assist in improving the volunteer firefighter training system starting with a project to identify impediments to training
- Expand the mandate of the Fire Commissioner to include rescue services provided by fire / rescue departments commencing with a project to assess the state of rescue services
- Improve the fire investigation and fire inspection systems in British Columbia

Additional major recommendations that the provincial government should undertake are:

- Appoint and fund a Fire Services Advisory Board
- Fund volunteer firefighter training to meet provincially-mandated competency standards
- Fund projects to evaluate the feasibility of improvements to communications and information technology, including linked regional records management systems
- Improve funding of out of area services provided by fire / rescue departments to its agencies

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The major recommendations that local governments should undertake are:

- Improvement district fire / rescue departments and fire / rescue services operated by autonomous societies should come under the authority of local governments
- Ensure that their departments meet the minimum competency standards for fire / rescue services
- Assist departments to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters
- Provide administrative support to small fire / rescue departments
- Prepare fire / rescue service plans and share them with residents and consult with the public on major service issues
- Support their local fire / rescue departments in undertaking initiatives and activities needed to act on recommendations addressed to the Fire / Rescue

System (see 4.3). This support should be reflected in local government annual plans.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM

The major recommendations that fire / rescue departments and firefighters should undertake are:

- Plan to meet minimum competency requirements for the provision of fire and rescue services and demonstrate progress toward attaining them.
- Support initiatives to improve interoperability between fire / rescue departments and between fire / rescue departments and other emergency services. More generally, the Fire / Rescue System needs to commit to improving interoperability and efficiency
- Support initiatives to improve efficiency, including joint purchasing, interoperability and regional initiatives
- Endeavor to comply with registration and certification processes
- Support and participate in initiatives owned by the Fire / Rescue System, including development of recruitment / retention programs, efficiency / cost containment initiatives and standardization/ interoperability programs
- The Fire Services Advisory Board should develop and promote “recommended practices” to improve effectiveness and efficiency in fire and rescue services

5. BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM CHANGES

The primary benefits and advantages of the Fire Service Liaison Group recommendations for the B.C. Fire / Rescue System are presented below:

5.1 RESIDENTS

- Residents in small communities have more robust, competent and sustainable fire / rescue departments
- The cost of the fire / rescue service is more equitably shared. Urban and rural residents pay their share of fire / rescue service costs
- The provincial government and its agencies contribute to the local fire / rescue department based on their use of services
- Fire / rescue service and performance gaps are identified and filled where feasible
- Plans to inspect public buildings throughout the province lead to greater public safety
- Improved fire prevention programs reduce fire incidents particularly in rural and remote areas
- Standards of service increase as additional training is provided

5.2 THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

- Through a stronger Office of the Fire Commissioner and an effective Fire Services Advisory Board, the provincial government and its agencies work with the Fire / Rescue System to solve issues and improve public safety
- The province has a strong network of fire / rescue departments which are better trained and equipped with improved interoperability to address major regional and Provincial emergencies
- With improved interoperability, major emergency events are addressed more effectively
- The province has an up to date Fire Services Act that reflects current and projected public safety and Fire / Rescue System needs
- Fire incidents are reduced through fire prevention programs and fire inspections of public buildings throughout the province

5.3 MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONAL DISTRICTS

- Municipalities have a more solid financial structure for their fire / rescue department with increased funding and support for out of area services
- Tools and processes are developed to reduce fire / rescue services costs
- Electoral areas throughout the province have stronger, more competent and better funded fire / rescue departments to meet the needs of their residents. New funding is provided for volunteer training

5.4 *THE FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM*

- The Fire / Rescue System has formal links with the provincial government and its agencies through the Fire Services Advisory Board
- There are structures, processes and programs in place to mobilize significant fire / rescue service resources on a province-wide basis
- Standards and recommended practices are in place, which improve fire / rescue service delivery, firefighter safety and interoperability
- Group purchasing improves costs and interoperability
- Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are clear to all

5.5 *SMALL FIRE / RESCUE DEPARTMENTS*

- Small fire / rescue departments receive needed funding for training. Provincial payments for out of area services provide for full cost recovery
- Support programs and initiatives are in place to help recruit, train and retain volunteers
- The Office of the Fire Commissioner provides technical and management assistance to address specific issues of small fire / rescue departments
- Improved fire prevention programs reduce incidents
- The local government provides administrative and technical support to fire / rescue service leaders

5.6 *LARGE FIRE / RESCUE DEPARTMENTS*

- The Office of the Fire Commissioner and Fire Services Advisory Board are mandated to assist large departments in their discussions and negotiations with provincial agencies
- There are structures and processes in place for members of the Fire / Rescue System to advocate for improvements with the province
- Specific research is carried out and initiatives are developed that focus on the needs and issues facing large urban fire / rescue departments
- Interoperability is improved so fire / rescue departments can both give and receive effective assistance as needed
- Improved fire prevention programs reduce incidents

6. CONCLUSION

The Fire Services Liaison Group recognizes that the provincial government, local governments, fire / rescue departments, firefighters, and many others need to review and comment on the proposed Fire / Rescue System Model. It is expected that dialogue with the stakeholders will help to improve the Model. Accordingly, this document should be treated as a draft.

Over the next few months, the Fire Services Liaison Group will consult with stakeholder groups. Each of the member associations of the Fire Services Liaison Group will consult with their memberships to solicit comments regarding the draft Model. Members of the Fire / Rescue System are encouraged to participate in the consultation process established by their association. The operational member associations of the Fire Services Liaison Group include:

1. The Fire Chiefs' Association of B.C
2. The Fire Prevention Officers Association of B.C.
3. The Fire Training Officers Association of B.C.
4. The B.C. Professional Fire Fighters Association
5. The Volunteer Fire Fighters Association of B.C.

Consultations will also be held with the Union of BC Municipalities, the operational member associations of the Fire Services Liaison Group, and the Local Government Management Association. It is anticipated that members of these associations will also consult with their memberships and provide comment and feedback on the Model.

The Fire Services Liaison Group will also solicit comments and feedback from the provincial government on the Model.

These consultations are expected to be complete by the end of February 2009. At that time, the Fire Services Liaison Group will revise the Model based on the feedback received as well as additional research that is currently underway.

The proposed Fire / Rescue System Model will produce meaningful improvements to the safety of British Columbians. While there are major challenges to overcome to implement the Model, the Fire Services Liaison Group urges the provincial government, local governments, and the Fire / Rescue System to work together to realize the many benefits of the proposed Fire / Rescue System Model and improve public and firefighter safety.

**Attachment 1:
B.C. Fire / Rescue Departments**

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FIRE DEPARTMENTS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

A. FIRE / RESCUE DEPARTMENTS BY TYPE

Type	Ownership	Direction	Funding	Estimated Number ⁽¹⁾
1. Large municipal fire department (career staff)	Incorporated local government (population over 25,000)	CAO/Council	Local taxes	27
2. Medium municipal fire department (career/volunteer staff)	Incorporated local government (population 4,000 to 24,199)	CAO/Council	Local taxes	57
3. Small municipal fire department (volunteer staff)	Incorporated local government (population under 4,000)	CAO/Council	Local taxes	76
4. Regional district fire department (e.g., RDKB Fire Department)	Regional District	CAO/Regional District Board	Local taxes set by Regional District	20 ⁽²⁾
5. Unincorporated community fire department (e.g., Fanny Bay Fire Department)	Society which contracts services to the Regional District	CAO/Regional District Board	Local taxes set by Regional District and Society	50 ⁽²⁾
6. Unincorporated community fire department (Likely fire and rescue service)	Society/Resort (e.g., Sun Peaks)	Society/Resort	Local fundraising, grants and possibly Regional District grants in aid	67 ⁽²⁾
7. Local fire improvement district (e.g., Union Bay Fire Department)	Improvement District	Improvement District/Electoral Area Directors (Independent of Regional District)	Local taxes set by Improvement District	40 ⁽²⁾
8. First Nations	First Nations	First Nations	Band Council	82 ⁽³⁾
9. Airport/Canadian Forces Base (e.g., CFB Comox)	Federal or local government	Federal or local government	Federal or local government	6
10. Industrial fire department (e.g., Fording Coal)	Corporation	Corporation	Corporation	20
11. Unincorporated community fire department (not operational, seasonal or below standard)	Society	Society	Local fundraising and grants	15 ⁽²⁾
Total Number of Departments				460

- (1) There is no reliable data on the number of B.C. fire departments
- (2) Estimated by the consultant
- (3) Approximately 40% of the First Nations bands in B.C. have fire departments. The research did not address how well equipped these departments are

B. NUMBER OF FIRE DEPARTMENTS BY CATEGORY ⁽⁴⁾

The B.C. fire service is comprised of the following components:

Category	Estimated Number
Medium to large urban departments ⁽⁵⁾	84
Small community departments ⁽⁶⁾	<u>268</u>
Sub total	352
First Nations departments	82
Airport fire departments	6
Industrial fire departments	<u>20</u>
Total	460

⁽⁴⁾ There is no exact count of the number of fire / rescue departments in BC. These numbers are estimated based on research conducted in early 2008 using department listings developed by the Office of the Fire Commissioner, UBCM and FSLG member associations

⁽⁵⁾ Categories 1 and 2 from Table A

⁽⁶⁾ Categories 3 to 7 and 11 from Table A

Attachment 2:
Summary Financial Information

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SUMMARY FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The following financial and statistical data have been used to calculate the numbers used in this report.

Financial and Demographic Information and Analysis	
B.C. population (2006 census)	4,113,500
Office of the Fire Commissioner annual budget	\$2.5 million
PEP payments to fire / rescue departments in 2007/2008 ⁽¹⁾	\$235,000
MOF payments to fire / rescue departments in 2007/2008 ⁽²⁾	\$15,000
Fire / rescue departments in B.C. ⁽³⁾	350
Provincial insurance premium tax revenues	\$375 million
B.C. Ambulance Budget, 2007/2008	\$283 million
Calculations	
Office of the Fire Commissioner annual budget per capita	\$0.61
Office of the Fire Commissioner annual budget per fire / rescue department	\$7,143
PEP and MOF payments per fire / rescue department per year	\$714
PEP and MOF payments for fire / rescue services per capita	\$0.06
Provincial insurance premium tax revenue per capita	\$91.17
B.C. Ambulance Budget per capita	\$68.79

⁽¹⁾ PEP paid \$350,000 to fire / rescue departments and to highway rescue societies. It has been assumed fire / rescue departments received 2/3 of these payments.

⁽²⁾ This is a rough estimate. MOF has not been able to provide data. Many fire / rescue departments do not bill MOF for their services.

⁽³⁾ Refer to Attachment 1.

Attachment 3:
Causes, Problems & Solutions

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Cause	Problem	No.	Solution Element
1. Lack of a Common Vision	1. Responsibility for Fire & Rescue Services	1.	Establish Common Vision
		2.	Fire Service is the "Fire / Rescue System"
		3.	Local Government Autonomy
		4.	Local Government Responsibility for Fire / Rescue Departments
		5.	Transparency and Accountability
	2. The Need to Improve Governance of the Province-wide Fire / Rescue System; Failure to Deal with Fire / Rescue as a System	6.	Amend the <i>Fire Services Act</i>
		7.	Establish a Fire Services Advisory Board
		8.	Fire Commissioner Mandate to Include Rescue Services
		9.	Education of Stewards
		10.	OFC Research Role
2. Decentralized Nature of the Fire / Rescue System	3. Service Gaps	11.	Gaps in Service Coverage
		12.	Services Provided to Provincial Agencies
		13.	Improved Liability Protection
		14.	Work with BC Ambulance Service to Reduce Service Gaps
		15.	Local Fire Bylaws
		16.	Improve Fire Investigation
		17.	Improve Fire Inspection

Cause	Problem	No.	Solution Element
		18.	Improve Public Education
		19.	Trusted Service Providers
		20.	First Nations & Other Emergency Service Providers
	4. The Challenge of Province-wide Competency Standards	21.	Improving Adherence to Competency Standards
		22.	Fire / Rescue Department Registration & Certification
		23.	Improve Training Delivery
		24.	Leadership and Management Training
		25.	Best Practices Guidelines
	5. Inadequate Objective Information about the Fire / Rescue System	26.	Improve Fire / Rescue Information
	6. Operational Implications of Independent Fire / Rescue Departments	27.	Improve Interoperability
	7. Budget Pressures	28.	Efficiency Initiatives
		29.	Communications and Information Management
		30.	Linked Regional Records Management Systems
		31.	Equipment Standardization & Joint Purchasing

Cause	Problem	No.	Solution Element
3. External Factors Affecting Smaller Communities and Rural Areas	8. Heavy Stress on the Volunteer Sector	32.	Province to Fund Volunteer Training
		33.	Recruitment / Retention Programs
		34.	Recruitment / Retention Incentives
		35.	Local Government Administration and Management Support
		36.	OFC Focus on Small Departments

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Attachment 4:
Elements of Proposed Model

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ELEMENT 1: ESTABLISH COMMON VISION

RECOMMENDATION

The following vision statement should be adopted by the Fire / Rescue System in British Columbia:

"To have a competent level of fire and emergency services that is supported by sustainable resources for all residents of and visitors to the province of British Columbia"

BACKGROUND

Fire / rescue departments have been organized in various ways on a community-by-community basis around the province. Traditionally, these departments focused on suppression of structure fires and fire prevention. Over time, many departments responded to community needs by adding a variety of rescue, medical first responder, and other emergency services.

This expansion in the services provided by some fire / rescue departments has not happened in a consistent manner across the province or even by region. Local decisions appropriately made by local jurisdictions in response to local needs have driven the evolution of the Fire / Rescue System.

A shared vision statement provides decision makers in government and within the Fire / Rescue System with strategic guidance on the future development of the service. Even though it must be recognized that a vision will never be fully attained, it provides guidance as it represents the future to be strived for.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element clearly defines the Fire / Rescue System's purpose to be protecting the lives and health of people in British Columbia. It also defines the key attributes necessary to do so, i.e., competence, efficiency, and sustainability.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government, local governments, and the component departments and organizations within the Fire / Rescue System need to jointly commit to the vision statement

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- No province-wide vision statement currently exists for the Fire / Rescue System

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

1. Responsibility for fire and rescue services

RELATED ELEMENTS

- The vision statement is the basis for all elements of the new model

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ELEMENT 2: FIRE SERVICE IS THE "FIRE / RESCUE SYSTEM"

RECOMMENDATION

The "Fire Service" should be recognized as the "Fire / Rescue System".

BACKGROUND

Traditional "fire services" included structural fire suppression, fire investigation, fire inspections, and public education about fire safety. Many departments have added a range of rescue and emergency services, including:

- Medical first responder
- Road rescue
- Hazardous material response
- Technical rescue services, including high angle rescue, enclosed space rescue, swift water rescue, etc.

This expansion in the range of services can be seen in the results of the survey of fire departments conducted for the Model Project by the Fire Services Liaison Group. The proportion of volunteer departments providing specific services beyond fire suppression was determined to be:

Services Provided	% of Depts
Interface Firefighting	92%
Public Education	70%
Road Rescue/Automobile Extrication	66%
Fire Investigations	60%
Emergency Medical First Responder	59%
Fire Inspections	45%
Hazardous Materials	29%
Technical Rescue	23%
Water/Ice Rescue	16%

The growth in the services provided by many departments has occurred without fundamental changes in the legislative framework for the Fire / Rescue System.

Fire and rescue services are provided by hundreds of individual volunteer and career departments around the province. The "Fire Service" is, in fact, a system of independent departments that interrelate in various ways.

The "Fire Service", from a province-wide perspective, should be recognized as the "Fire / Rescue System" to reflect these factors. Governance of the system should also be based on this perspective.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by aligning oversight and governance of the Fire / Rescue System with the range of services departments actually deliver.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government, local governments, and the fire / rescue departments and other stakeholders need to jointly accept the principle that the "Fire Service" should be recognized and governed as the "Fire / Rescue System"

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- While many individual departments have renamed themselves as "Fire / Rescue Departments", there has been no revision of the *Fire Services Act* to reflect the full range of services
- The individual departments when considered collectively are more appropriately viewed as a "system" that provides fire and rescue services

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

1. Responsibility for fire and rescue services
2. The need to improve governance of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 7, Establish Fire Services Advisory Board
- Element 8, OFC Mandate to Include Rescue Services

ELEMENT 3: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY

RECOMMENDATION

The new Model recognizes that the existing policy that provision of fire / rescue services are “permissive” for local governments (i.e., are not mandatory) should be continued.

That is, local governments (i.e., municipalities and regional districts) may determine:

1. If they wish to establish or maintain a fire / rescue department
2. The form and nature of any fire / rescue department they may decide to establish, e.g., career or volunteer, internal department or contracted services
3. The range of fire and rescue services that the department will provide
4. The service areas where fire and other services are to be provided
5. The response time targets for providing fire and rescue services
6. Funding and funding mechanisms

BACKGROUND

Local governments retain their autonomy about decisions regarding whether and where fire and rescue services will be delivered within their jurisdictions and how such services will be funded. In particular, local governments are free to decide not to provide such services.

The Fire Services Liaison group strongly recommends that local governments ensure all incorporated communities have, at a minimum, a fire / rescue department capable of mounting an exterior attack on structure fires.

Local government autonomy does not extend to mandated standards for firefighter safety and training. This restriction on local autonomy is a continuation of the present situation.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by assigning responsibility for protective services.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Local governments are responsible for this element of the model

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- No provincial legislation (except the *Vancouver Charter* which obliges that city to have a fire department) including the *Fire Services Act*, *Community Charter*, and *Local Government Act* requires local governments to provide fire / rescue services

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

1. Responsibility for fire and rescue services

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 4, Local Government Responsibility for Fire / Rescue Departments
- Element 5, Transparency and Accountability

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ELEMENT 4: LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR FIRE / RESCUE DEPARTMENTS

RECOMMENDATION

Municipalities should be responsible for all fire / rescue departments within their jurisdictions, other than industrial, federal government, and First Nations departments. Regional districts should be responsible for all other fire / rescue departments (except industrial, federal, and First Nations departments).

The Fire Services Liaison Group recognizes this element of the proposed Model will require a long time to achieve. It is important that local governments have the time needed to effect this change in an orderly manner. However, the principle that fire / rescue services are provided by government is an important one that should guide the ongoing evolution of the Fire / Rescue System.

BACKGROUND

Under the existing model, several types of local jurisdictions provide fire / rescue services. These entities include:

- Municipalities
- Regional districts
- Improvement districts
- Societies contracted to local governments
- Autonomous societies

Under the new model (after an appropriate transition period) regional districts will assume responsibility for all fire / rescue departments (excepting industrial, federal, and First Nations departments) within their jurisdiction. In particular, departments currently under improvement districts or organized as autonomous societies will be brought under a municipality or regional district.

Under the new model, local governments retain their autonomy in respect of the form of fire / rescue departments. It is not necessary to take over a department as local governments can contract for services from societies, First Nations departments, or other providers. Local governments will exercise their authority and determine what, if any, services they choose to provide and how those services are structured and organized. Local governments will need to consider the requirements of insurance underwriters when determining whether services are to be contracted.

The principal impact of this element will be on improvement district departments and societies. In the case of improvement districts, the provincial government has encouraged improvement districts to evolve to municipalities or Regional District Service Areas. This process will take a number of years.

Fire / rescue societies present a different challenge. A few societies contract with local governments and, therefore, already meet the intent of this element of the model. Other societies receive little or no funding from or direction by local governments. Under the new model, autonomous or semi-autonomous departments will become internal departments or contractors to the responsible

local government. Local governments will make this decision. Again, an orderly transition will be required for this to occur.

Any organization that provides fire / rescue services (after the transition period) must be part of or contracted to a local government. The Fire Services Advisory Board will need to develop policies regarding how unrecognized service providers will be dealt with after the transition period. It is expected that these policies could involve loss of benefits available to recognized departments.

The Fire Services Liaison Group recognizes the challenges raised by this element of the Model. There may be resistance, in some cases, on the part of departments or local governments to transfer from an improvement district or society to a Regional District Service Area. However, to ensure proper oversight, accountability and funding, this change is necessary.

The implementation of this aspect of the new model requires a transition period, which is expected to last five years or more, to permit restructuring of improvement district and autonomous departments. This transition period will also be used to upgrade the capabilities of departments that do not meet provincially-mandated training or other standards.

There is some possibility that some departments may be unable or unwilling to meet the mandated standards. The transition plan needs to consider what actions are required in this circumstance.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element ensures that fire / rescue departments are accountable to government for the services they provide.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Local governments are responsible for local fire / rescue departments
- Provincial government should amend the *Fire Services Act* and other enactments as necessary to provide statutory support for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008
- Managing Changes to Local Government Structure in British Columbia: A Review and Program Guide, Ministry of Community Development, October 2000
- Improvement District Conversion Guide, Ministry of Community Development, 2005

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

1. Responsibility for fire and rescue services
2. The need to improve governance of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 3, Local Government Autonomy
- Element 21, Improving Adherence to Competency Standards

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ELEMENT 5: TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

RECOMMENDATION

Local government (i.e., municipalities and regional districts) should, for each fire / rescue department in their jurisdiction (other than industrial, federal, and First Nations departments), annually publish service plans that document the fire and rescue services to be provided, the zone or zones where the services will be delivered, and the response time targets for each service. Fire / rescue department service plans should be public documents.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of service plans is to improve the transparency (i.e. the availability and clarity) of decisions by local governments regarding whether to provide fire and rescue services and the level of service to be provided. It is also intended to ensure that members of the public have access to information about their fire / rescue department that will allow them to better evaluate whether the service levels and capabilities are appropriate for their community. Fire / rescue department service plans should be developed as a component of the local emergency response plans.

By clearly specifying service policy decisions, service plans will act to reduce the potential liability of fire / rescue departments.

A service plan should be a relatively straightforward document that includes the following:

- A description of the fire / rescue services to be provided
- A description of the service zones within which those services are to be provided. Different services may be provided in different zones. For example, road rescue/extraction services may be provided in a large zone, but suppression in a smaller one
- Response time targets for fire / rescue services. Response time targets may differ by type of service and by service zone
- A description of the funding provided by the local government responsible for the fire / rescue department (if any)
- An assessment of the major risks and risk reduction / mitigation plans
- A description of the steps taken to cooperate with adjacent fire / rescue departments and to improve interoperability (if any)
- A statement from the local government as to whether the department meets provincial standards for fire / rescue services, including training standards. In the event that a department does not meet mandated standards, the service plan should present an action plan for achieving compliance

The Fire Commissioner, with the advice of the Fire Services Advisory Board, should recommend standards for service plan formats to the Minister that are appropriate for the range of fire / rescue departments around the province. This will include simpler service plan requirements for smaller departments that have limited resources for plan development. A checklist / *pro forma* plan should be developed

that local governments can use as a template for preparing service plans for their departments.

The public should have the opportunity to comment on proposed service plans as part of the existing process within the local government budgeting cycle. In addition, local governments should report on their performance against the fire / rescue department service plans in an annual report as contemplated by the *Community Charter*. The Office of the Fire Service Advisory Board should encourage methods to make these reports accessible to the public.

This element of the Fire / Rescue System model is intended to ensure that local government autonomy in respect for fire / rescue services is matched by appropriate public transparency and accountability for fire / rescue services, including decisions to not provide specific services or service levels.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element ensures that local governments are accountable to the public for the standard of care regarding the fire / rescue services they provide or choose not to provide.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government is responsible for mandating local government responsibility for fire / rescue departments
- Local governments are accountable for service provision decisions

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Benchmarking, Manitou Incorporated, June 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

2. The need to improve governance of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 3, Local Government Autonomy
- Element 4, Local Government Responsibility for Fire / Rescue Departments

ELEMENT 6: AMEND THE FIRE SERVICES ACT

RECOMMENDATION

As part of its existing plans to revise and update the *Fire Services Act*, the provincial government should include amending the Act to enable implementation of the proposed Fire / Rescue System Model.

BACKGROUND

The *Fire Services Act* is the primary legislation governing the Fire / Rescue System in British Columbia. This legislation addresses fire prevention, fire suppression, and fire investigation. However, it does not address the full range of services that fire / rescue departments deliver today. That is, there is a mismatch between the governing legislation and the “on the ground” reality of the Fire / Rescue System. The existing legislation does not address province-wide governance issues.

A number of elements of the proposed Fire / Rescue System Model require legislative amendments. Additionally, there are many long-standing concerns within the Fire / Rescue System about various aspects of the *Fire Services Act* that the Office of the Fire Commissioner is expecting to address in a comprehensive revision that will commence shortly.

The provincial government, under the auspices of the Office of the Fire Commissioner and with the support of the Fire Services Advisory Board, should ensure that amendments to the *Fire Services Act* include provisions needed to implement the new Model (including consequential amendments to other enactments). A working group should be formed including representatives of the provincial government, the Fire / Rescue System, local governments, and other stakeholder organizations to assist the Office of the Fire Commissioner to review the Act and propose amendments.

It is anticipated that, given the extensive consultations that the Office of the Fire Commissioner intends to conduct as part of its plans to amend the *Fire Services Act*, revising the Act to accommodate the needs of the Model will take several years to complete.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element ensures that the Fire / Rescue System and local governments have the legislative authority and support to effectively protect public safety.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government is responsible for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- The *Fire Services Act* [RSBC 1996] Chapter 144

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

2. The need to improve governance of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 2, Fire Service is the “Fire / Rescue System”
- Element 4, Local Government Responsibility for Fire / Rescue Departments
- Element 5, Transparency and Accountability
- Element 8, Fire Commissioner Mandate to Include Rescue Services
- Element 13, Improved Liability Protection
- Element 15, Local Fire Bylaws

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ELEMENT 7: ESTABLISH A FIRE SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

RECOMMENDATION

A Fire Services Advisory Board ("FSAB") should be appointed to provide province-wide policy leadership and coordination for the Fire / Rescue System. The board should consist of representatives of stakeholders with operating or governance roles in the Fire / Rescue System. The Fire Services Advisory Board should be chaired by the Fire Commissioner. The Board should be permanent, meet regularly and be appropriately funded.

BACKGROUND

Section 4 of the *Fire Services Act* provides for the creation and operation of a "Fire Services Advisory Board". It defines the duties of the Board as:

- (a) may advise the fire commissioner on all aspects of operational fire services
- (b) must, on request of the minister, investigate and prepare a report on fire suppression, and
- (c) must perform other duties required by the minister.

These provisions of the *Fire Services Act* are sufficient to permit the Fire Services Advisory Board to play a critical leadership role for the province-wide Fire / Rescue System. The Board should be reinstated to perform the role and functions described below.

The Composition of the FSAB

The Fire Services Advisory Board should consist of representatives of the Fire / Rescue System in the province, including:

- The Office of the Fire Commissioner as the senior fire authority in the province with respect to fire safety and prevention
- The five associations whose members are directly involved in fire / rescue service delivery - the Fire Chiefs Association of B.C., the Volunteer Firefighters Association of B.C., the Fire Prevention Officers Association of B.C., the B.C. Fire Training Officers Association and the B.C. Professional Fire Fighters Association
- The Union of British Columbia Municipalities and Local Government Management Association to represent the interests of local governments who have jurisdiction over most fire / rescue departments
- The Fire Services Advisory Board should be chaired by the Fire Commissioner

In addition, the Fire Services Advisory Board should draw upon, as needed, other agencies and organizations whose decisions and operations impact the Fire / Rescue System. This would include the Provincial Emergency Program, Ministry of Forests and Range, WorkSafe BC, Ministry of Health Services/B.C. Ambulance Service/Emergency Medical Assistants Licensing Board, training institutions, Search and Rescue B.C. and others. These other organizations should not be part of the standing membership of the Fire Services Advisory Board, but should participate in its meetings when issues of joint interest are addressed.

The Purpose of the FSAB

The purpose of the Fire Services Advisory Board will be to provide critical, system-focused policy leadership for the province-wide Fire / Rescue System. It will ensure that fire / rescue policy matters and issues important to the system will be dealt with on a coordinated basis by those directly involved in delivery or governance of fire suppression, fire prevention and rescue services. The Fire Services Safety Board should be the "single forum" for addressing issues relating to the Fire / Rescue System.

Policy setting authority would, of course, remain with the Ministry while the Fire Services Advisory Board should provide an advisory role and undertake or spearhead initiatives in agreed upon areas. The specific role of the Board should be to:

- Provide the provincial government with advice about matters affecting fire and rescue services, including seeking ways to build, integrate and sustain fire, rescue and emergency services in the province
- Identify priorities for changes to the Fire / Rescue System
- Advise the provincial government on standards or proposed standards that affect the Fire / Rescue System
- Develop guidelines and "best practices" recommendations for fire and rescue services for departments and local government
- Develop consistent Fire / Rescue System responses to proposed changes by provincial government agencies that affect the service and develop of common, consistent procedures for working with other participants in the emergency services community
- Provide recommendations to the Minister regarding education and other aspects required to sustain needed competencies
- Provide recommendations to the Minister regarding actions and policies to maintain province-wide system viability, sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness
- Provide general advisory assistance to the Office of the Fire Commissioner

Please note that the Fire Services Advisory Board, as envisioned within this Model, does more than provide policy advice to the provincial government. Instead, the Board is intended to provide province-wide leadership in the improvement of fire and rescue services. A more descriptive title for the Fire Services Advisory Board would be the "Fire Rescue Leadership Council".

The Fire Services Advisory Board has a vital role to play in developing a coherent Fire / Rescue System response to various changes by provincial government agencies that affect the service. For example, decisions taken by the Ministry of Forests and Range in respect of interface firefighting practices and standards can significantly impact the Fire / Rescue System. Similarly, decisions of the Emergency Health Services Commission may affect emergency medical first response services provided by fire / rescue departments.

It is important to recognize that the Fire / Rescue System works within a broader emergency services and public safety community. This includes the Provincial

Emergency Program, B.C. Ambulance Service, police agencies, search and rescue societies, road rescue societies, and many other organizations. The Fire / Rescue System needs to have an ability to develop common procedures and policies for working with these other components of the emergency services and public safety community.

The Fire Services Advisory Board will provide a forum for the Fire / Rescue System to advise these other agencies of the impacts of their decisions upon the service. Representatives of these other provincial government entities should be invited to attend Fire Services Advisory Board meetings where issues of mutual interest are addressed.

The Fire Services Advisory Board will provide a forum for all of the key parties responsible for fire and rescue services to meet and develop common solutions for the challenges the Fire / Rescue System is facing. In particular, the Fire Services Advisory Board will be critical to implementing the new Model for the service.

The Need for the FSAB

There are a number of important points that support the need for the appointment and operation of the Fire Services Advisory Board in the manner proposed by the Fire Services Model.

1. Although the term has been used universally, as noted, there is no such single entity as the "fire service" in the province. Rather, fire / rescue is a system made up of independent entities, including more than 350 individual, independent fire / rescue departments and their authorities having jurisdiction as well as numerous provincial agencies and organizations who participate in specific elements or whose policies and decisions significantly affect the system. It is essential that fire / rescue be managed as a system with mechanisms to bring the various parts together to jointly deal with issues and make decisions on a coordinated basis. The Fire Services Advisory Board is this mechanism. It will provide the means for the province to connect to fire / rescue on a province-wide, system-wide basis and a mechanism for the system components to come together on a systematic basis
2. The Fire Services Advisory Board will provide the Fire / Rescue System with the mechanism to provide a "single forum" to resolve important issues and challenges and to proactively put forward initiatives to the province and act upon common issues
3. Because fire-related incidents make up less than half of the incidents responded to by most fire / rescue departments and many departments provide a range of rescue services, it is essential that the mandate of the Fire Services Advisory Board cover the full range of rescue services delivered by fire / rescue departments. This, too, must be managed on a coordinated basis and the Fire Services Advisory Board is an appropriate mechanism to accomplish this
4. Regardless of the fact fire / rescue services are provided across the province by a system, rather than a single entity, important decisions that impact fire / rescue are made by a range of agencies and organizations. There is no

mechanism to examine and respond to the impact of individual decisions or cumulative decisions when taken together on the Fire / Rescue System as a whole. (For example, there was a great deal of confusion when the Workers Compensation Board brought in Guideline G31.23 – Entry into Buildings. In this instance, the Fire Services Advisory Board could have provided a single point of contact for discussion and input).

This is particularly important in view of the fact there are a number of provincial agencies (Provincial Emergency Program, Ministry of Forests, B.C. Ambulance Service) that depend on local fire / rescue departments to provide resources for responses in their jurisdiction. The Fire Services Advisory Board will provide these agencies with a single forum for addressing issues between these provincial government agencies and the Fire / Rescue System

5. There are numerous issues (such as needed changes in fire inspections and investigations) that are beyond the ability of individual, local fire / rescue departments to address so a province-wide, system-wide mechanism is required. This should be the Fire Services Advisory Board
6. A system-wide approach is needed to deal with institutional level issues and changes. For example, there is no mechanism to deal with or promote interoperability across the system
7. By taking a system approach to fire / rescue, the Fire Services Advisory Board will be able to take a proactive, strategic approach to issue identification that should provide for earlier identification of topics that need to be addressed. This would mean that critical issues such as the high stress being placed on the volunteer sector by firefighter recruitment/retention problems should be clearly identified and the Ministry made aware of them earlier
8. There are many task groups, committees, and agencies on which fire service associations are individually represented. For example the Fire Chiefs Association of B.C. and the B.C. Professional Fire Fighters Association both participate in the Provincial Medical Leadership Council. These appointees represent the views of their individual associations and, no matter how much they may try to take a broader system perspective, in the end they must represent the views of their constituents. No-one is mandated or has the authority to represent and speak for the overall Fire / Rescue System

It is clear that the Fire Services Advisory Board will be able to play an important, needed role in the ongoing development and maintenance of an effective Fire / Rescue System.

FSAB Subcommittees

In view of the range of high importance, specific focus topic areas with which the Fire Services Advisory Board will need to deal, it would be appropriate to structure the Board with a number of subcommittees (both standing and *ad hoc*). These might include:

- Education

- Standards and regulations (including equipment standards for cooperative purchasing, sprinkler bylaws)
- Advice on amendments to the *Fire Services Act*
- Inspection and Audit Checklist Advisory Board (as proposed in the Bulletin from the Office of the Fire Commissioner)
- Firefighter recruitment and retention

The Fire Services Advisory Board, or a standing subcommittee (i.e., a “Board of Education”), should be tasked with overseeing and providing advice on fire / rescue training in British Columbia. This should include:

- Recommending training standards to the Minister
- Assessing the implications of proposed training standards
- Advising the Minister on the availability of training and adequacy of the training delivery system
- Reviewing the training system to ensure that accredited training meets provincial and international training standards
- Promoting transferability of training credits

In Summary

To recap, the Fire Services Advisory Board should be appointed with the membership and roles discussed above for the following reasons:

1. The Fire Services Advisory Board will provide a vehicle to fire / rescue departments to coordinate actions on a province-wide basis
2. In particular, the Fire Services Advisory Board will provide a vehicle for fire / rescue departments to coordinate their actions for rescue and other emergency services province-wide
3. The Fire Services Advisory Board will allow the Fire / Rescue System to provide a single forum for addressing issue affecting the provincial government and the Fire / Rescue System
4. The Fire Services Advisory Board will provide a vehicle for the Fire / Rescue System to coordinate with provincial government agencies that define standards (e.g., WorkSafe BC) or deliver emergency services (e.g., B.C. Ambulance Service)
5. The Fire Services Advisory Board will provide a vehicle for addressing systemic issues (such as problems in the fire investigation or inspection systems) that are beyond the scope of individual departments to address
6. The Fire Services Advisory Board will provide a vehicle for providing leadership on the key issues of interoperability and regionalization
7. The Fire Services Advisory Board will provide a vehicle for proactively identifying and addressing critical issues, e.g., volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention issues

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

The Fire Services Advisory Board contributes to public safety by (i) defining competency standards required to safely and effectively provide fire and rescue services, (ii) promoting “best practices” to departments around the province and (iii) proactively identifying issues affecting public safety and developing policies and programs to deal with them.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government should reactivate the Fire Services Advisory Board with the mandate and membership described above
- Local government representatives and representatives of the various Fire / Rescue System associations should participate in the activities of the Fire Services Advisory Board
- The Office of the Fire Commissioner should chair the Board and provide support services (e.g., organization of meetings, distribution of documents, etc.)

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- §5, *Fire Services Act*
- Analysis of Fire / Rescue Service Gaps in B.C., September 2008
- Report on Benchmarking, Manitou Incorporated, June 2008
- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008
- Local Fire / Rescue Services Provided to Provincial Agencies, September 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

2. The need to improve governance of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System
4. The challenge of province-wide competency standards

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 2, Fire Service is the “Fire / Rescue System”
- Element 8, Fire Commissioner Mandate to Include Rescue Service

ELEMENT 8: FIRE COMMISSIONER MANDATE TO INCLUDE RESCUE SERVICES

RECOMMENDATION

The Fire Commissioner's advisory/coordination mandate should be expanded to include the full range of rescue services in addition to fire services.

BACKGROUND

Section 3 of the *Fire Services Act* defines the duties of the Fire Commissioner. The enumerated services include duties relating to:

- Fire prevention and inspection
- Fire suppression
- Providing advice about matters such as the adequacy of water supplies, installation and maintenance of fire alarms, and other "fire" matters
- Collecting and disseminating information about fires

The Fire Commissioner's current mandate does not include any role in respect of the rescue and emergency services provided by fire / rescue departments. In other words, the provincial government agency for the Fire / Rescue System has a much narrower mandate than the service it oversees. Some implications of this fact include:

- There is no central entity responsible for tracking and reporting *all* activities and services of the Fire / Rescue System from a province-wide perspective
- The Fire / Rescue System has no central point of contact with the provincial government for non-fire related issues and concerns
- There is no central mechanism for formulating province-wide responses to non-fire related issues and challenges
- There is no mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness, efficiency, and competence of the Fire / Rescue System

The Fire Commissioner's advisory/coordination mandate should be expanded to include roles in respect of rescue and emergency services. This should include:

- Tracking and reporting statistics on all fire / rescue department delivered services
- Liaising with other provincial government agencies that make regulatory or other decisions affecting rescue services provided by fire / rescue departments, e.g., Ministry of Forests and Range, Emergency Health Services Commission
- Working with members of the Fire Services Advisory Board to develop province-wide strategies for fire and rescue services

Fully implementing this aspect of the model will require an amendment to the *Fire Services Act*. On an interim basis, the role of the Fire Commissioner could be expanded under the "other duties required by the minister" provision, i.e., Part 1 5(c).

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Expanding the mandate of the Fire Commissioner contributes to public safety by (i) ensuring there is oversight of all aspects of fire / rescue services, and (ii) providing more comprehensive information about the delivery of fire and rescue services in British Columbia.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government should expand the mandate of the Fire Commissioner and provide the necessary resources to meet the expanded mandate

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- §3, *Fire Services Act*

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

2. The need to improve governance of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 7, Establish a Fire Services Advisory Board

ELEMENT 9: EDUCATION OF STEWARDS

RECOMMENDATION

The Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board should develop educational material for local government officials on fire and rescue related issues.

BACKGROUND

Local government officials are responsible for fire / rescue services within their communities. They are responsible for assessing the capabilities of their departments, evaluating the need for services, and providing necessary resources.

To ensure that local government officials have an appropriate understanding of key issues relating to fire and rescue services, the Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board should develop education material that:

- Describes fire and rescue services
- Identifies the critical issues affecting the delivery of services, e.g., response times for fire or medical first responder calls
- Outlines the key management issues facing departments, e.g., recruitment and retention of volunteers, meeting training standards
- Describes the role of local governments overseeing fire and rescue services

These education materials could be made available to local government through the Union of British Columbia Municipalities. Alternately, it could be coordinated with the Elected Officials Workshops hosted by the Provincial Emergency Program following each local government election in various areas of the province.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by ensuring that responsible officials have the knowledge required to effectively oversee and direct fire / rescue departments.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Fire Services Advisory Board should create a working group from the Fire / Rescue System and local governments to develop educational materials
- The Union of British Columbia Municipalities should make the educational materials available to local government elected officials and managers

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

2. The need to improve governance of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 4, Local Government Responsibility for Fire / Rescue Departments

ELEMENT 10: OFC RESEARCH ROLE

RECOMMENDATION

The Office of the Fire Commissioner should research fire, rescue and emergency services trends and issues to develop a fact base for effective Fire / Rescue System decision-making.

BACKGROUND

While some large fire / rescue departments research trends in fire and rescue services, no mechanism currently exists to research “best practices” for the province-wide Fire / Rescue System. The Office of the Fire Commissioner should undertake or commission research on key trends and issues affecting the Fire / Rescue System. The results of such research should be made available for fire / rescue departments and local government decision makers.

This element of the model will help the British Columbia Fire / Rescue System take systematic advantage of experience in other jurisdictions when developing “best practices” guidelines. Potential topics include risk management and the use of performance metrics. The research could also help fire / rescue departments develop compatible responses to common problems. Common solutions may also promote reduction of barriers to interoperability.

The Fire Services Advisory Board should assist the Office of the Fire Commissioner by (i) providing advice as to research topics to pursue, and (ii) making available members of the Fire / Rescue System to assist on research projects.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by ensuring that fire / rescue departments and local governments are (i) informed of trends within the province they may need to consider, and (ii) have the benefit of the experience of other jurisdictions.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Office of the Fire Commissioner is responsible for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- No organization is currently tasked with researching fire and rescue related trends and issues, developing proposed strategies, and promoting common solutions on a province-wide basis

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

2. The need to improve governance of the province-wide Fire / Rescue System
4. The challenge of province-wide competency standards
6. Operational implications of independent fire / rescue departments

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 8, Fire Commissioner Mandate to Include Rescue Services
- Element 25, Best Practices Guidelines

DRAFT

ELEMENT 11: GAPS IN SERVICE COVERAGE

RECOMMENDATION

Decisions about where services are provided and where they are not should be documented by the Office of the Fire Commissioner and made available to the emergency services and public safety community and to the public.

BACKGROUND

Currently, there are gaps in the coverage where fire and rescue services are not provided. Given geographic and demographic considerations, such gaps in service coverage are unavoidable.

These gaps in service vary by type of service. For example, fire / rescue departments provide structural fire suppression services to about 98% of the people in the province, indicating that gaps in this area are very limited. However, there are many areas where fire investigation and fire inspection services are inadequate. Hazardous materials response and technical rescue services are not provided in many areas, including some urban areas. However, because no risk assessment process is in place, it is not possible to determine if the absence of these services represents a gap in a needed service. Road rescue and extraction services may be available in remote locations, but response times might be unacceptably long, which also represents a gap in service from the prospective of public safety.

Many agencies have responsibility for the various fire, rescue, and emergency services in British Columbia. The following table from the report *Analysis of Fire / Rescue Service Gaps in B.C.* summarizes emergency services and the organizations with responsibility for determining if and where those service are provided:

Emergency Service	Responsibility
Wild fires on Crown land	Ministry of Forests and Range
Wild fires on private land	Ministry of Forests and Range (may bill for services)
Interface fires Starting outside municipal boundaries)	Ministry of Forests and Range
Interface fires Starting within municipal boundaries)	Municipalities (may call on Ministry of Forests for assistance)
Rural structure fires	No coverage
Emergency medical services	B.C. Ambulance Service
Local emergencies	Local government
Multiple jurisdiction emergencies (e.g., flooding) (non fire)	Provincial Emergency Program
Multiple jurisdiction fires	Office of the Fire Commissioner

Emergency Service	Responsibility
Highway crashes	No mandated responsibility/nearby fire / rescue department or highway rescue society
Vehicle fires in a community	Local fire / rescue department
Rural/highway vehicle fires	No coverage
Fire inspections in an incorporated community	Local fire / rescue department
Fire inspections in an unincorporated community or rural area	No mandated responsibility
Highway traffic control	Ministry of Highways contractor
Public fire education	Office of the Fire Commissioner
Emergency communications systems	No mandated responsibility. Each agency serves its own needs

As this table illustrates, many organizations share responsibility for emergency services. The Fire / Rescue System operates within this broader emergency services environment. It is to be expected that gaps in service coverage will arise in this complex environment.

The Office of the Fire Commissioner should collect and publish information on fire and rescue service coverage from local, provincial, and federal governments and other service providers such as road rescue societies. Preferably, the resultant data base should include capability for members of the public to search by location in order to determine what services they receive and do not receive. This information would also be very useful for provincial government agencies such as the Provincial Emergency Program, Ministry of Forests and Range and the B.C. Ambulance Service. Alternatively, other organizations within the broader emergency services and public safety community could publish service coverage information for all emergency services, including those provided by the Fire / Rescue System.

Any changes in liability protection (see Element 13) should provide incentives to reduce gaps in service coverage.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element improves public safety by ensuring there is a central repository of information regarding where fire and rescue services are available and where they are not. Indirectly, this may also contribute to public safety by encouraging extension of services in currently unserved or underserved areas.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Office of the Fire Commissioner will work local governments and organizations within the broader emergency and public safety sector to ensure service coverage information is available

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- “First Responders: Fire Services and Pre-hospital Emergency Care in British Columbia”, 2007 (The “Cameron Report”)
- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008
- Analysis of Fire / Rescue Service Gaps in B.C., September 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

3. Service gaps

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 4, Local Government Responsibility for Fire / Rescue Departments
- Element 5, Transparency and Accountability
- Element 13, Improved Liability Protection

DRAFT

ELEMENT 12: SERVICES PROVIDED TO PROVINCIAL AGENCIES

RECOMMENDATION

The provincial government and the Fire Services Advisory Board should undertake a joint study to examine the impact on fire / rescue departments of services provided to provincial government agencies and areas under provincial government jurisdiction along with the compensation paid for these services.

The results of the joint study should form the basis for ensuring the relationships are appropriately beneficial to both parties for each service.

BACKGROUND

Fire / rescue departments provide services to a variety of provincial government agencies including the Provincial Emergency Program, the Ministry of Forests and Range, the British Columbia Ambulance Service, and others. The provincial government compensates fire / rescue departments for providing some of these services using several different tariffs depending on the nature of the service provided, the duration of the service call, and the agency receiving the service.

An inter-agency working group has developed an updated tariff for provincial government reimbursement for Office of the Fire Commissioner initiated fire / rescue department deployment of fire apparatus and crews in response to provincial emergencies. Separate tariffs exist for services provided under the Provincial Emergency Program or the Ministry of Forests and Range. These compensation rates are still to be updated.

Current tariffs for services provided to the provincial government may or may not cover fire / rescue department out-of-pocket costs for those services. However, the tariffs have not been structured to cover the full costs of those services. The formula should fully reflect the complete costs to provide services which means that compensation should be based on the full operating costs to provide the service plus a contribution to capital costs.

The joint study should focus on services provided outside of the coverage areas of major urban/suburban fire / rescue departments because, other than first responder service, this is where a majority of service is provided to provincial agencies by fire / rescue departments. It should cover review and revision of compensation levels. It should also consider such topics as whether provision of services to provincial agencies is contributing to the stress levels being experienced by volunteer fire / rescue departments (and, if so, how this might be alleviated) and how the fee structure might be used to encourage fire / rescue departments to provide expanded coverage in areas where risk analysis indicates this is necessary.

This element would need to be coordinated with element 14, "Work with B.C. Ambulance Service to Reduce Gaps".

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by encouraging local fire / rescue departments to continue to provide (or even expand) protective services in areas under provincial jurisdiction.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government organizations responsible for emergency and public safety will work with representatives of the Fire Services Advisory and local government on this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008
- Inter-agency Working Group Report: Reimbursement Rates, June 28, 2004, Revised June 17, 2008
- Local Fire / Rescue Services Provided to Provincial Agencies, September 2008
- PEP Policy Bulletin 05.01 – Road Rescue Services, November 30, 2005

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

3. Service gaps
7. Budget pressures.

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 14, Work with B.C. Ambulance Service to Reduce Service Gaps
- Element 19, Trusted Service Providers

ELEMENT 13: IMPROVED LIABILITY PROTECTION

RECOMMENDATION

Fire / rescue departments, their personnel, their local municipal and regional district administrators and elected officials should be protected against liability claims or actions arising from the good faith performance of their functions, duties or powers. This is particularly important to smaller departments when providing out-of-boundary service.

BACKGROUND

WorkSafe BC and public liability protection for local governments and fire / rescue departments only cover services in a specified/community area. The services and area must be formally approved through local bylaws and regulation. However, liability coverage does follow fire /rescue departments out of the area when they respond under formal mutual aid agreements with other communities. Fire /rescue departments also have liability protection for services delivered outside their service area when they are given a Provincial Emergency Program number or task number by the Ministry of Forests in advance of responding to an incident. In these cases, they must only provide services for which they are qualified and tasked.

Liability is a concern because there are many unforeseen situations that can impede a local fire / rescue response (e.g., delayed call out, slow firefighter response, poor road or weather conditions and frozen water hydrants). In any case of loss or injury there are always retrospective opportunities to spread blame and costs of loss among the participants. For example, departments and local governments have increased risks and potential liability because of reduction in local protective services when crews and equipment are dispatched out of the coverage area (i.e., the fire crew and apparatus are away when an emergency happens in the home community).

Fire departments working under the authority of an improvement district or local society have the same WorkSafe BC and liability issues. However, they are finding it difficult to find and afford insurance coverage. Their choice is then to operate without insurance, close their doors, or attempt to have their operations taken over by the regional district.

Liability protection could be restructured legislatively to encourage local governments to enter mutual aid agreements, respond to out of area services, and reduce area fire / rescue service gaps (see element 11). In addition, liability protection could be linked, as in Nova Scotia, to departments' meeting provincial standards, including fire / rescue department registration and firefighter training certification (see element 22).

The provincial government, the Fire / Rescue System, and local government representatives should undertake a project to define liability protections that encourage mutual aid, interoperability and reduction of coverage gaps.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by encouraging fire / rescue departments to (i) improve competencies (assuming liability protection is linked to mandated standards), and (ii) continue to provide (or even expand) out-of-area services.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board to develop a specific proposal for improving liability protection

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Fire and Emergency Services Liability, August 2008
- Analysis of Fire / Rescue Service Gaps in BC, September 2008
- Report on Benchmarking, Manitou Incorporated, June 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

3. Service gaps
6. Operational implications of independent fire / rescue departments

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 22, Fire / Rescue Department Registration and Certification

ELEMENT 14: WORK WITH BC AMBULANCE SERVICE TO REDUCE GAPS

RECOMMENDATION

The Fire / Rescue System and the B.C. Ambulance Service should develop a joint strategy to reduce performance gaps in emergency medical first responder service, especially in northern B.C. and rural areas. This project should consider both risks to public safety (as a result of gaps in coverage) and efficiency considerations (i.e., which agencies can most cost effectively reduce risks to public safety).

BACKGROUND

Emergency medical calls make up the largest category of responses for many fire / rescue departments in British Columbia. For example, the Fire Services Liaison Group's survey of fire / rescue departments found that 70% of all departments provide First Responder Emergency Medical Responder service (although this is 59% if only volunteer departments are considered). These calls place a heavy demand on the resources of departments that provide this service. However, the Fire / Rescue System has become heavily involved in the medical first responder system without a province-wide mandate or strategy.

In 2007, the provincial government published a study of first responders, fire services and pre-hospital emergency care services, commonly referred to as the "Cameron Report". A significant finding of this study was that there are significant coverage gaps in the medical first responder services around British Columbia. The Cameron Report recommended that more proactive effort be put into seeking new first responder services. Specifically, one of the recommendations was: "...if the [Emergency Health Services] Commission determines that there continues to be significant problems with availability of first responder services in parts of the province after actively seeking potential first responder agencies for under serviced areas, then the Commission should prepare a report to government with options and a recommendation for action."

The Fire Services Liaison Group supports the Cameron Report and supports the actions of the Emergency Health Services Commission to put the recommendations into action.

The Fire / Rescue System should actively participate in the recommended program to increase the number of first responders. Assuming the Emergency Health Services Commission determines it necessary to undertake the above report to develop options and recommendations for action, the Fire / Rescue System should offer to partner in this study. This should involve a joint project with the B.C. Ambulance Service to determine the most efficient and effective manner to provide medical first responder services where such services are justified based on risks to the public. This study should consider the financial arrangements necessary to ensure that emergency medical first responder services are available where needed. In particular, financial arrangements should compensate fire / rescue departments for those services provided to ensure that the British Columbia Ambulance Service meets that agency's service level targets.

The Office of the Fire Commissioner should facilitate the discussions between the Fire Services Advisory Board and the B.C. Ambulance Service.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by (i) encouraging a reduction in service gaps, and (ii) encouraging efficiencies.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Fire Services Advisory Board and the British Columbia Ambulance Service are jointly responsible for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- First Responders: Fire Services and Pre-hospital Emergency Care in British Columbia, 2007 (The "Cameron Report")
- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, May 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

3. Service gaps

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 11, Gaps in Service Coverage

DRAFT

ELEMENT 15: LOCAL FIRE BYLAWS

RECOMMENDATION

The provincial government should support local governments in enactment of bylaws covering fire prevention, fire detection, fire mitigation, and building codes, including sprinkler systems and other mitigation strategies.

BACKGROUND

As the vision statement indicates, fire and rescue services should be extended to protect more people in more places in British Columbia. However, given geographic and demographic realities, it is not feasible to provide fire suppression services everywhere that people live, work, or travel. The challenge is to find mechanisms to improve public safety in areas where fire suppression services are not practical.

Extending fire suppression services to protect homes and businesses in unprotected areas can be very expensive. Significant capital costs (for new halls, trucks, equipment, etc.) and operating costs (for additional firefighters etc.) may be required to provide coverage in areas not currently covered. Local governments frequently do not have the financial resources necessary to extend services. Sprinkler systems (providing there this an adequate water system) and other preventive measures can be very effective in improving public safety in areas where fire suppression is not available in a timely manner. This can be a method to extend fire service to rural or difficult to serve areas as contemplated by the vision.

Local governments do not have the authority to enact local fire and building code bylaws without provincial government support that provide for sprinkler systems even though such systems have been demonstrated to improve public safety. Local governments should have the authority under local bylaws to implement sprinkler bylaws and other strategies to improve fire detection, prevention, and mitigation in their communities. Such bylaws should *not* be allowed to detract from the National Fire Code of Canada 2005 standard adopted by regulation under the *Fire Services Act*, i.e., local fire and building code bylaws should be in addition to the provincial standard.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by allowing for innovation to improve protection in areas where traditional services are not financially feasible.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government is responsible for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Benchmarking, Manitou Incorporated, June 2008
- Analysis of Fire / Rescue Service Gaps in B.C., September 2008
- *Fire Services Act*
- *Local Government Act*

- *Community Charter*
- *An Issue Paper Supporting the Automatic Sprinklering of All New Commercial, Residential, Institutional and Industrial Construction, Fire Chiefs' Association of British Columbia*
- *Review of CMHC Report on Costs and Benefits to Municipalities of Mandatory Residential Fire Sprinklers, Fire Chiefs' Association of British Columbia*

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

3. Service gaps

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 11, Gaps in Service Coverage

DRAFT

ELEMENT 16: IMPROVE FIRE INVESTIGATION

RECOMMENDATION

The fire investigation system should be reengineered to ensure that investigations in all communities are timely and appropriate.

BACKGROUND

Fire investigation is a major component of a comprehensive fire prevention program. It is the basis on which engineering, enforcement and education strategies are developed and implemented to prevent potential future fires. Currently, there are approximately 1,400 "Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner" who carry out fire investigations around the province.

While the *Fire Services Act* provides for this role, it does not specify any technical qualifications or training requirements to act as a Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner. The Office of the Fire Commissioner has recommended basic training requirements, but the training taken is inconsistent and, in some cases, not available for Local Assistants. The result is that qualified investigators are not available in a timely manner in communities around the province. The Local Assistant system also does not currently provide for timely fire investigations for all areas in B.C., particularly for small communities. It appears that the Office of the Fire Commissioner is under-resourced for this vital function. It is particularly important that investigations requested by the police in the case of suspicious fires be carried out to a high standard.

The "Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner" system needs to be reengineered to ensure that it is effective and efficient province-wide. Other program changes to improve the fire investigation should also be examined. An improved fire investigation system should include minimum standards and training required to qualify as a fire investigator. The reengineering The Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board should undertake a project to propose specific changes to the fire investigation system.

Improving the fire investigation system will be a long term project that will take several years to achieve.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by improving the ability of the Fire / Rescue System to systematically learn from experience to reduce fire risk.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Office of the Fire Commissioner, with the assistance of representatives of local government and the Fire / Rescue System, is responsible for redesigning the fire investigation system
- Responsibility for implementation will depend on the changes in the fire investigation system that are recommended

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008
- Analysis of Fire / Rescue Service Gaps in BC, September

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

3. Service gaps

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 11, Gaps in Service Coverage
- Element 26, Improve Fire / Rescue Information

DRAFT

ELEMENT 17: IMPROVE FIRE INSPECTION

RECOMMENDATION

The fire inspection system should be reengineered to ensure that inspections are appropriately undertaken in all communities, are efficiently delivered, and to address liability concerns. In particular, an improved fire inspection system should ensure that all schools, hospitals, and other public buildings in the province are inspected.

BACKGROUND

Section 36 of the *Fire Services Act* requires municipalities to inspect public buildings such as schools, hotels, theatres and so forth. However, there is no provision for fire inspections of public buildings that are not located within a municipality. As a result of this discrepancy, there are many public buildings in British Columbia that are not required to and do not receive life safety or code inspections by a trained and qualified fire inspector.

The *Fire Services Act* does not provide the Fire Commissioner with the authority to ensure that Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner or others that undertake fire inspections have the necessary training and experience to be effective inspectors. An additional aspect of the current fire investigation system of concern is the inconsistency between communities in how inspections are conducted.

The Office of the Fire Commissioner, the Fire Services Advisory Board, and local government representatives should undertake a joint study to develop specific recommendations on improvements to the fire inspection system. This study should address:

1. Training standards for inspectors
2. Risk management-based approaches to focusing inspection resources
3. Life safety standards and procedures
4. Code inspection standards and procedures
5. Ensuring all public buildings are inspected
6. Providing appropriate liability protection for local governments, fire / rescue departments, and fire inspectors (where established competency standards are met)
7. Potential for realizing efficiencies in inspection services on a regional basis
8. Funding issues
9. Ensuring fire inspections occur across the province
10. Options to fund inspections

The initial priority should be to extend life safety fire inspections to schools, hospitals, and other public buildings outside municipalities. Improvements in code inspection should be a subsequent priority.

Improving the fire inspection system supports the vision by improving public safety across British Columbia in a very effective manner.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by expanding and improving the effectiveness of fire prevention services.

RESPONSIBILITY

- A working group of representatives of the Office of the Fire Commissioner, local government, and the Fire / Rescue System will be responsible for redesigning the fire inspection system
- Responsibility for implementation will depend on the changes in the fire inspection system that are recommended

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- §36, *Fire Services Act*
- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008
- Survey of B.C. Fire Departments conducted by Fire Services Liaison Group Fire Inspection Task Force
- Survey of B.C. Fire Departments by Inspection Task Group
- Analysis of Fire / Rescue Service Gaps in B.C., September 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

3. Service gaps

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 25, Best Practices Guidelines
- Element 28, Efficiency Initiatives

ELEMENT 18: IMPROVE PUBLIC EDUCATION

RECOMMENDATION

A province-wide fire safety public education strategy should be implemented.

BACKGROUND

Public education regarding fire risks, fire prevention, and mitigation is a proven mechanism for improving public safety. Some effective public education materials have been developed by the Office of the Fire Commissioner and the B.C. Fire and Life Safety Education Advisory Committee (the "education advisory committee"). However, public education programs are delivered (or not delivered) inconsistently around the province.

Public fire education should be recognized as a very important component of the Fire / Rescue System. Delivery of such elements as public service announcements or school programs can be used to deliver public safety messages across a range of jurisdictions or to areas that do not have fire / rescue departments without being constrained by the service gaps and jurisdictional boundaries that inhibit some of the other services. Because public fire education is a service that can be delivered throughout the province, it should play an important role in achieving the vision to cover all residents of and visitors to the province.

The education advisory committee has developed a strategic plan for province-wide public education. The plan includes key initiatives involving increased partnerships for program delivery, raising awareness of fire/life safety education, identification of funding sources and ensuring sustainability and renewal of program initiatives. The strategy envisions the education advisory committee playing an advisory role and employing the capabilities of the Fire Prevention Officers Association of B.C. to deliver public education programs in regions around the province. In its plan, the education advisory committee recognized the need for initiatives to support the new Model.

The Fire Services Liaison Group strongly endorses the idea that a province-wide public education strategy should be implemented. The Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board should make review of the strategy developed by the advisory committee an early priority and should determine that it can endorse the strategy. Depending on the results of this analysis the Fire Services Advisory Committee should support the initiative for sustained funding to provide a province-wide public safety strategy in partnership with other stakeholders.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by expanding and improving the effectiveness of public education.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The B.C. Fire and Life Safety Education Advisory Committee Board formed by the Office of the Fire Commissioner is responsible for proposing a province-wide public education strategy
- Responsibility for implementation of the strategy depends on the strategy recommended

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- British Columbia Public Fire & Life Safety Education Advisory Committee, Public Education Strategic Plan Update minutes, July 29, 2008
- Analysis of Fire / Rescue Service Gaps in B.C., September 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

3. Service gaps

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 11, Gaps in Service Coverage

DRAFT

ELEMENT 19: TRUSTED SERVICE PROVIDERS

RECOMMENDATION

Registered and certified fire / rescue departments should be “trusted providers” under the Provincial Emergency Program.

BACKGROUND

The Provincial Emergency Program pays fire / rescue departments for responding in areas of provincial jurisdiction for road rescue and other specified emergencies. The amount depends on the nature and duration of the call. Departments need to have authorization from the Provincial Emergency Plan prior to responding in order to receive this payment.

In the new model, fire / rescue departments that are registered and certified (see element 22) should be “trusted providers” and not be required to obtain pre-authorization from the Provincial Emergency Program before responding to calls from outside their service areas. The specific details of this will need to be negotiated with the Provincial Emergency Program.

This option should be considered in the assessment of rescue services soon to be undertaken by the Office of the Fire Commissioner as well as the study to examine the impact of services provided to provincial government agencies (i.e., Element no. 12).

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by encouraging fire / rescue departments to continue to provide (or even expand) out-of-area services. This element should also improve response times.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government is responsible for this initiative

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008
- Local Fire / rescue Services Provided to Provincial Agencies, September 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

3. Service gaps

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 11, Gaps in Service Coverage
- Element 12, Services Provided to Provincial Agencies
- Element 22, Fire / Rescue Department Registration & Certification

ELEMENT 20: FIRST NATIONS & OTHER EMERGENCY SERVICES PROVIDERS

RECOMMENDATION

The Fire / Rescue System should seek opportunities to cooperate with First Nations fire / rescue organizations and other emergency services providers.

BACKGROUND

Fire / rescue departments across the province regularly work with First Nations fire / rescue departments, industrial fire departments, search and rescue societies, and other emergency services providers. The Fire / Rescue System should seek opportunities to improve public safety by cooperating with these organizations in delivering fire and rescue services.

The First Nations Emergency Services Society should be approached to identify initiatives and partnerships that might be pursued to improve fire / rescue service delivery.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by encouraging improved cooperation and interoperability with other fire and rescue services providers. This element should also assist in reducing service gaps.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Local fire / rescue departments are responsible for cooperating with specific First Nations departments and other emergency services providers
- The Fire Services Advisory Board is responsible for providing leadership with respect to relations with First Nations departments and other emergency services providers

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

3. Service gaps

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 11, Gaps in Service Coverage

ELEMENT 21: IMPROVING ADHERENCE TO COMPETENCY STANDARDS

RECOMMENDATION

The Fire Services Advisory Board and the Fire Commissioner should take immediate action to clarify and specify training standards for fire and rescue services, specifically regarding identification of mandatory requirements. In the longer term, mandatory competency standards should be established for core fire / rescue services.

In particular, the Fire Services Advisory Board and the Fire Commissioner should immediately address the standards that apply to interior firefighting. This standard must consider both the competencies required for interior attack and the current capabilities of the many small fire / rescue departments in the province.

The Fire Services Advisory Board and the Fire Commissioner should also develop a strategy that allows fire / rescue departments, where needed, to improve competencies to adhere to standards.

BACKGROUND

Competency standards have a critical role in delivery of fire and rescue services. These standards establish what firefighters need to know, how they need to be equipped and what they need to do to provide safe and effective fire / rescue services.

It is important to appreciate the difference between “recommended practices” and “standards”. A recommended practice (sometimes called a guideline) is a set of recommendations regarding the competencies, equipment, and management of fire and rescue services. A standard has the same content, but when formally adopted, it is mandatory. This implies that there is some mechanism for ensuring that a standard is met.

Currently, a variety of mandated standards apply to the Fire / Rescue System on a province-wide basis. These include:

- WorkSafe BC regulations concerning equipment and competencies regarding operating procedures in the provision of certain fire suppression services
- Ministry of Forests and Range standards for fighting wildfires and interface fires
- The Emergency Health Services Commission standards for the provision of first responder services
- The Motor Vehicle Act sets standards for licensing and driving vehicles
- The provincial government has stipulated that the training standards for fire service personnel in British Columbia are those published by the National Fire Protection Association (“NFPA”). This is central to both life safety and the effective operation of a fire / rescue department. There are a number of critical issues with this directive that are covered later in this write-up

There are several important issues relating to mandated standards in general. Currently, many smaller fire / rescue departments are not able to meet NFPA

training standards. Recently a "Basic Fire Fighting Certificate Program" was launched to improve volunteer firefighter training in B.C. However, this initiative does not bring trainees up to the NFPA Firefighter I level, the implied minimum standard for British Columbia, but does contain the essential core elements from the program.

Another issue arises because there is no mechanism for ensuring that fire / rescue departments are competent and comply with standards. There may be "after the fact" enforcement or liability if a standard is not met resulting in a negative outcome. However, nothing in the current model ensures regular checking of competency and standards compliance.

Finally, at present a variety of agencies set competency requirements for fire and rescue services. There is, however, no mechanism for the Fire / Rescue System to coordinate the impact of those standards on departments. More importantly, no organization is charged with establishing standards specific to fire and rescue services.

Because the enforcement of standards for the Fire / Rescue System is weak, there is no certainty that fire / rescue departments meet minimum competency and safety standards. Weak standards and weak standard enforcement may expose departments and local governments to liability for injuries to people or damage to property.

Probably the most critical issues raised by the Model project are those related to training standards for firefighters because they are directly related to life safety. There is a great deal of misunderstanding in this critical area.

The pertinent facts are:

- At present, as directed by Minister's Order dated December 18, 2002, the British Columbia Training Standard for firefighters in B.C. are those published by the National Fire Protection Association which specifies in *NFPA 1001 – Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications*. This "... identifies the minimum job performance requirements for career and volunteer fire fighters whose duties are primarily structural in nature."
- Since the minimum standard for firefighter training in *NFPA 1001* is *Fire Fighter I*, it could be assumed that *Fire Fighter I* is the minimum competency standard for firefighters in the province. However, this is not the case. Apparently, the Minister's Order has been interpreted to mean that fire / rescue departments must train to *NFPA 1001* which means they must employ this material but are not required to attain any particular competency standard (including Fire Fighter I)
- Fire Fighter I is generally accepted as the minimum competency level required for fire fighters to undertake an interior attack in a burning structure
- A "Basic Firefighter Certification Program" is presently being offered across the province to improve volunteer firefighter training. The program contents are based on NFPA Fire Fighter I but the course only covers a portion of the training modules (the core elements). As a result, it does not bring course participants to Fire Fighter I level competencies. Additional training and

evaluations (a "bridging" program) are required for individuals to achieve Firefighter I certification

- A small proportion of volunteer fire fighters presently have completed Fire Fighter I (estimated at 10%). Not including the recently added HazMat operations element, it requires approximately 250 hours of training to attain Fire Fighter I certification (which translates into a training period of three years if this training takes place only once per week). This compares to 45 training hours to complete the Basic Fire Fighting Certificate Program
- The Volunteer Firefighter's Association of B.C. states that the two major impediments to volunteers training to Fire Fighter I are (i) high cost, and (ii) limited volunteer time availability. It also believes that there would be mass volunteer firefighter resignations if the Fire Fighter I competency was mandated at this time

It is essential that the misunderstandings and inconsistencies in training standards for firefighters be dealt with quickly and directly.

There are three types of mandated province-wide standards that apply to fire / rescue departments. They are:

- Operating standards for fire services. These are set by WorkSafe BC
- Firefighter training standards. These are set by the Solicitor General
- Other standards that relate to the work performed by firefighters and the services they provide (e.g., first responders, driving firefighting apparatus, and safety regulations relating to various types of rescue services)

Action is required immediately as well as over the longer term in regard to specification of training and competency standards for the Fire / Rescue System. In the immediate term the proposed fire / rescue model assumes continuation of the present standards in the other areas.

Immediate Action

It is essential that misunderstandings and inconsistencies that have developed regarding training standards for firefighters be dealt with quickly and directly. This specifically applies to clarification of exactly what standards apply to fire fighting training and the associated competency levels.

The Fire Services Liaison Group recommends that the Fire Services Advisory Board and the Fire Commissioner initiate immediate action to clarify and specify training standards for fire and rescue services. In the event that there is any delay in appointing the Fire Services Advisory Board, then a working group of representatives of the Fire / Rescue System drawn from management of both volunteer and career departments, training officers, local governments, and the union should be immediately appointed to deal with this issue.

This group should also deal with important related matters at the same time the training standards decisions are made, including:

- What will the training standards be?

- Will the mandatory aspect be deferred to allow departments to undertake needed catch up?
- What assistance will be provided to departments to assist them to catch up? For volunteer departments, this would need to address both costs and time availability
- Will the standards apply equally to volunteer and career departments?

The training standards for performing interior attacks are a pressing concern and need immediate attention. The recognized minimum standard for interior attack is the NFPA 1001 "Fire Fighter I". However, consultations undertaken by the Fire Services Liaison Group indicate that only a small proportion of volunteer firefighters meet this standard. Furthermore, the Fire / Rescue System does not have the ability to train large numbers of volunteers to the Fire Fighter I level. An additional concern is the potential impact on volunteers and volunteer recruitment if new standards would require more personal sacrifices to be trained.

There is a clear dilemma. On the one hand, to be safe and effective, volunteer firefighters should meet the Fire Fighter I standard. On the other hand, the System is not able to provide this training and the personal sacrifices required could cause many volunteers to quit. The issue of what standards should be in place and how competencies can be improved over time must be addressed on a Fire / Rescue System-wide basis. The Fire Services Advisory Board and the Fire Commissioner should make this an urgent priority.

Once the above has been addressed, it is recommended that:

- The volunteer sector focus on ensuring that all its firefighters attain the Basic Fire Fighting Certificate
- The Fire Services Advisory Board and the Fire Commissioner should develop a strategy for improving competencies over an extended transition period
- Training funding be made available to assist volunteer departments to attain this
- The Fire Services Advisory Board set a deadline for volunteer fire / rescue departments to attain compliance with its firefighters to be trained to the Basic Fire Fighting Certificate level. The specific date must take into account the availability of funding and overcoming the impediments to accessing training as determined by the study being carried out by the Office of the Fire Commissioner

Over time, the Fire Services Liaison Group expects that volunteer fire / rescue departments will train increasing portions of their firefighters to the full Fire Fighter I standard.

The proposed Model for the Fire / Rescue System asks that the provincial government fund the training of volunteer firefighters to meet mandated training standards (see element 32, "Province to Fund Volunteer Training"). This funding is needed immediately in order to assist volunteer departments upgrade their competencies.

Funding is not the only problem associated with achieving volunteer training. Volunteers need to make significant personal sacrifices to obtain training (e.g., time

away from work and family). It is very important that any changes in the volunteer training system minimize the impacts on the personal lives of volunteers around the province.

Long Term Action

The Fire Services Liaison Group believes that the minimum mandatory training standard for all fire fighters in the province should eventually be NFPA 1001 Fire Fighter I for interior firefighting. However, it recognizes that this is not possible at this time. Imposing this policy would create an extreme hardship for many small departments and would exacerbate recruitment / retentions problems if this caused many volunteer firefighters to resign.

It is vital that departments that cannot meet minimum competency standards be given the time and resources to develop the necessary competencies required to meet any fire and rescue services standards that are set. In particular, the volunteer departments need support to ensure firefighters and incident commanders have the necessary skills to safely and effectively operate. Without this leadership, implementing any mandatory standard element of the model could force departments to curtail services or even cease operations.

To achieve the envisioned quality of service, the Fire Services Liaison Group proposes that over the long term a set of training and operating standards should be developed and enforced for fire and rescue services. This specifically would cover minimum standards for the four core services provided by fire / rescue departments:

1. Exterior firefighting Fighting Certificate
2. Interior firefighting
3. Emergency medical first responder
4. Road rescue / automobile extraction

When the minimum standards are put in place for the four core service areas, it is expected that the type of format used to specify competency requirements will be similar to the following:

Service	Requirements	Minimum Training Levels
Exterior Firefighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Personnel Required - 3 b. Equipment - NFPA 1901 Initial Attack Apparatus c. Expectations - exterior or wild land fire attack capability, including exposure protection & outdoor firefighting d. Time - to provide flexibility a target arrival time should be a component of the fire / rescue department service plan (the suggested target is: arrival within 15 minutes from notification, 80% of incidents within a response area to be specified by the department. If this cannot be attained, it could be stipulated as "Best Efforts"). 	<p>NFPA 1001 Selected Competencies incorporated in the BC Basic Fire Firefighter Certificate Curriculum</p> <p>ICS 100</p>
Interior Firefighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Personnel Required - 4 for initial attack; 2 more within 10 minutes b. Equipment - NFPA 1901 Initial Attack or Pumper Fire Apparatus c. Expectations - interior firefighting capability at initial attack level, at a minimum d. Time - to provide flexibility a target arrival time should be a component of the fire / rescue department service plan (the suggested target is: Initial complement -4 personnel plus pumping appliance- on scene in 10 minutes from notification 90% of incidents within a response area to be specified by the department. If this cannot be attained, it could be stipulated as "Best Efforts"). 	<p>NFPA 1001 Firefighter I</p> <p>ICS 100</p>
Emergency Medical First Responder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Personnel Required - 2 b. Equipment - BLS Equipment c. Expectations - initial response or support to ambulance personnel d. Time - to provide flexibility a target arrival time should be a component of the fire / rescue department service plan (the suggested target is: 10 minutes from notification, 90% of time within a response area to be specified by the department. If this cannot be attained, it could be stipulated as "Best Efforts"). 	<p>Emergency Medical Assistant (FR) BC EMALB consistent with Cameron Report (2007)</p> <p>ICS 100</p>

Service	Requirements	Minimum Training Levels
Road Rescue (Extrication)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Personnel Required – 3 b. Equipment - purpose-built vehicle, subject to inspection, capable of carrying crew and equipment. Powered rescue tools and equipment.* c. Expectations - Removal of occupants trapped in crashed vehicles, these personnel would also meet requirements for Emergency Medical First Responders d. Time – to provide flexibility a target arrival time should be a component of the fire / rescue department service plan (the suggested target is: 15 minutes from notification, 90% of incidents within a response area to be specified by the department. If this cannot be attained, it could be stipulated as "Best Efforts". 	<p>NFPA 1006 Chapter 6 (Vehicle and Machinery) Chapter 4 (Rope Rescue) at Level ii.</p> <p>ICS 100</p>

The Fire Services Liaison Group expects that, over time, standards for other fire and rescue services will be developed and implemented based on the recommendations of the Fire Commissioner working with the Fire Services Advisory Board.

Mandatory competency standards should not be implemented until it can be demonstrated that the needed improvements in training and competency improvement in fire / rescue departments across the province have taken effect and a solid Fire / Rescue System foundation is effectively in place.

For a "standard" to be truly a required standard and not a "recommended practice", there needs to be an enforcement mechanism. Enforcement of standards should be the responsibility of either (i) the Office of the Fire Commissioner, or (ii) an independent authority established by the provincial government. Given that some departments may not be willing or able to meet the mandated standards, policies must be defined to determine what actions should be followed in respect of non-compliant departments.

This aspect of the new Fire / Rescue System Model should not be implemented if new resources are not provided to ensure that small departments can meet the standards. In fact, without funding for and access to training to meet the standards, this aspect of the proposed Model should *not* be implemented.

The transition to these standards for fire and rescue services will require a number of years to achieve and must not be enforced until properly funded remediation training has been completed. The result, however, will be improved competency and public safety.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by ensuring that firefighters have the training, leadership, and equipment necessary to provide competent fire and rescue services.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Local governments are responsible for ensuring fire / rescue departments upgrade their capabilities to meet mandated standards
- The Fire Services Advisory Board is responsible for recommending competency standards to the Fire Commissioner
- Caveat: Mandatory standards, especially for interior firefighting, should only be implemented once the training system and funding for volunteers is improved to required levels and departments have had a reasonable opportunity to improve competencies (see Element 32)

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Benchmarking, Manitou Incorporated, June 2008
- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

4. The challenge of province-wide competency standards

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 22, Fire / Rescue Department Registration & Certification
- Element 32, Province to Fund Volunteer Training

ELEMENT 22: FIRE / RESCUE DEPARTMENT REGISTRATION & CERTIFICATION

RECOMMENDATION

All fire / rescue departments (other than federal and First Nations departments) should be registered with and certified by the standards enforcement authority.

BACKGROUND

At present, there is no comprehensive list of fire / rescue departments in British Columbia. It is not even possible to determine how many fire / rescue departments currently operate in the province.

The Immediate Term Position

All fire / rescue departments should be required to register with the Office of the Fire Commissioner. Methods to encourage registration and discourage non-compliance should be developed. This should include promotion of registration by the Fire Services Advisory Board and consideration of providing incentives to encourage departments to voluntarily register with the Office of the Fire Commissioner.

The Eventual Position

At the time the Fire / Rescue System transitions to mandatory competency standards (see element 21), all fire / rescue departments should be required to obtain and maintain certification by the Office of the Fire Commissioner or a standards enforcement authority. Obtaining and maintaining certification should entail:

1. Attestation by the responsible local government that the department meets minimum competency standards for the services it provides (where the Minister has established such standards)
2. In those cases where a department does not meet a minimum mandated competency standard, the local government must develop a plan to achieve compliance within a reasonable period of time
3. Completion and submission by the local government responsible of a Volunteer Fire Department Audit and Inspection Checklist annually for volunteer departments. An equivalent checklist should be developed for career departments
4. Publishing of a fire / rescue service plan by the local government responsible

It is important to note that the responsibility for ensuring that a fire / rescue department meets minimum competency standards should lie with the local government responsible for the department.

The standards enforcement authority will undertake such audits, inspections, and other actions it determines are necessary to ensure that fire / rescue departments meet minimum competency standards.

As with element 21, "Adherence to Competency Standards", a reasonable period must be provided for departments to make any changes needed to be certified. A

detailed plan needs to be developed to upgrade competencies over, say, five years. Additionally, consideration should be given to provide incentives to departments to become registered and certified, especially in the short to medium term.

As an initial step toward implementing this element, all fire / rescue departments should be asked or required to provide basic information to the Office of the Fire Commissioner. This should include:

- A list of the fire / rescue services the department provides
- Information about firefighters and their level of training
- An inventory of major equipment and apparatus operated by the department
- Contact information

The Office of the Fire Commissioner should make this information available to the Fire / Rescue System, local governments, and the broader emergency services and public safety community.

This Element would address the Fire / Rescue System's long standing expressed need to be able to define or specify what a fire department is. A fire / rescue department would be defined as a fire / rescue service provider that has been certified.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by ensuring that fire / rescue departments meet minimum competency standards for the services that they deliver.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Local governments are responsible for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

4. The challenge of province-wide competency standards
5. Inadequate Fire / Rescue System information

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 21, Improving Adherence to Competency Standards

ELEMENT 23: IMPROVE TRAINING DELIVERY

RECOMMENDATION

The system to deliver training to firefighters should be improved in order to ensure all firefighters and fire / rescue departments are able to meet provincially-mandated standards.

BACKGROUND

Surveys of fire / rescue departments and local governments undertaken by the Fire Services Liaison Group found that both groups saw firefighter training issues as one of the two most important challenges (the other being firefighter recruitment and training). The survey indicated that 65% of volunteer fire / rescue departments had concerns about the lack of consistency of training across the province, difficulty getting access to needed training, and the high cost of training.

These problems were especially acute for volunteer departments in rural areas. Several types of problems were reported, including:

- Lack of funding to pay for courses and travel to attend out-of-town courses
- Unavailability of training in the community or in nearby communities
- The sacrifices volunteer firefighters must make to obtain training. These include the loss of income while attending training, out-of-pocket costs to travel, and time away from family

Fire / rescue training requirements became more stringent in 2002 with the adoption by the province of the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1001, "Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications" as the British Columbia Training Standard. In addition, other standards have been instituted by various provincial government agencies for interface firefighting, medical first response, and other services. The Fire Services Liaison Group anticipates that training standards will continue to be raised in the coming years. If not addressed, this will, exacerbate the problems reported in the survey with the firefighter training system in B.C.

The Fire Training Officers Association of B.C. (jointly with the Fire Chiefs' Association, the Volunteer Firefighters Association and the Justice Institute) has a current initiative, the "Basic Fire Fighting Certificate Program" that will improve training delivery around the province. While this initiative is very useful, it has a couple of important limitations. The first is that the Basic Fire Fighting Certificate represents a subset of the National Fire Protection Association training standard. That is, firefighters who complete this program will not meet the Fire Fighter I standard which means they will not be qualified to undertake interior fire attack.

The other limitation associated with the Basic Fire Fighting Certificate Program is the one-time nature of its funding and delivery. This means there is no assurance that the improvements being attained by the program will be sustained in the future.

The Office of the Fire Commissioner has launched a project to identify and define the problems within the training delivery system specifically focusing on

impediments to accessing needed training. The Fire Services Liaison Group strongly supports this important initiative. Developing a more complete understanding of the barriers that limit access to training is the first step to improving the delivery of firefighter training.

The new Model recommends (see element 32) that the provincial government fund volunteer firefighter training as one aspect of improving the training delivery system. However, funding alone is not enough. Some specific opportunities to improve the volunteer training delivery system include:

- Adding more delivery of training regionally. This will materially improve access to training and has potential to reduce per trainee costs. It also should reduce barriers to interoperability and minimize the impacts on volunteers to attend training sessions
- Expanding the “train-the-trainer” system
- Use of technology to deliver “non-hands on” training to firefighters. The current system makes very little of such technology yet potential benefits are similar to those that could be realized with regionalized training
- Providing accredited training through other trades training institutions, mobile training units and increased use of train-the-trainer programs
- Finding methods that reduce the sacrifices of time away from family, lost time at work, etc. that volunteers are required to make

The Office of the Fire Commissioner, the Fire Services Advisory Board, and the Fire Training Officers Association of B.C. should undertake a joint project to propose specific changes to the training delivery system to:

1. Ensure firefighters receive training that permits them to meet minimum competency standards established by the provincial government
2. Reduce the per trainee costs to deliver training
3. Improve the accessibility of training to meet mandated standards around the province

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by making it easier for firefighters to receive the training they require to competently provide fire and rescue services.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government is responsible for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Survey of Fire / Rescue Departments and Local Governments
- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

4. The challenge of province-wide competency standards

6. Operational implications of independent fire / rescue departments

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 21, Improving Adherence to Competency Standards
- Element 32, Province to Fund Volunteer Training

DRAFT

ELEMENT 24: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT TRAINING

RECOMMENDATION

A leadership and management training program for fire / rescue departments should be implemented.

BACKGROUND

A number of U.S. studies (such as those by the U. S Fire Administration and the International Fire Chiefs' Association) have found that developing leadership and management skills is a critical issue for small, volunteer departments. In particular, management and leadership skills are the vital requirement for smaller departments to effectively meet their challenges. This was also a conclusion of the Diversity/Recruitment/Retention Task Group that participated in developing this Model.

The "Board of Education" (see element 7) should identify courses and programs needed to develop leadership and management skills for fire / rescue departments. Separate leadership development programs would be needed for career and volunteer departments. This should consider examination of various potential sources, such as the NFPA Fire Officers program, fire officers training programs offered by provincial institutions, and the "Fire Officer Program" or the "Volunteer Fire Officer Leadership" course and the "Executive Development Program" developed by the Australian Fire Authorities Council. The Fire Services Advisory Board should encourage firefighters interested in management and leadership positions to obtain the prescribed training. Local governments should provide funding for this purpose.

In addition to developing recommendations for training requirements, this element should also consider how training institutions, including the Justice Institute, can deliver leadership and management training to fire department management and management candidates.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by improving the management of fire / rescue departments.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Fire Services Advisory Board is responsible for identifying and recommending a leadership and management program
- Responsibility for delivery of the program depends on the details of the program developed

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- *Retention and Recruitment for Volunteer Emergency Services*, 2007, US Fire Administration

- Fire Services Liaison Group Diversity/ Recruitment/Retention Task Group report, 2008
- U. S. Fire Administration, *Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services – Challenges and Solutions*, May 2007
- International Fire Chiefs Association, *The Blue Ribbon Report – Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service*, March 2004

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

4. The challenge of province-wide competency standards
8. Heavy stress on the volunteer sector of the Fire / Rescue System

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 7, Establish a Fire Services Advisory Board
- Element 23, Improve Training Delivery

DRAFT

ELEMENT 25: BEST PRACTICES GUIDELINES

RECOMMENDATION

The Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board should develop, publish, and promote “best practices” guidelines for fire and rescue services. A best practices guideline for risk assessment / risk management should be an early priority.

BACKGROUND

Element 10 of this Model proposed that the Office of the Fire Commissioner create a capacity to research key issues relating to fire and rescue services. The Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board should identify specific topics for research into and development of best practices guidelines for the Fire / Rescue System. It should also identify existing sources of best practices information, such as the Volunteer and Combination Officers Section of the International Association of Fire Chiefs or the US Fire Administration.

Identification of a risk assessment / risk management methodology should be an early priority for development of a best practice guideline. Risk assessment / risk management methodologies provide a structured approach to identifying risks within a community and defining risk abatement and mitigation strategies for those risks. Determination of service requirements and decisions regarding service provision should be based upon an effective risk management process. However, the Fire / Rescue System does not have a quantitative risk assessment / risk management process or model that is efficient, affordable and suited to B.C.’s situation. Adopting a best practices guideline for local governments and fire / rescue departments should allow decision makers to make well-founded decisions about fire / rescue services, resources, and priorities.

There are a number of risk assessment / risk management methodologies that have been developed by other organizations. An existing methodology should be adapted to meet the requirements of local governments and fire / rescue departments in British Columbia. The system under development by the Alberta Fire Services Advisory Committee (the “Alberta Risk Protocol System”), shows promise and should be evaluated for this purpose. The B.C. Fire / Rescue System will have access to the Alberta system as the Fire Chiefs Association of British Columbia, the Office of the Fire Commissioner, and the Justice Institute contributed to its funding.

Another area of significant opportunity is the development of a best practices guideline to address standard operating procedures for smaller fire / rescue departments (see element 27). By reviewing and adapting standard operating procedures already in place in British Columbia and in other jurisdiction, a “*pro forma*” procedure manual could be developed. The Fire Services Liaison Group anticipates that many departments will elect to adopt this document as their internal standard. In addition to reducing the costs to local government to “re-invent the wheel”, common operating procedures should improve interoperability between the departments that share them. Local governments may wish to

encourage departments within their jurisdiction to move toward such common practices.

Other opportunities to develop best practices guidelines will, no doubt, be identified. These guidelines, as they are developed, should be actively promoted within the Fire / Rescue System by the Fire Services Advisory Board. Some best practices guidelines may also eventually be specified as standards for the Fire / Rescue System by the Minister.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by encouraging departments and firefighters to adopt practices that have been demonstrated to be effective. Indirectly, this element may also help to reduce barriers to interoperability.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Fire Services Advisory Board and the Office of the Fire Commissioner are jointly responsible for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Benchmarking, Manitou Incorporated, June 2008
- Alberta Risk Protocol System Phase 2 – Proof of Concept Results Report, October 2007

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

4. The challenge of province-wide competency standards
5. Inadequate Fire / Rescue System information
6. Operational implications of independent fire / rescue departments

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 7, Establish a Fire Services Advisory Board
- Element 10, Office of the Fire Commissioner Research Role
- Element 27, Improve Interoperability

ELEMENT 26: IMPROVE FIRE / RESCUE INFORMATION

RECOMMENDATION

The currency, completeness, and accuracy of information about the Fire / Rescue System and the delivery of its services should be improved.

BACKGROUND

Under the current model, fire / rescue departments are expected to report fire incidents to the Office of the Fire Commissioner in a prescribed format. The purpose of this requirement is to permit the Fire Commissioner to assemble and publish province-wide data about fires and fire departments that can be used as input in the development of Fire / Rescue System policies, fire prevention programs, and public education initiatives.

Unfortunately, there is poor compliance with this requirement. One factor that reduces compliance is the lack of administrative resources available for this purpose to many departments, especially small volunteer departments. These departments, which rely on volunteer labour, often take the view that they should use their limited resources fighting or preventing fires, not completing reports. There is no meaningful consequence for non-compliance.

As a result of the above, the fire incident data that is available is not reliable. This data does not provide a solid basis for analysis or decision-making.

A problem of equal importance with Fire / Rescue System information is the absence of any province-wide collection and reporting of non-fire services delivered by fire / rescue departments. This is a result of the fact that the Fire / Rescue System has evolved to provide a range of rescue and emergency services, but the province-wide governance structure has not kept up with this change.

Another significant issue relating to information about the Fire / Rescue System is the lack of an inventory of major fire and rescue equipment that could be employed in a regional or province-wide emergency. The need for such an inventory was made in the report into the 2003 Kelowna firestorm (commonly referred to as the "Filmon Report"). That report recommended that the Office of the Fire Commissioner maintain a searchable database for this purpose. It is understood that the Office of the Fire Commissioner is currently preparing to update its inventory program.

Improving the quality and completeness of information about the Fire / Rescue System presents significant difficulties. Some opportunities for progress could include:

- Instituting reporting to the Office of the Fire Commissioner of non-fire services, including emergency medical first responder calls and road rescue calls
- Provision of administrative support by local governments to ensure that fire / rescue departments are able to meet reporting obligations
- Using statistical surveys to obtain information about fire and rescue services (versus the detailed incident reporting approach)

While the Office of the Fire Commissioner provides nominal payments for reports filed by fire / rescue departments, the Fire Services Liaison Group believes that it would be worthwhile to consider whether these funds might better be used for other purposes.

The Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board should evaluate opportunities to improve the timeliness, completeness, and accuracy of information about the Fire / Rescue System. However, major systematic improvements may be achieved through implementation of regional linked records management systems, if this proves to be practical (see element 30).

The Fire / Rescue System should be part of the solution for improving fire / rescue information. The Fire Services Advisory Board should undertake an information/promotion initiative to educate fire / rescue departments on the importance and benefits of providing information. If needed, this initiative could be initiated by the Fire Services Liaison Group in advance of the re-launch of the Fire Services Advisory Board.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Improving the level of knowledge about the effectiveness of the Fire / Rescue System and individual departments within it allows responsible officials and managers to improve effectiveness.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Fire Services Advisory Board and the Office of the Fire Commissioner are jointly responsible for evaluating opportunities to improve fire / rescue information
- Responsibility for implementing improvements will depend on the specific opportunities pursued

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008
- *Firestorm 2003 Provincial Review*, the Honourable Gary Filmon P.C., O.M.
- *Fire Loss Reporting Manual*, Office of the Fire Commissioner

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

5. Inadequate Fire / Rescue System information

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 29, Communications and Information Management
- Element 30, Linked Regional Records Management Systems
- Element 35, Local Government Administration and Management Support

ELEMENT 27: IMPROVE INTEROPERABILITY

RECOMMENDATION

The Fire / Rescue System and local governments should undertake initiatives to improve interoperability. The Fire Services Advisory Board and the Office of the Fire Commissioner should provide leadership to assist departments and local governments in this.

BACKGROUND

Many factors are impediments to improving cooperative action and interoperability between departments. Commonly cited barriers include:

- Incompatible equipment and apparatus
- Inconsistent operating procedures and incident command procedures
- Lack of confidence in the competency standards of other departments
- Lack of clearly defined incident command procedures
- Incompatible communications systems
- Liability concerns for service provided outside a department's service area
- Liability concerns relating to reduced service levels within the service area if personnel and equipment are dispatched to support another department
- Labour relations considerations
- Policies of local governments
- Lack of understanding of the need by governance bodies
- Lack of consistent funding for fire / rescue departments
- Additional costs to provide mutual aid

Currently, the understanding of the impediments to interoperability is based on anecdotal information. The Fire Services Advisory Board should, with the support of the Office of the Fire Commissioner, undertake a project to identify, characterize, and assess the main barriers to improving interoperability between fire / rescue departments and between fire / rescue departments and other rescue and emergency service providers.

More generally, the Fire / Rescue System needs to fully embrace the need to improve interoperability. The Fire Services Safety Board needs to provide leadership in this regard.

Identifying impediments to improving interoperability is a necessary prerequisite to an initiative to address this issue on a province-wide basis. Based on this analysis, the Fire Services Advisory Board and the Office of the Fire Commissioner should encourage local governments and fire / rescue departments to undertake projects to improve interoperability where:

1. The potential benefits are substantial, and
2. The probability of success is good

Please note that there may be some opportunities for improving interoperability that could generate significant benefits in efficiency or public safety, but which are

difficult to pursue or implement. It is important, therefore, to focus on those initiatives that are “doable”.

One opportunity that should be investigated is the potential to develop a set of *pro forma* “recommended practices” focused on the needs of small- and medium-sized departments addressing:

- Standard operating procedures
- Incident command
- Equipment and apparatus
- Firefighter training

and other fire / rescue department operational aspects. Note that these recommended practices are not standards in that they are not mandated. However, to the extent that departments adopt common practices and procedures, barriers to interoperability should be reduced.

These recommended practices for small- and medium-sized departments should be based on materials currently in use in departments in British Columbia or other jurisdiction and which are determined to reflect “best practices”.

More generally, interoperability improvement initiatives may involve changes in legislation, standards, best practices guidelines, equipment and apparatus, training, administration and support services, or other aspects of fire / rescue department operations and management. It is anticipated that there would be a number of initiatives over a number of years.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by improving the ability of departments to work effectively together when providing fire and rescue services.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Fire Services Advisory Board is responsible for identifying barriers to interoperability

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008
- Communications Issues Review, August 2008
- Analysis of Fire / Rescue Service Gaps in B.C., September 2008
- *Firestorm 2003 Provincial Review*, the Honourable Gary Filmon P.C., O.M.

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

6. Operational implications of independent fire / rescue departments

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 25, Best Practice Guidelines
- Element 29, Communications and Information Management

- Element 31, Equipment Standardization & Joint Purchasing

DRAFT

ELEMENT 28: EFFICIENCY INITIATIVES

RECOMMENDATION

Fire / rescue departments and local governments should encourage efficiency improvement initiatives in the three different circumstances created by population/development patterns within the province:

1. The metropolitan Vancouver and Victoria areas
2. The regional urban / suburban situation (outside of Vancouver and Victoria)
3. The rural / small communities situation

BACKGROUND

The Fire Services Liaison Group believes that the Fire / Rescue System must commit itself to improving its efficiency, both within individual departments and regionally. This is necessary given the fiscal constraints faced by governments. This commitment to efficiency improvement also directly contributes to public safety because efficiency increases service delivery capacity.

The Fire Services Advisory Board should play a leadership role in promoting an active commitment to efficiency improvement initiatives.

When considering the potential to find efficiencies in fire / rescue services, it is important to recognize that the issues and opportunities are different in different areas within the province. The three main situations consist of the major metropolitan areas of Vancouver and Victoria, other urban / suburban areas, and rural / smaller community circumstances. Efficiency initiatives need to be different for fire / rescue departments in each of these three demographic/development situations. Given the very limited budgets of many departments serving rural areas and smaller communities, the potential for cost savings may be very limited. In these situations, the focus should be on effectiveness improvements, i.e., getting more "bang for the buck".

Local governments and their fire / rescue departments should focus on areas such as automatic aid, interoperability, shared services (e.g., regional specialty rescue teams), and shared resources (e.g., a regional training facility) when pursuing efficiency improvements.

Fire / rescue department service plans should specifically describe initiatives, if any, that local governments and their departments have included to realize regional or other efficiencies. Access to grants or other benefits from the provincial government should be dependent on demonstration by local governments that they have considered opportunities for improving the efficiency of their departments.

The Fire Services Advisory Board should identify opportunities for realizing regional and other efficiencies by encouraging local governments and fire / rescue departments to actively pursue these opportunities. Eventually a working group made up of representatives of fire / rescue departments and local governments should be formed to develop specific approaches to realizing the identified efficiency improvement/cost containment opportunities. A grant program similar to

the *Innovations in Fire Service Program* could be an effective program to encourage efficiency initiatives.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by allowing departments to provide more services with the limited financial, human, and other resources available.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Fire / rescue departments and local governments are responsible for finding and implementing efficiency improvements
- The Fire Services Advisory Board should work with representatives of local government and the Fire / Rescue System to identify potential efficiency improvement projects
- Responsibility for specific projects will depend on the specific projects identified

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- J. Gordon Routley, *Identification of Potential Efficiencies and Revenue Enhancements*, June 2008.

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

7. Budget pressures

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 27, Improve Interoperability

ELEMENT 29: COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

RECOMMENDATION

The Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board should establish a working group to develop specific recommendations for improving communications and information management systems in the Fire / Rescue System. Three phases of work are required to develop a detailed plan are (i) baseline analysis, (ii) gap analysis, and (iii) project definition.

BACKGROUND

Communications and information management systems include 9-1-1, radio, Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD), Records Management System (RMS), and dispatch. These are crucial processes that determine the ability of the Fire / Rescue System to receive and manage calls for assistance and effectively launch and manage emergency responses.

Issues related to radio deficiencies (including lack of interoperability), incomplete 911 coverage, the need for properly functioning, consolidated CAD and RMS systems, and the coverage and functioning of dispatch systems are critical to the Fire / Rescue System. These areas are evolving rapidly (both due to activities within B.C. and external to it in the communications industry and the general fire service). However, issues in this area are extremely technical and are complicated by the need for integration and coordination across the Fire / Rescue System and with other emergency responses agencies.

Radio systems should migrate over time to require inter-operability with Police and British Columbia Ambulance Service as well as other fire departments and the B.C. Forest Service. Interoperability will increase firefighter safety and provide for more effective mutual aid when it is required. Where possible, new radio systems should be required to conform to the "Project 25" open system compliance standard.

- The Fire Commissioner should take a lead role in working with the various agencies to review existing fire radio systems to ensure that their governance and operating models as well as their frequency plans allow them to be interfaced with other radio systems
- The Fire Commissioner, working with existing fire / rescue radio system users should review the existing body of knowledge with regard to third party "black box" radio interface solutions and develop an implementation strategy

CAD systems should form the basis for dispatch for all fire / rescue departments in British Columbia. The advantages of CAD systems are numerous but their principal strengths lie with integrated GIS to shorten response time and eliminate duplicate responses. CAD also allows for the greatest amount of knowledge to be available to dispatcher and firefighters to make the best possible decisions. Fire / rescue CAD systems should also be fully interfaced with British Columbia Ambulance Service.

- Agencies providing dispatch for fire / rescue departments in British Columbia should be strongly encouraged to utilize a fire CAD either as a standalone system or by using a shared system similar to those being implemented in Metro Vancouver and other regions

- The opportunity to interface existing and future fire / rescue CAD systems with the ambulance CAD system being deployed throughout the province by B.C.AS should be a priority. This interface would eliminate the additional time taken for the physical handoff of caller information from British Columbia Ambulance Service to fire/ rescue departments. At the present time the development of the interface to the ambulance CAD is at the option of the fire dispatch provider however the Fire Commissioner should take a lead role in developing provincial support for a standard interface that could provide required first responder response data directly into each fire / rescue CAD system
- Fire / rescue CAD systems should be required, at a minimum, to have the capability to transmit data to mobile workstations in fire / rescue apparatus in real time to ensure that the most appropriate and up to date information regarding properties, usage, pre-plans, building construction etc, is available for incident commanders

RMS should be available for all fire / rescue departments to allow them to track and manage their personnel, their physical assets and the properties within their response jurisdiction. The implementation of a searchable database of Fire / Rescue System assets was recommended by the Filmon Report

- The Fire Commissioner should recommend the deployment of a Provincial Fire / Rescue RMS as a hosted system to afford smaller and medium sized fire departments the opportunity to participate. The model for this system is the police RMS (BC Prime) which was supported by the Solicitor General. A similar model (Project FIRES) is now being implemented by the Delta, Richmond, Vancouver, Port Moody and New Westminster Fire Departments and is contemplated as being expandable for the entire province
- The fire / rescue RMS used by any fire / rescue agency should have an interface to their CAD system that will provide for an upload of all relevant property and other information at the time units are dispatched

Dispatch service for fire departments should be provided by competent, dedicated personnel who are trained, managed and mentored to achieve the call management standards outlined in NFPA 1221 and meet the professional qualifications in NFPA 1061.

- Fire / rescue dispatch providers for any fire / rescue department in B.C. should be required to report on their ability to meet the call management standards specified in NFPA 1221 and to ensure that their dispatch personnel at a minimum are compliant with NFPA 1061

Fire / Rescue System 9-1-1, radio, CAD, RMS and dispatch have all been improved in recent years. However, there are still gaps in a number of areas which the Model should address by carrying out the following projects.

1. Baseline Analysis: The Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board should commission a working group to conduct a thorough baseline review of existing Fire CAD, RMS, dispatch and radio systems in British Columbia as a first priority. The purpose of this review would be to clarify the present state of each component as it relates to the fire safety for

every resident of B.C., as well as to understand initiatives that are underway or planned, to improve these

2. Gap Analysis: Following completion of the baseline analysis, the same body should commission a gap analysis to clarify what amount of upgrading would be required for each of these component parts, identifying the issues related to governance, operations, technology, and change management along with estimates of effort, costs and timelines
3. Project Definition: Following the gap analysis a project definition document should be completed that would prioritize each of the projects along with a more detailed list of actions, costs and a timeline. The objective of this document would be to receive approval for part or all of the projects along with the funding to implement them. As part of their approval process each of these component projects would be required to have defined measures of success that could be assessed once the project was completed
4. Implementation: Based on approvals flowing from the project definition phase, contracts would be confirmed to complete and finalize each of the authorized component projects

As each component is completed a final review based on the previously defined success criteria would be undertaken to ensure that value for each had been achieved.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Improvements in communications and information technology can contribute to public safety by (i) ensuring firefighters are promptly dispatched, and (ii) that they have the information needed to effectively deliver services when dispatched.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board will be responsible for undertaking the initial feasibility study
- Responsibility for any resulting initiatives will depend on the results of the initial study

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Communications Issues Review, August 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

3. Service Gaps
5. Inadequate Fire / Rescue System information
6. Operational implications of independent fire / rescue departments

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 26, Improve Fire / Rescue Information
- Element 30, Linked Regional Records Management Systems

ELEMENT 30: LINKED REGIONAL RECORDS MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

RECOMMENDATION

The provincial government should fund a project to evaluate the feasibility of linked regional records management systems.

BACKGROUND

As discussed in element 26, *Improve Fire / Rescue Information*, there are serious deficiencies with the available information about the province-wide Fire / Rescue System. This includes lack of information about both traditional "fire" services and rescue services delivered around the province.

Records management systems have the potential to improve the day-to-day operation and management of fire / rescue departments as well as the timeliness, accuracy, and completeness of information.

Sharing records management systems on a regional basis has the potential to realize efficiencies by sharing records management costs amongst many departments. Linking regional records management systems has the potential to provide a province-wide data base of and perspective on fire and rescue services.

The benefits to the key stakeholders in this would be:

- All fire / rescue departments will have access to a robust, full function records management system that will not only provide for incident records and reporting but will provide the full range of important record keeping and reporting, including training and personnel records, equipment maintenance, inventory, budgets and financial records
- The regional districts will ensure that their fire / rescue departments have the information needed for effective management and will be able to assess their departments against comparable and better identify best practices and problem performance
- The Office of the Fire Commissioner will have detailed, correct, comprehensive information on which to base decision-making, will be better able to identify "best practices" and will allow rapid on-line searches for needed resources for major emergencies

At this time it is not known if the potential for shared records management systems justifies the cost, time, and effort to implement these systems. In element 29, *Communications and Information Management*, a project to form a working group to conduct a baseline review of existing fire CAD, RMS, dispatch and radio systems is recommended. Because of the potential significant benefit to small fire departments struggling with administration tasks, as part of this project it is recommended that the provincial government fund a project to evaluate the potential for linked regional records management systems in 2009/2010. If linked records management systems are found to be financially, operationally, and technically feasible, implementation will take place during subsequent few years. This depends, of course, on the necessary financial and contractual arrangements being made.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by improving the quality of information that is used to manage individual departments and govern the province-wide Fire / Rescue System.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Office of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Services Advisory Board will be responsible for undertaking the initial feasibility study
- The provincial government should provide the funding required to undertake the study
- Responsibility for any resulting initiatives will depend on the results of the initial study

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Communications Issues Review, August 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

5. Inadequate Fire / Rescue System information
7. Budget pressures

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 26, Improve Fire / Rescue Information
- Element 28, Efficiency Initiatives
- Element 29, Communications and Information Management

ELEMENT 31: EQUIPMENT STANDARDIZATION & JOINT PURCHASING

RECOMMENDATION

A purchasing cooperative (or other appropriate legal vehicle) should be established to purchase trucks, equipment, apparatus, etc. on behalf of participating fire / rescue departments.

BACKGROUND

The Fire Service Liaison Group believes that there are significant opportunities to achieve per unit cost reductions if fire / rescue departments pooled their purchasing power. For example, the Columbia Shuswap Regional District reports that it combined apparatus purchases for its thirteen fire / rescue departments with three municipalities and saved \$20,000 to \$30,000 per unit. Price reductions can be negotiated when larger volumes are purchased. A cooperative (or alternative legal entity) should be established to act in this capacity for fire / rescue departments regionally or province-wide.

The focus on a joint purchasing initiative should be on small- to medium-sized departments where the need for savings is most urgent and where there may be more opportunities to standardize equipment.

Equipment standardization also can contribute significantly to improving interoperability. Compatible equipment can allow departments to work together more easily. Additionally, standardized equipment might also permit departments to conduct some joint training, reducing the "per seat" cost of that training.

The Fire Services Advisory Board should undertake a project to develop a "recommended practice" for standard equipment for smaller fire departments that local governments can refer to when making equipment acquisitions.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by (i) maximizing the services that can be provided given resource constraints, and (ii) improving the ability of departments to work more effectively together (i.e., interoperability).

RESPONSIBILITY

- Local government is responsible for the equipment standardization
- The Fire Services Advisory Board is responsible for developing recommended practices for equipment with the support of the Office of the Fire Commissioner. The Fire Services Advisory Board is also responsible for facilitating the establishment of a purchasing cooperative vehicle

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008
- Identification of Potential Efficiencies and Revenue Enhancements, J. Gordon Routley, June 2008.

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

6. Operational implications of independent fire / rescue departments
7. Budget pressures

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 27, Improve Interoperability
- Element 28, Efficiency Initiatives

DRAFT

ELEMENT 32: PROVINCE TO FUND VOLUNTEER TRAINING

RECOMMENDATION

The provincial government should fund mandated training of volunteer firefighters. The provincial trades training system provides a model that could be applied to volunteer training.

BACKGROUND

Surveys of fire / rescue departments and local governments identified firefighter training as the number one problem within the Fire / Rescue System. For volunteer departments, training-related issues are contributing significantly to the high stress being experienced by the sector. Concerns in the volunteer sector include:

- More stringent training standards (e.g., the National Fire Prevention Association 1001 standard) requires departments to provide much more training to volunteers than in the past
- Volunteer departments do not have adequate funding, in many cases, to meet the "Basic Fire Fighting Certificate" level. Training to the "Firefighter I" level is even less feasible
- Even if funding is available, training is not readily accessible locally or regionally for many departments
- Meeting training standards is requiring volunteers to make greater personal sacrifices to be trained. In many cases, volunteers have to pay to travel to attend training course

These factors combine to reduce the willingness of people in smaller communities to become or remain volunteer firefighters. With an aging workforce, the volunteer sector of the Fire / Rescue System needs to train new firefighters and upgrade the skills of current ones.

The provincial government should fund volunteer firefighter training to meet mandated competency standards for several reasons (see Section 5), including:

- The provincial government is an important "customer" of fire and rescue services delivered by volunteer departments so it is important that local fire / rescue departments work well
- The provincial government relies on volunteer fire / rescue departments in regional and provincial emergencies
- Provincial government fire and rescue services are organized on a province-wide basis (i.e., Ministry of Forests and Range, B.C. Ambulance Service, and the Provincial Emergency Program). It is in the interests of the provincial government that, province-wide, volunteer departments adhere to competency standards
- The competency of volunteer departments is a life safety issue for both firefighters and members of the public.

Firefighting is a trade. There is a well-established body of knowledge that firefighters need to learn to be safe and effective. The training, both classroom and

practical, required to impart that body of knowledge is clearly defined. The provincial government should treat this trade similarly to other trades and fund training of volunteer firefighters where standards have been mandated.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by ensuring that volunteer firefighters are able to meet the minimum competency standards for fire and rescue services.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government is responsible for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Survey of Fire / Rescue Departments and Local Governments
- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

7. Budget pressures
8. Heavy stress on volunteer sector

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 23, Improve Training Delivery

ELEMENT 33: RECRUITMENT / RETENTION PROGRAMS

RECOMMENDATION

The Fire Services Advisory Board with the support of the Office of the Fire Commissioner should develop volunteer recruitment and retention programs that local governments and fire / rescue departments may adopt.

Local governments should assist departments recruit and retain volunteer firefighters.

BACKGROUND

Small, volunteer fire / rescue departments make up the largest segment of the Fire / Rescue System in the province. This sector is struggling to maintain its workforce as it is experiencing increasing difficulty attracting and keeping volunteer firefighters. The Model project conducted a survey of fire / rescue departments and local governments to determine the most critical issues with which they must deal. This survey determined that challenges created by firefighter recruitment and retention problems were one of the top two most important issues facing fire / rescue departments in small and medium-sized communities served by volunteers. Many of these departments are under-strength and are finding it difficult to maintain minimum acceptable levels. It is not an exaggeration to state that if present trends continue, the largest sector of the Fire / Rescue System faces a potential crisis.

The impending firefighter recruitment and retention crisis is not unique to B.C. and is not limited to a few isolated fire / rescue departments. It is the result of external forces that are acting on all of North America's fire service jurisdictions. Numerous studies have identified recruitment and retention challenges and have consistently and strongly warned about the dire consequences if ways are not found to address these challenges. Examples of organizations and jurisdictions that have identified and called for action to forestall firefighter recruitment and retention crises include the US Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Volunteer and Combined Officer Section of the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the State of Pennsylvania, and the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Programs are required to address recruitment and retention pressures and create more robust, sustainable volunteer fire / rescue departments. The Fire Services Advisory Board and the Office of the Fire Commissioner should undertake a project to identify and evaluate successful approaches to volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention in use within British Columbia and around North America. This evaluation will be used to design programs that fire / rescue departments around the province may adapt to local circumstances.

The need for programs and initiatives to effectively address the impending recruitment and retention crisis is time sensitive as it must be addressed before the strains on the system become overpowering or irreparable. Because of this, the Fire Services Liaison Group is examining whether it can launch the above project or some meaningful portion of it in the short term before the Fire Services Advisory Board is formed.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by minimizing the loss of firefighters and fire and rescue services in communities with volunteer departments.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Fire Services Advisory Board is responsible for developing recruitment retention programs
- Local governments are responsible for recruiting volunteer firefighters

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

8. Heavy stress on the volunteer sector

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 34, Recruitment / Retention Incentives

DRAFT

ELEMENT 34: RECRUITMENT / RETENTION INCENTIVES

RECOMMENDATION

The provincial government should provide tax or other incentives to encourage volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention. Incentives for both volunteers and employers (to release employees to respond to calls) need to be considered. Additionally, incentives should be structured to recruit volunteers from non-traditional groups.

Local governments should also consider providing incentives to volunteer firefighters and their employers.

BACKGROUND

As stated in Element 33, the volunteer sector of the Fire / Rescue System is experiencing very high stress because of problems recruiting and retaining firefighters. If strong programs of corrective action are not put in place quickly, the volunteer sector may suffer irreparable damage. The provincial government should consider incentive programs to counter this and should encourage local governments to consider offering incentives as well.

The provincial government should consider extending tax and other financial incentives to volunteer firefighters and their employers to support recruitment and retention. The type of program might be similar to that offered by the Province of Nova Scotia which provides a refundable tax credit of \$375 (rising to \$500 in 2009) for volunteer firefighters as well as accidental death insurance. Before it adjourned, the House of Commons was considering a private members bill to provide an income tax deduction of \$1,000 for 100 hours of voluntary service, rising to \$2,000 for 200 hours or more.

The provincial government should evaluate financial incentive programs in place in other jurisdictions and implement incentives for volunteer firefighters in British Columbia.

The provincial government should encourage local governments to offer incentives as well. As an example, Grand Forks is considering offering medical, extended medical and dental coverage to its volunteer firefighters as a way to keep existing members and recruit new ones.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by minimizing the loss of firefighters and fire and rescue services in communities with volunteer departments.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The provincial government and local governments are jointly responsible for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008

- Nova Scotia Volunteer Firefighters Tax Credit
- Bill C-219, *An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductions for volunteer emergency service)*

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

8. Heavy stress on the volunteer sector of the Fire / Rescue System

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 33, Recruitment / Retention Programs

DRAFT

ELEMENT 35: LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

RECOMMENDATION

Local governments should ensure that volunteer fire / departments within their jurisdiction have necessary administrative and management support.

BACKGROUND

Small fire / rescue departments frequently lack administration and management resources, limiting their ability to effectively and efficiently deliver fire / rescue services. These departments make up the largest segment of the Fire / Rescue System and are under increasing stress. In particular, the increasing difficulty recruiting, retaining, and training volunteer firefighters is a major management challenge for these departments. Management talent is critical to any effective response to these challenges.

In these circumstances, it is critical that these departments have the resources and talents needed to be effective. Local governments, as the level of government responsible for fire and rescue services, needs to provide resources as needed.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by ensuring that departments have the management and administrative capacity needed to allow them to provide fire and rescue services.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Local government is responsible for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008
- *Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services*, 2007, US Fire Administration

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

8. Heavy stress on the volunteer sector

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 36, OFC Focus on Small Departments

ELEMENT 36: OFC FOCUS ON SMALL DEPARTMENTS

RECOMMENDATION

The Office of the Fire Commissioner should create a specific unit to assist small departments address the trends, issues, and challenges within that sector of the Fire / Rescue System.

BACKGROUND

While career and composite departments protect most people in British Columbia, the volunteer sector covers more geography. The volunteer sector, therefore, is critical to delivery and maintenance of services across the province. However, as stated previously, the volunteer sector faces severe consequences if the pressures being placed on it are not addressed quickly and directly. While individual departments and local governments are addressing local issues and priorities for volunteer departments, no organization is tasked with focusing on trends and issues that affect the sector as a whole.

The Office of the Fire Commissioner should recognize the importance of and challenges being faced by the volunteer sector by improving its capacity to support small fire / rescue departments. The Office of the Fire Commissioner should identify and track issues affecting small volunteer departments, identify potential solutions or mitigation strategies and identify “best practices” and successful programs. It should document its findings and the developed programs for use by the small, volunteer departments. This unit should particularly focus on initiatives related to firefighter recruitment and retention.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY

This element contributes to public safety by supporting volunteer departments protect smaller communities.

RESPONSIBILITY

- The Office of the Fire Commissioner is responsible for this element

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Report on Issues Facing Small Fire Departments, April 2008

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

8. Heavy stress on the volunteer sector

RELATED ELEMENTS

- Element 25, Best Practices Guidelines
- Element 33, Recruitment / Retention Programs
- Element 34, Recruitment / Retention Incentives