

Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry (AGFO)
The growing issue of wildfires in Canada and the
consequential effects that wildfires have on forestry and agriculture industries
April 16, 2024

QUESTION

Senator Klyne: I want to go back to something that Senator McNair had asked and you had referenced, Mr. Hargrove. I kind of had the question written down as this was going on.

With these wildfires, especially those that impact communities directly, there must be a huge number of stakeholders in many categories at varying levels and regions. How important and how difficult is it to keep all these stakeholders informed and up to date in real time? I recall some issues with that in the 2023 wildfires. There was one incident with a single road in or out where they stepped up their game to try to keep people up to date and informed in real time.

Are there any lessons learned there? Do you have a different way of communicating with stakeholders when some have been removed from their communities and others want to get back in, just to keep everybody up to date?

Ms. El Bied: Thank you for the question and for the comment. Based on the information that we got, I have to follow up on this because, honestly, through the lessons learned that we have run, there are always some challenges like that. We are ensuring that people are getting information in a timely manner and keeping them informed on a daily basis. Sometimes, communication is more than a couple of times during the day and asking if things are being moved. I can follow up if there are any specifics on those key elements that you have raised, what we have learned and how we are addressing this. Based on the information that I have seen lately; however, I cannot remember having seen a specific element regarding that, but I can do a follow-up and provide you a written response on that.

ANSWER

In Canada, Emergency Management is a shared responsibility and emergencies are managed first at the local level – for example, by first responders such as medical professionals and hospitals, fire departments, the police and municipalities. The management at the municipal level includes information sharing and communication with stakeholders. Local authorities who need assistance request it from provincial or territorial governments. If an emergency escalates beyond their capabilities, the province or territory may seek assistance from the federal government.

At the Federal level, the [Government Operations Centre](#) (GOC) supports preparedness for and leads the coordination of the integrated federal response to all-hazard events of national interest. In other words, the GOC coordinates federal departments and agencies, provinces and territories when the scope of an event requires a coordinated response.

The Watch is the GOC's 24/7 centre that monitors and reports on current and emerging issues in Canada or internationally that could impact our national interest. The GOC is responsible for providing analysis to senior officials, federal, provincial and territorial entities, and non-government organizations.

The GOC also maintains relationships with the provinces and territories through [Public Safety Regional Offices](#). During an emergency, the Regional Office becomes an extension of the GOC and helps coordinate the federal response at the regional level, and back up to the national strategic decision-making level.

At the Federal level, the after action review process highlighted the success of the integrated situational awareness provided by the GOC. During the wildfires season last year, Public Safety and the GOC played an important leadership, coordination, and situational awareness role across the Federal Government and nationally with Provincial and Territorial governments. Public Safety also found that the press conferences, technical briefings, and public health communications helped inform Canadians, and kept them aware of both the risks, and the actions being taken by their governments.

For the 2024 wildfire season, Public Safety Canada and key partners are enabling a strong preparedness strategy, utilizing subject matter expert analysis and lessons from 2023 and past seasons to assess potential fire dangers, weather patterns, and wind conditions and to develop public communications strategies and public health messaging and response.

Just as emergencies in Canada are managed first at the local level then the province or territory, Canadians are encouraged to tune into their local and provincial/territorial authorities for direction during emergencies. By following social media and/or listening to local radio stations, they will receive up-to-date information specific to their area, including road closures.

The Government of Canada is committed to supporting Canadians through the wildfire season. The federal wildfires web page, Canada.ca/wildfires, provides links to federal programs, resources and information for Canadians and to support provincial and territorial efforts to combat wildfires.

Public Safety Canada also regularly coordinates media briefings on behalf of multiple federal departments; pre-emptively, technical briefings for media and ministerial media conferences took place in both April and May in anticipation of the 2024 wildfire season. In addition, the Minister of Emergency Preparedness and the department communicate broadly with Canadians through news channels and social media when provinces and territories request federal assistance.