



News Release

Canada, British Columbia and First Nations Leadership Council sign Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding to improve emergency management services for BC First Nations

April 27, 2019 — Vancouver, Coast Salish Territory, British Columbia — Indigenous Services Canada

Supporting First Nations communities in emergency situations is a priority for the Government of Canada. First Nations communities are often vulnerable because of their remote locations, and the government is committed to ensuring everyone in Canada has access to quick, reliable emergency services.

Today, the Honourable Seamus O'Regan, Minister of Indigenous Services, the Honourable Mike Farnworth, British Columbia Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs), Regional Chief Terry Teegee (British Columbia Assembly of First Nations), as well as Cheryl Casimer and Robert Phillips (both of the First Nations Summit), signed a Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on emergency management. This MOU leads the way to enhanced partnerships and emergency capacity that will benefit First Nations peoples and all British Columbians.

The MOU commits all parties to establish a formal relationship to hold collaborative, constructive and regular dialogue on emergency management issues. All parties will work in partnership to better support First Nations' capacity and ensure that their role in both the governance and operations of emergency management is acknowledged.

The MOU shows progress in commitments made by Canada and BC to address gaps in services identified during unprecedented natural disasters in 2017 and 2018 that adversely affected First Nations communities.

Quotes

“We are acutely aware of the devastating impact that floods, landslides and windstorms have—and the particular impact on First Nations communities, who are among the hardest hit. Working shoulder-to-shoulder with First Nations communities is a priority for the Government of Canada. Signing this MOU moves us all forward in ensuring emergency services delivery is inclusive, culturally safe and respects Indigenous knowledge.”

*The Honourable Seamus O'Regan, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Indigenous Services*

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“This Memorandum of Understanding recognizes the strong relationship this government has with First Nations leaders and communities; a relationship that has strengthened after the unprecedented floods and wildfires of 2017 and 2018. I am proud to take part in this MOU signing and to reaffirm our ongoing commitment to ensure First Nations communities are properly supported in the event of an emergency or natural disaster.”

*The Honourable Mike Farnworth
British Columbia’s Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General*

This MOU will create a new process to improve high-level issues related to emergency management in BC. For too long First Nations in BC have been at the forefront of impacts from climate change and emergencies from fires to floods. We need to be better prepared for the safety and security of all people in BC. This is an important step in the implementation and support for First Nations jurisdiction in Emergency Management. It is our right and responsibility to protect our territories, properties and cultural resources. We expect that we can do better to be prepared, respond to and recover from emergencies in BC.”

*Regional Chief Terry Teegee
BC Assembly of First Nations*

“The threat of climate change has become a glaring reality, the fire seasons of 2017 and 2018 ravaged Indigenous lands and territories beyond recognition. Through this MOU we hope that there will be increased resources, improved communications and fluid cooperation with those on the front lines who defend our environment and communities.”

*Grand Chief Stewart Phillip
President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs*

“This MOU is a platform to support reconciliation among First Nations, British Columbia and Canada as we strive to address the impacts of climate change. It commits us to engaging in regular dialogue on emergency management issues of mutual interest and concern, and working in a coordinated and constructive manner with First Nations communities to share information, best practices and possible approaches for responding to wildfires and emergencies in this province.”

*Robert Phillips
Task Group Member, First Nations Summit*

Quick Facts

- The governments of Canada and British Columbia have a 10-year, \$29.6 million bilateral Emergency Management Service Agreement to enhance the delivery of emergency management support services to on-reserve First Nations communities in British Columbia. This agreement enables all First Nations communities on reserves to receive emergency management support comparable to what is currently provided to other local authorities.
- The Government of Canada also has a service agreement to allow the BC Wildfire Service to fight wildfires on reserves.
- The tripartite approach to emergency management recognizes First Nations as full partners in the governance and operations of emergency management.
- In Budget 2019, the Government of Canada proposes to invest nearly \$259 million over five years, starting in 2019-2020, to strengthen the capacity of First Nations to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate emergency threats. This funding includes \$211 million over five years, starting in 2019-2020, to support increased preparedness and emergency management on reserves.
- The First Nations Leadership Council is formed by the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

Associated Links

- Province of British Columbia website: [Emergency Management Services Memorandum of Understanding](#)
- Report by the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs: [From the Ashes: Reimagining Fire Safety and Emergency Management in Indigenous Communities](#)
- Report by the Province of British Columbia: [Addressing the New Normal: 21st Century Disaster Management in British Columbia](#)

Jeff Valois
Director of Communications
Office of the Honourable Seamus O'Regan
Minister of Indigenous Services
613-698-2884

Media Relations
Indigenous Services Canada
819-953-1160
SAC.media.ISC@canada.ca

Jordan Turner
Communications Manager
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Emergency Management BC
250-952-5062

Colin Braker
Communications Director
First Nations Summit
604-926-9903
cbraker@fns.bc.ca

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