Comox-Strathcona Regional District Fire Innovations Project

Dave Mitchell & Associates Ltd.

Contents

Executive Summary

The fire departments within the Comox Strathcona Regional District range from urban fire departments such as Campbell River, Courtenay and Comox—which combine some paid staff along with volunteers—to small rural departments such as Zeballos, Tahsis and Gold River, which are comprised of a relatively small number of volunteers. The fire departments in the CSRD operate on the east and west coasts of Vancouver Island as well as several islands in the Strait of Georgia, and despite their differences share many common issues. To evaluate these issues and to develop a regional approach to addressing and resolving them, the Comox Strathcona Regional District applied for and received funding for a fire innovations project from the Province of BC.

The types of issues faced by CSRD Fire Departments range from matters such as recruitment and retention of personnel (a challenge shared by all departments), questions of evolving standards, the competence and training of fire crews, the costs associated with meeting recognized standards to more basic concerns about handling administrative functions, dealing with regulations and other organizational and operational questions. These issues were shared, to a greater or lesser degree, by each of the departments within the regional district, although certain of the matters were of greater concern to the smaller departments.

In a series of workshops attended by representatives of most of the regional Fire Departments as well members of the CSRD and the City of Courtenay, the participants collectively identified the major challenges facing the departments and suggested a number of key strategies for addressing them. Possible solutions ranged from increasing inter-departmental communications by establishing a regional fire chiefs' group to seeking a greater level of participation

by the Regional District as a coordinator or facilitator of selected activities and functions, including hosting a regional record management system.

In terms of priorities, the most important issues relate to the recruitment and retention of volunteer fire fighters. This challenge will be most effectively tackled by the regional Fire Chiefs and the Regional District working with the consultants to develop specific approaches and solutions, with related timelines and accountabilities for implementation.

The second major priority relates to training and certification of fire fighters to ensure that they are able to deal effectively with fire and other emergencies without unacceptable risk to themselves or to the public. The concern about the training of fire fighters is not related to any lack of desire or motivation on their part, rather it relates to the length of time it takes to fully train and certify them and to maintain their level of training given the high turn-over rate in the volunteer ranks. This is a long-term issue, but one that requires an immediate start and work should commence at the same time and in parallel to the first priority.

The other items identified, such as administrative support for the smaller fire departments, issues related to inspections and investigations, boundary questions, strategic training for chief officers, resource sharing, group purchases, etc., will require a similar effort, but are not the most pressing concerns. These have each been added to an action plan recommended to the Regional District and to the Fire Departments.

Background

On January 28, 2007, the Comox Strathcona Regional District [CSRD] issued an RFQ seeking responses for a 'Fire Innovations Project'. The scope of the project and related background information was set out in detailed appendices to the RFQ, which are reproduced as Appendices A and B to this report. Participating Fire Departments and Agencies are listed in Appendix D.

In broad terms, this project was designed to fully engage all of the groups and entities responsible for the delivery of fire services in the CSRD, ranging from very small volunteer departments, to composite urban departments. Specifically the desired outcome was described in Appendix B as

> *…. [developing] a coordinated program that will provide the optimum protection to all populated areas through the collaboration and pooling of regional resources.*

The project was awarded to Dave Mitchell & Associates Ltd. of Coquitlam who assigned four consultants to work with the CSRD. The following is a brief identification of the consultants who were involved in this phase of the project:

Dave Mitchell

Dave Mitchell [BA] retired as Division Chief, Communications in 1998 from Vancouver Fire & Rescue Services following a career spanning 32 years. During this time he was responsible for managing the emergency call taking and dispatch for the Vancouver and Whistler Fire Departments. In 1997 he managed the transition of dispatch service for the five Fire Departments on the Sunshine Coast from an independent contractor, to Vancouver Fire/Rescue.

In 1998 Mr. Mitchell was hired by E-Comm, Emergency Communications for Southwest BC as its first Operations Manager. In this role he was a member of the founding senior management team, and was responsible for the transition of the Regional 9-1-1 Control Centre staff from the Vancouver Police Department to its current location at 3301 East Pender in June 1999. By June 2000 this included the management of approximately 200 call takers, dispatchers and team managers in addition to a ULC listed alarm monitoring service.

He left E-Comm in June 2000 to work as a consultant, and since that time has managed the development of corporate, strategic and operational plans for a number of clients. In addition he has completed two fire hall location studies for clients in the GVRD, provided transition management services to Vancouver Fire/Rescue as it implemented a new Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system and is currently project manager for development of their new records management system.

In 2004 Mr. Mitchell provided technical advice to the Hon. Gary Filmon as part of the Firestorm 2003 Review. In 2005, along with ICTconsult Inc. he conducted a full review of the radio system for the fire departments on the Sunshine Coast Regional District. He is also currently completing a master fire plan for West Vancouver in addition to managing a major communications upgrade for the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, a new CAD acquisition and implementation for E-Comm as well as facilitating the discussions currently underway for the partial or full amalgamation of the fire departments for the Districts of West Vancouver and North Vancouver.

Dave received a Bachelor of Arts from Simon Fraser University in 1985 and in 1997 completed the Executive Management Development Program, also from SFU. He is currently a member of the Fire Chiefs Association of British Columbia (FCABC), the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the Canadian

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Association of Management Consultants (CAMC) and the Association of Professional Communications Officials (APCO) and has recently been named as Chair of their Public Safety Communications Standards Committee.

John Vokes

John Vokes [MA] served for 33 years in progressively responsible positions within the fire service. These positions include Director of the Justice Institute of BC's Fire & Safety Division, 17 years with British Columbia's Office of the Fire Commissioner - the last nine as Deputy of Policy and Operations, and prior to that, nine years as a career fire fighter.

In addition to providing technical, interpretive, and administrative advice related to administration of codes and standards, legislation that affects fire safety, enforcement of fire regulations, and the development of fire training strategies, John has assisted many local governments throughout British Columbia to establish and improve fire protection systems that provide for the safety of their residents. This experience has led to an in-depth understanding of fire service culture and operational needs related to fire safety.

John is highly trained, educated, and experienced in leading fire service initiatives having earned a Master of Arts degree (RRU) in Leadership and Training along with a Bachelor of General Studies degree (SFU) with a focus on Leadership in Justice and Public Safety Organizations, and a Fire Science Certificate (Mohawk College).

John has recently completed work on a Fire Services Review for the Squamish Lillooet Regional District as well as an impact study for the fire service at Big White.

Doug McRae

Deputy Fire Chief Doug McRae [Retired] served with Vancouver Fire/Rescue from 1973 through various ranks, until his promotion to Operational Deputy Fire Chief in October, 1999. In Vancouver, the operational deputy is responsible for the overall management and performance of one-third of the fire suppression services.

During his tenure as Deputy Fire Chief he was also responsible for all communications issues related to E-Comm and was the project sponsor for the implementation of the dispatch CAD system in 2001 along with the ongoing management of the Wide Area radio system.

Chief McRae also managed the hazardous materials team comprising 80 fire fighters in addition to facilities management which included the planning and development of replacement fire halls. Doug sat on various boards at E-Comm as the chairperson of the Fire Service Committee and the User Committee; he also represented the fire service on the 2010 Candidate City campaign, the 2009 Police and Fire games and the Symphony of Lights.

Doug has recently completed work on a Fire Services Review for the Squamish Lillooet Regional District and a Master Fire Plan for the West Vancouver Fire/Rescue Department.

Ian MacDonald

Ian MacDonald (BA (Hons), MA, LLB), is a former lawyer who practiced international corporate law in Canada and the United Kingdom. Mr. MacDonald has worked on large public and private financings in Canada, including the Strait Crossing Inc. project which put the financing and development agreements in

place for the construction of the bridge linking Prince Edward Island with New Brunswick. He also advised extensively on other financings, shareholder agreements and corporate restructurings and corporate acquisitions.

After moving to England, Mr. MacDonald became managing partner of a 12-partner intellectual property/litigation firm, and had a varied practice advising clients in respect of company formation, shareholder and members' agreements, corporate financing, governance issues and privacy matters.

Mr. MacDonald retired as a lawyer in January 2004 and returned to Canada, since which time he has become a volunteer director on the boards of two charitable organizations, acting as the chair of the governance committee for each of them, and assisted various community groups in developing long term strategic and business plans. Mr. MacDonald has previously worked with Planetworks on the CREST radio project, conducting a full governance review of that organization.

Workshops

The initial two meetings of the CSRD fire innovations project were held May 22nd and 23rd 2007 at the Oyster River Fire Hall. Those attending included members representing a majority of the fire departments in the CSRD along with staff from the Regional District, the City of Courtenay and several fire improvement districts.

Following introductions, the scope of the project as outlined in Appendix B of the RFQ was reviewed by CSRD representative, Debra Oakman. She noted that the Province is supporting efforts by the Regional Districts in taking the initiative to discuss fire service delivery. In the discussion that followed, it was agreed that while each fire service faced its own unique challenges, most of the issues were ones that were commonly shared.

Agenda

The agenda which had previously been circulated identified that the participants would discuss the current fire delivery model within the CSRD to achieve the following:

1. Provide mutual introductions of the project sponsors, facilitators and participants, and to set out the format for the workshops.
2. Review the fire innovations project background information [Schedule B of the RFQ] and clarify any related issues.
3. Discuss and analyse the current fire delivery model within the CSRD in order to:
    a. Identify and agree the relevant standards of service that should be used to review the current fire delivery model within the region and plan for the future,

   b. Identify the strengths of the current fire services within the CSRD in
       terms of all activities that are undertaken, including fire
       suppression, first responder, special teams, communications,
       training, apparatus, inspections, other matters,

   c. Identify any deficits in the delivery of fire services and at a high
       level discuss the ways in which these might be addressed including
       the priorities for each item. Participants were also asked to clarify
       the challenges and risks associated with not addressing the
       identified deficits.

4. At a high level describe the fire service that could meet the challenges
   identified in 3 c, while maintaining the strengths identified in 3 b.

5. Identify the key stakeholders that would be required to manage this
   process.

The second round of meetings of the Comox Strathcona Regional District fire
innovations project were held June 18th and 19th 2007 at the Oyster River Fire
Hall. As in the previous meetings, those attending included members
representing a majority of the fire departments in the CSRD along with staff from
the Regional District and the City of Courtenay.

The first item on the agenda was a brief review of the output of the previous
workshops followed by two presentations that had been requested by the
participants in May. The first of these was by Dave Mitchell on the issue of
communication standards[1] and its linkage to prompt and effective
response/arrival times and consequent effective delivery of fire suppression and
first responder services. The presentation outlined the time-critical nature of fire

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[1] These are found principally in the NFPA Standards 1221 [Standard for the Installation,
Maintenance and Use of Emergency Services Communications Systems], NFPA 1710 [Standard
for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical
Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments] and NFPA 1720 [
Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency
Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments].

and other emergencies and demonstrated that quicker call processing times can shorten response times which in turn improves survivability and reduces property losses.

The second presentation, by Ian Baikie of North Island 911 Corporation[2], reviewed potential efficiencies that could be achieved in hastening the arrival of fire fighters by invoking automatic mutual aid in one or more areas. This analysis was based on a GIS review of travel times from various fire halls to certain locations and showed that in a number of cases, a more timely arrival to an emergency could be achieved by having more than one fire department respond. In these specific areas, the first arriving would likely be from an adjacent jurisdiction.

The final action for the workshop was a detailed review of the prioritized list of issues that had been identified in the previous two-day workshop. The list of issues was fully reviewed and specific actions were identified for each of the 20 major areas.

The major issues were developed in the first set of workshops and identified areas of significant risk or weakness. The identified challenges are set out below:

1. Establishment of standards acceptable region-wide which must be met before a firefighter or an officer is qualified to go onto the fireground.
2. Improved availability of training to meet the agreed standards, which addresses issues of logistics, location, costs and time.
3. Enhanced inter-departmental cooperation and planning: Standard Operating Guidelines [O/G's].
4. Development of equitable mutual aid arrangements throughout the region;

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[2] Details regarding the North Island 911 Corporation can be found at: http://www.nisl911.bc.ca/

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5. Sharing/transferring of current and redundant resources (e.g., training manuals, used equipment etc.).

6. Use of mass/group purchasing to reduce capital costs.

7. Inter-operability/standardization of equipment.

8. Increased use of third party evaluations of the operations of a department, (including training, equipment and management).

9. Management of recruitment issues.

10. Management of firefighter retention issues.

11. The need for workshops for managers, chiefs etc., to help them understand their potential liability under applicable legislation, including Worksafe BC & Bill C45.

12. The need for smaller departments to be able to "upload" some of their administrative obligations and obtain administrative help in dealing with regulatory burdens.

13. The need to develop an effective region-wide system that will enable smaller departments to obtain assistance, advice or direction.

14. The need to develop the business case for obtaining increased grant and other funding from the senior levels of government.

15. The need to become a more effective lobby group with senior levels of government and the public.

16. The challenge of dealing with unprotected areas (areas which are inhabited/commercially used but have no fire protection). Examples included: Mt. Washington (residential); the North side of Duncan Bay Rd. (mix residential/ commercial); and Menzies Bay (industrial).

17. An effective means of dealing with boundary questions and anomalies.

18. Development of effective fire prevention by-laws and contract areas.

19. Rationalize and improve fire investigations.

20. Rationalize and improve fire inspections.

The workshop participants were challenged to consider this list and to prioritize each item Based on that assessment, the list can be refreshed to show the relative importance from highest to lowest as follows[3].

Highest Priority

1. Manage the recruitment of volunteer fire fighters [#9].
2. Manage the retention of volunteer fire fighters once they have been recruited [#10].

High Priority

1. Establish and implement regionally accepted standards of training and certification of fire fighters which must be met before a fire fighter or an officer is qualified to operate on the fire ground [#1].
2. Provide a method for smaller fire departments to upload some of their administrative tasks/workload [#12].
3. Provide a method for these same departments to obtain assistance, advice or direction [#13].
4. Deal with unprotected areas that are inhabited or commercially used, but have no fire protection [#16].
5. Deal with/resolve boundary issues and anomalies [#17].
6. Address the issue of interoperability and standardization of equipment [#7].

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[3] For ease of comparison the item number previously assigned is shown.

Medium Priority

1. Develop a case for obtaining increased grant and other funding from senior levels of government [#14].
2. Implement enhanced inter-departmental cooperation and planning [#3].
3. Address fire prevention bylaws and contract areas [#18].
4. Rationalize and improve fire investigations [#19].
5. Rationalize and improve fire inspections [#20].

Medium—Low Priority

1. Obtain improved availability of training to meet the agreed upon standards in a way that addresses the issues of logistics, location, costs and time [#2].
2. Develop an equitable mutual aid arrangement throughout the region [#4].
3. Implement an increased use of third-party evaluations of the operations of a department including training, equipment and management [#8].

Low Priority

1. Increased sharing or transferring of current and redundant resources [#5].
2. Use of mass or group purchasing to reduce capital costs [#6].
3. Develop workshops for Chiefs, managers, etc., to understand their potential liability under applicable legislation, including WorkSafe BC and Bill C45 [#11].
4. Become a more effective lobby group with senior levels of Government and the public [#15].

Detailed Review

The workshop participants discussed each of these major issues and described the context for them, and then identified specific actions that would be recommended.

Highest Priority

Manage the Recruitment of Volunteer Fire Fighters

The issue of how to successfully manage the recruitment of volunteer fire fighters was identified by the group as being their highest priority; followed closely by the parallel issue which is the challenge of retaining them once they have been recruited. The various challenges to successful recruitment are noted in the following section along with proposed actions.

Comments

- In many areas there are simply not enough people to draw from as a result of changing demographics and the many other opportunities there are for employment.
- There are also challenges to entry both in terms of higher fitness levels as well as background and other checks that are necessary to ensure that suitable candidates are brought into the fire service.
- It was also noted that many individuals may view their 'non-work' time as having multiple priorities, only one of which might be volunteering as a fire fighter.

- Coupled with the increased entry requirements, fire fighters today are expected to attend more practice time in addition to attending training courses that are outside of their area of residence.

Actions

- Develop a recruitment program that is very compelling and inclusive, with a goal to attract the broadest possible group. Need clear expectations
- Identify increased opportunities for recruiting including participation with trade fairs, as well as presenting the career opportunity at high schools or regional colleges.
- Develop a series of incentives that would encourage individuals to want to volunteer; these may include:
    - Offering training as an opportunity leading to transferable skills,
    - Honoraria for attendance at practices and call outs,
    - Community appreciation programs/days,
    - Uniforms.
- Community recognition of businesses which allow or encourage their employees to volunteer as a fire fighter.
- Develop and conduct surveys to determine what current programs are working well to recruit volunteers and how these could be enhanced
- Develop an awareness and advertising program that could be used region wide.

Manage Retention of Volunteer Fire Fighters Once They Have Been Recruited

Retention of fire fighters once they had been recruited and trained was the second highest priority item. Many departments now identify a considerable turn-

over of volunteers, in some cases approaching 30%. This has a significant impact as departments are required to spend much more time and money recruiting to fill absences. There is also the issue of the 'sunk' cost for the department for all the training they have conducted with the departing fire fighters if they cannot be retained. Finally, the high turnover rate coupled with the length of time taken to complete training means that at any given time fire departments have a significant proportion of their members that may not be fully trained and are therefore of limited use on a fire ground.

Comments

Many of the issues related to retention are similar to recruitment as will be noted below.

- Higher standards of training are required, that necessitate a greater/longer commitment in participation, both in terms of initial training and maintenance training.
- The robust economy has led to greater competition for the time of people who may otherwise be prepared to make a commitment to the volunteer fire department.
- In a number of areas, higher housing prices make it more difficult to encourage people to reside within an area that will allow them effectively respond with the volunteer department.
- The training provided to volunteer fire fighters tends to make them more suitable candidates for employment as a career fire fighter; a work history as a volunteer or paid on call fire fighter is seen as providing a significant advantage for an individual applying with a career department.
- Lack of an incentive or recognition program may lead to volunteer fire fighters feeling under-appreciated.

- Too few opportunities to utilize the skills that they have learned (often training, but seldom performing).

- Alternatively, too many responses to emergency incidents and other activities which makes the commitment too extensive for volunteers to manage.

- Concerns of some volunteers about being involved in the first responder program.

- Requirement to always be 'on call'.

Actions

- Ensure that the level of interest is kept as high as possible; specific strategies to ensure this include but are not limited to:
   o High quality training opportunities,
   o Live fire training.

- Develop community recognition programs that convey to the volunteer fire fighters the degree to which the community relies and depends upon them and appreciates their efforts, including the following:
   o Identify retention 'best practices' within the CSRD as well as other areas,
   o Continue with awards banquets,
   o Recognize long service,
   o Ensure that local, regional, provincial and federal politicians are given an opportunity to participate with these.

- Ensure the community profile of the fire department is as high as possible[4] to enhance the attractiveness of volunteering with the department.

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[4] This is separate from the recognition of the individual as a volunteer fire fighter, but is closely linked.

- o Specific actions could include press releases to announce recruitment and training actions as well as particular incidents to which the departments have responded.

- Develop programs that increase the participation of the fire departments with the community to increase the departments' profile.

  - o Specific actions could include participation with community fireworks programs for Halloween, Canada Day, etc.

  - o Consider one or more such activities that are conducted region wide by a majority of fire departments.

- Ensure that each department has a regular feedback process from its volunteers so that any issues that may discourage their participation are addressed as early as possible.

  - o This may include the development of an online survey process that could be shared by departments as a way to ensure positive [and negative] feedback is identified and addressed quickly.

- Develop a 'family atmosphere' that is inclusive of spouses/partners and other family members.

  - o Examples of this may include having participation by the volunteer's family in activities such as Valentine's Day[5] dances, BBQ's, picnics, etc.

- Endeavour to ensure that volunteers attend a reasonable balance of incidents.[6]

- Conduct exit interviews with volunteer fire fighters who are leaving to understand whether there are any specific actions that could or should be taken so as to avoid the departure of other volunteers.

- Consider the development of some types of benefit programs to provide additional reasons for volunteers to stay with the fire department.

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[5] It was well noted that spouses were far more supportive if the volunteer fire fighter also observed Valentine's Day, Mother's Day etc., with them and with their families.
[6] It is noted that some departments get too busy or have an excessive number of calls of a certain type; for some departments the number of calls becomes overwhelming, making retention of their regular job more difficult.

- o The benefits could include extended medical and disability insurance coverage.
- o A review of these programs and perhaps the opportunity for them to be offered in a more cost-effective way on a regional basis should be considered.
- o The CSRD may have an opportunity to manage the application for such programs and may also be able to coordinate an effective 'group purchase' program.

High Priority

Establish and Implement Regionally Accepted Standards of Training and Certification of Fire Fighters Which Must Be Met Before a Fire Fighter or an Officer Is Qualified To Operate on the Fire Ground

The question of fire ground competence was seen as a significant potential risk, with the degree of risk increasing as the size of the department got smaller. The larger departments are better able to manage this challenge, as with more fire fighters, their ability to handle a structure fire or similar incident will not be compromised by having at the fire scene some fire fighters whose role will be limited by insufficient training or experience. Enough trained fire fighters can be expected turn out to deal with the incident.

For the smaller departments, however, which are proportionately more adversely affected by issues of training, turn-over in personnel and difficulties in attracting sufficient recruits, this issue can be critical. It can mean that a small department, arriving at a significant fire incident, cannot safely do more than seek to prevent the spread of the fire beyond its point of origin. To take a more aggressive approach would put the fire fighters at risk and potentially be a breach of the department's and the commander's statutory obligations to the fire fighters. Absent sufficient properly trained personnel, situations will likely arise where a

smaller department cannot risk attacking a structure fire—a circumstance that will necessarily lead to greater property damage and potentially increased risk for residents who may be trapped in the fire.

The issue of fire ground training and competence is also relevant to mutual aid situations. Absent agreed levels and approaches, there is a risk that an incident commander will not know the skill levels of other departments' volunteers or career fire fighters who may be responding to a major call out. Within some departments there is a move to provide some obvious identification of training levels, often times by colour coding helmets or turnout gear. The challenge at present is that this is not standardized so that a colour code used by one department may be subject to a different interpretation by another, which could lead to an incident commander placing a fire fighter into a situation for which he or she is not prepared.

Comments

- The issue relates to clarifying the basic level of training that must be achieved before a fire fighter can enter the fire ground safely.
  - This task can be subdivided to encompass the definition of the graduated series of qualifications; these may include:
    - Acting as a fire ground resource to others more qualified—a first level,
    - Operating the various pieces of apparatus which includes all of the previous competencies—a second level,
    - Entering a burning structure which includes all of the previous competencies—a third level.
- Use the Basic Fire Fighting Certificate training as the minimum for entering the fire ground.

- Consider using different colour coding for personal protective equipment—helmets and/or service coats—to distinguish the level of competence.
    - Noted that this would need to be standardized to prevent confusion at mutual aid incidents.
    - There will also be a requirement to review the O/G's being used within the region to ensure they are harmonized with regard to the issues of:
        - Levels of competence that are agreed upon for entry onto the fire ground,
        - Identification of fire fighters within the agreed upon levels of competence.
- This task will require a high degree of consensus with the Fire Chiefs and their full participation with this will be vital.
- The various levels of competence will require specific training and one significant barrier to this may have been access to training.
    - The departments[7] or sites that offer training and evaluation for each level of competence within the region[8] should be identified and clarified for all departments,
    - The CSRD may consider supporting the implementation of a 'train the trainer' program based on each of the agreed upon levels of competence.

Actions

- Confirm the agreement that the National Fire Protection Association standards are the ones that apply[9].

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[7] Comox Fire has the site and instructors to train to Fire Fighter 1 [FF1] and Fire Fighter 2 [FF2]
[8] Comox Fire noted that their training schedule rapidly fills up and as of mid June, the schedule for the fall of 2007 was already 60% booked
[9] The Office of the Fire Commissioner notes the following in this regard: *By Ministerial Order, effective January 1, 2003, the National Fire Protection Association training standards have*

- Establish consistent training policy requirements.

- Establish officer training protocols and levels.

- Establish a consistent and standard protocol applicable to fire fighters entering the fire ground and working at a fire scene, including entry into a burning building.

- Consider colour coding of turnout gear [helmets and/or coats] based on training levels.

- Identify best practices from other jurisdictions for standards to enter and operate on the fire ground.

- Review the 'grandfathering' of fire fighters with long experience but who lack specific certification.

- Consider whether and when re-certification or refresher training may be required.
  - This may include a review of policies related to skills maintenance training.

Provide a Method for Smaller Fire Departments to Upload Some of Their Administrative Tasks/Workload

A number of fire departments, principally the smaller ones, noted a real difficulty in managing some of their administrative tasks and workload. The workshop participants were not overly specific in terms of what they required, but the ability to 'upload' some part of their administrative tasks was seen as a way the CSRD could significantly assist and allow them to focus on more operational issues.

Workshop participants also commented that they relied increasingly on technology—computerization in general plus issues related to the Internet—to run their fire departments and that while these are important this is not always

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replaced the British Columbia Fire Service Training Standards. This can be found at:
http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/firecom/index.htm#legislation

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their core competence. At some point the CSRD could provide significant assistance to these departments by assisting in ways to ensure that secure data back up is provided and that issues related to connectivity etc., could be available.

Comments

- The need for a centralized/standard approach to software support in the region was identified.
- Without being specific, the tasks to be considered were probably below the threshold of actions that the manager of protective services would manage; they may be appropriate for an administrative assistant or a similar position at the Regional District level.
- Some part of the support would deal with issues such as remote addressing and for these, a summer student or other part-time position could be appropriate.

Actions

- CSRD to implement a record management system[10] [RMS].
- CSRD to assist the departments with development of a long-term capital plan.
- CSRD to create a shared regional database of fire fighters.
- CSRD to develop and maintain templates for O/G's.
- CSRD to assist the fire departments with information technology [IT] functions such as back up and software licensing.

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[10] A Record Management System is an integrated system of software to provide tracking and management for a very wide range of fire departments activities including the general categories of 'persons, places and things'. More specifically they provide inter-related 'modules' dealing with: personnel, training, certification, station journal, public education, asset management, preventive maintenance, roster management, buildings/properties, inspections, incident reporting, hazards, pre-plans, etc.

- CSRD to provide some assistance for the departments with IT issues related to maintaining their computer and other communication equipment.
- CSRD to coordinate the implementation of a standardized model for house numbers that would allow for recognition of these within the region.

Provide a Method for These Same Departments to Obtain Assistance, Advice or Direction

Similar to item 4 above, many of the fire departments noted that they would generally benefit from the identification of a resource for advice and direction over and above purely information technology types of issues. The appropriate individual for this may in fact be the manager of protective services however there is not a uniform understanding that he can assist with these as required. It was also recognized that the Comox Valley Fire Chiefs Association might also be a good resource in terms of operational and other advice and that this group could be expanded to make it a regional body.

Comments

- Assistance is required for any number of tasks from time to time and these include issues related to training, fire fighter evaluation, etc.
- Members of the Comox Valley Fire Chiefs' Association reviewed the degree to which they are already doing this for departments within their area and suggested this informal model might work for the region.

Actions

- Expand the Comox Valley Fire Chiefs' Association to become a CSRD Fire Chiefs' Association.

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- Clarify the availability of the manager of protective services as a resource for the fire departments throughout the region.

Deal with Unprotected Areas That Are Inhabited or Commercially Used, But Have No Fire Protection

Residential and commercial property that is developed outside of areas with defined fire protection occurs in a number of areas within the CSRD. The discussion of this topic was an epiphany for a number of the participating fire departments and in general this was a topic that was previously not well understood at least in terms of the extent to which it occurs. Development in the unprotected areas may be gradual and the lack of fire protection becomes more of an issue as the number and value of properties rises.

From the perspective of the local fire departments, they may not have a legal requirement to attend a fire or other emergency in an undeveloped area, but in some cases these may literally be across the street from a protected property. While there may be no legal requirement to respond there is the perception at least of a moral requirement to provide service if possible. In other unprotected areas, the development that has occurred is significantly distant from an existing fire department meaning that a response from an existing department is unlikely to be timely or effective.

In the first example, the most practical and effective approach may be to expand an existing department's coverage footprint pursuant to an appropriate fire protection agreement. In the second example, where coverage from an existing fire department is impractical, establishment of a new fire department may be the better option.

As noted, the problem of residential and commercial development in areas without fire protection may be less of an issue to the local fire departments (who generally will not provide service unless a specific agreement is reached) and more of a concern for the CSRD. Given that the establishment of fire services is a matter of local discretion, if the residents in the unprotected areas do not support the development of a fire department there may be relatively little that the CSRD can do. However, the CSRD should make use of its role in authorizing major developments by requiring that such developments make appropriate provision for fire protection.

Comments

- The specific issue is that there are a number of populated areas that do not have fire protection; the lack of fire protection potentially places lives and property at risk.
- This is a higher priority for the CSRD; less so for the individual fire departments.
- It was felt generally that the CSRD should revisit its approach to development in areas without fire protection.
- The fire chiefs within the region are prepared to work with the CSRD in terms of providing advice and developing a strategy for implementation of fire protection in areas that are currently not serviced.
- Some unprotected areas could be added to an existing protection district or municipal fire department as they are within a reasonable travel and response time from the existing hall(s).
- Other unprotected areas may be too far away to offer services from an existing department and where this is the case coverage could be provided from a new/additional fire hall for an existing department or by the development of a new stand-alone fire department.

Actions

- CSRD to work with the fire departments to develop an inventory of all unprotected areas.
- Develop an improved communication process to ensure that any new developments in unprotected areas are identified and added to the inventory.
- Consider developing a new referendum process for Mount Washington to test for support for fire protection.
- Develop an appropriate reimbursement/pricing structure for fire services provided by other departments.
- Clarify whether Development Cost Charges can be levied to ensure appropriate capital planning to establish fire services; alternately understand whether this is better managed as part of the rezoning process.
- Require that project developers supply amenities needed to support fire services when new developments are undertaken.

Deal With/Resolve Boundaries

This issue differs from the previous item in that the properties in this case are within a fire protection area or serviced by a municipal fire department, but are closer geographically to a fire hall in another area. This question is one that requires some degree of political sensitivity in terms of dealing with the existing service provider that may have been providing fire protection for a significant period of time.

On the other hand it can be clearly demonstrated that shortening the time for fire fighters to respond to a fire or other emergency can significantly increase the

safety of the residents and limit the degree of damage caused by a fire. The workshop participants had a considerable discussion regarding automatic mutual aid whereby the properties in these defined areas would receive a response from two fire departments—the geographically closest department would be dispatched simultaneously with the department that has the legal jurisdiction.

Implementation of automatic mutual aid is technically straight forward. Deputy Chief Ian Baikie, who manages the North Island 911 Corporation, pointed out that the existing computer aided dispatch system contains all the software required to enable automatic mutual aid to occur. It would be necessary, however, for the affected departments to establish agreements as to the areas which are to receive this service before it can be implemented. It should be noted that, at the present time, such forms of automatic mutual aid occur in a number of places in BC.

Comments

- There are currently gaps and/or overlaps in available coverage for some areas; for these areas although the property is within one jurisdiction, a fire hall in another jurisdiction is closer and could be expected to arrive sooner.
- Such forms of automatic mutual aid would likely lead to improved customer service but may raise some jurisdictional issues in terms of 'ownership' of the fire report, etc. and this could be managed by having the closest hall respond + the hall from the actual jurisdiction.
- Implementation of automatic mutual aid on this basis would require that legal and cost issues be clarified in advance by the affected departments.

Actions

- Assess areas where a case for automatic mutual aid may be relevant based on fire hall location, response times, traffic patterns and other variables.
- Potentially amend boundaries to reflect response times or implement automatic mutual aid to these areas.

Address the Issue of Interoperability and Standardization of Equipment

In many parts of British Columbia, interoperability between fire departments is increasing due both to increased call volumes and a relative decline in the number of available volunteer fire fighters at various times of the day[11]. There are many tangible benefits to the public as well as the fire service where interoperability exists, including increased cost-effectiveness by reducing somewhat the need to have as many fire fighters trained and available within any one jurisdiction. Safety for fire fighters as well as residents may also be increased where a larger number of them can be called to the scene to assist with major fires, hazardous materials events and similar large scale incidents.

For reasons of safety and effectiveness, however, the increased level of interoperability requires a significant focus on standardization of procedures and equipment to ensure they are fully harmonized. Fire fighting is dangerous enough without having to cope at the scene of an emergency with multiple terms and phrases for the same commands or with equipment incompatibilities (such as air bottles and breathing apparatus).

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[11] A number of recent studies in British Columbia have demonstrated that the number of volunteers responding to calls at night is significant, often the majority of the department, while the response during normal business hours may be virtually zero. This in some ways is also linked to the issue of recruitment and retention

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The fire departments within the CSRD have made some strides individually toward standardizing issues within their own departments but this is not always the case across the region. The participants agreed these issues needed to be addressed. One example of a positive initiative is the Comox Valley mutual aid agreement that has led to a number of initiatives to standardize training and equipment. One example of a multi region initiative to standardize some terms and phrases is contained within the dispatch system which is supplied and maintained by the North Island 911 Corporation.

Comments

- This requirement to standardize is very important for Mutual and Automatic aid scenarios.
- There is a requirement for standardized radio configurations and profiles.
- Certain personal protective equipment, particularly important items such as breathing apparatus, needs to be standardized to ensure there are no 'mix-ups' when different departments are working together; in this particular case it is noted that some departments have air bottles that are not compatible with others.
- Some departments have 'cascade' air refilling capabilities but where there are differences in the types of air bottles these refilling systems cannot accommodate all users.
- Hose couplings can also be a problem where some departments use threaded couplings while others use quick-connect couplings such as Storz$^©$.
- Fire hydrants have different coloured 'caps' that indicate pressure or water flow but it was noted that some departments within the CSRD use different colour codes for the same hydrant condition.

Actions

- Determine where differences currently exist in critical equipment that may affect the ability to deliver mutual aid safely.
- Prioritize standardization efforts once gaps are identified; implement in a staged fashion.
- Assess current radio channels & procedures and develop consistent standards & approaches.

Medium Priority

Develop a Case for Obtaining Increased Grant and Other Funding From Senior Levels of Government

External funding to support fire department operations is available from one or more sources but it has not always been requested or obtained by every department. In addition, some fire department activities could benefit from additional targeted funding from senior levels of government.

The Office of the Fire Commissioner has been able to provide funding for regional initiatives[12] over the past several years. In addition, some portion of fire fighter training is supported directly or indirectly, but not all departments may have taken full advantage of it. The 2007 Peter Cameron report into the role of the fire service in pre-hospital care has also suggested that, in some cases, financial assistance for the fire first responder program should be provided by the Emergency Health Services Commission[13].

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[12] This current study received funding support from the Province of BC and specifically from the Office of the Fire Commissioner in the Ministry of the Solicitor General

[13] First Responders, Fire Services and Pre-hospital Emergency Care in British Columbia: A Report to the Emergency Health Services Commission, by Peter Cameron, page 6 where it notes: *The Commission should establish a policy for financial assistance for FR agencies (and*

It is recommended that new initiatives, specific to the identified needs within the fire service, should be developed and discussed with senior levels of government to help address issues such as training that are probably beyond the ability of some of the smaller fire departments.

Comments

- The CSRD is probably the appropriate agency to take the lead once the requirements for the funding are determined but this does not preclude other departments from making a funding request where appropriate.
- It was noted that the recently released Cameron report has opened the door for funding to support fire first responder programs.
- Training is probably one of the key components for which grant and other funding should be sought; it was felt generally that the provincial government has not been given the opportunity to step up to the plate to support training in part at least due to their lack of awareness of the problem.
- It was noted that there is a need to get the current Solicitor General fully on board as the fire service/Office of the Fire Commissioner lies within his ministry.
- At least one department noted that they had received training money for some special operations teams.
- Need to seek funding for training and providing coverage for auto fires.
- Funding is needed for education and training; one option would be to seek funding to develop a roving training unit that could service the smaller departments.

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potential agencies) in rural and remote communities where no recognized training agency offers first responder courses in the community.

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- Funding is also needed to develop special operations teams – hazmat, high angle rescue, etc.

- Fire services are not always funded to appropriate levels in a number of areas; this may require education of local taxpayers and municipal governments as well.

- It was felt that the CSRD and fire departments should seek funding from PEP; PEP should be helping with training because ultimately they will be relying on the fire departments to support the implementation of the emergency plans.

- In another regional district, there is a current request before the government for assistance with the development of a training centre; the business plan was developed to show the benefit to the local community and the Province.

- It was felt that the CSRD and fire departments should use capital projects for specific funding applications and work through local MLA's for support.

Actions

- Implementation of a fire RMS would provide much of the statistical information needed to support grant applications.

- Develop a consolidated list of all potential sources of funding (e.g., JEPP[14] Grants, Fire Innovations, Fire Commissioner, etc.).

- Develop appropriate shared funding approaches.

- Determine the rules for retiring capital equipment and review how this is done across the departments in the CSRD.

- Create a database that shows likely needs to renew equipment, to facilitate coordinated capital grant requests and/or joint purchasing efforts.

- Approach BC Ambulance to get first responder supplies, equipment and training; it was noted that if a department was not participating with the

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[14] Joint Emergency Preparedness Fund

first responder program that the BC Ambulance Service will potentially pay to set it up[15].

- Develop a position paper that can be forwarded to the appropriate task group of the Fire Service Liaison Group [Model Project] with suggestions for funding sources to be identified.

Implement Enhanced Inter-Departmental Cooperation and Planning: Operational Guidelines

The development of standard Operational Guidelines started nearly 20 years ago, and the practice has grown and been implemented in many, but not all fire departments within the region. In at least one case, one of the smallest fire departments within the CSRD was planning to start developing O/G's but it appeared to be an overwhelming task.

This would certainly be the case if a fire department needed to build these 'from scratch' but that should not be the case. Instead, the CSRD[16] should undertake the task of providing a template for O/G's based on identified best practices within the region. These templates could then provided in an electronic 'soft copy' to any other fire department as a basis for their own operating guidelines.

A number of the participants noted that the O/G's need to be harmonized across the region to ensure that different departments do not have conflicting operating guidelines, especially where those departments might employ mutual aid. In both cases—providing templates for the development of O/G's as well as the review and harmonization of O/G's—it was felt that the CSRD should take an active role in coordinating the work.

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[15] It is noted that this may however require ongoing support for the program once initiated and this would fall to local government.
[16] Manager of Protective Services

Comments

- Regional Fire Chiefs can address this issue best
    - Take the O/G's that have reasonable commonality and implement those across the region (with appropriate, department-specific variation).
    - Use a staged approach on the O/G's where there are material differences.
- It is critical to ensure that the substance of the main O/G's is the same.
- There is a critical need for coherent and consistent operational O/G's if mutual aid is to be properly delivered and a consequent need to train to these common standards.
- The aim is to develop a common bank of guidelines that will be modified for specific departments; there has to be enough in common to ensure that common operations can be safely delivered.
- From a risk management perspective, there has to be an essential coherence between the O/G's; they cannot be in conflict with each other.
- Issue can be very complicated and complete uniformity may not be achieved because of differences between the departments (both in terms of equipment, training and potential fire situations).
- For smaller departments, given the problems with day shift staffing, meeting various standards may not be possible. In that case, it was important to have a "Plan B", which involved the development of guidelines that address the specific situations faced by smaller departments. In essence, these O/Gs would limit the actions taken by smaller departments if the turn-out for an event was insufficient.
- O/G's must be designed to address the principal issues; smaller departments don't require the same large number of O/G's that a larger department might.

- Noted that it was important to prioritize key O/G's for each particular department (e.g. chimney fires for a department that has a lot of those incidents).

Actions

- The CSRD should obtain an inventory of O/G's in soft copy and act as a repository.
- O/G's should be incorporated in the proposed RMS and made available online; training lesson plans and job descriptions/expectations should also be gathered and made available.
- Review existing O/G's to ensure that there are no material conflicts: focus on operations, safety, and training.
- Coherent and consistent region-wide O/G's on radio channels and operations should be based on NFPA standards.
- Consider provincial standards that may emanate from 2003 firestorm issues and the subsequent report by the Hon. Gary Filmon.
- Identify critical issues relating to the safe and effective delivery of mutual aid and develop relevant O/G's.
- The CSRD should ensure that O/G's that are developed for use by fire departments within the region comply with the guidelines for O/G's developed by the Office of the Fire Commissioner, including the use of correct terminology and format.

Address Fire Prevention Bylaws and Contract Areas

The implementation of fire prevention bylaws within the region appears to have developed in an uneven manner. In some areas without a formal fire protection agreement, there may not be a regular program of inspections based on an

adopted fire prevention bylaw. In addition, the fire prevention bylaws for various areas within the region may be different which could result in an uneven level of regulation.

In non-municipal areas, the provision of fire protection (suppression) is not related to a program of inspections unless the area is covered by a specific fire prevention bylaw. This has to be agreed upon by the elected officials and administration for the area or by the regional district. The obligation to carry out investigations and inspections arises under the Fire Services Act (the "FSA") and falls within the authority of the Fire Commissioner. Investigations and inspections are carried out by Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner (LAFC's). The powers and authorities granted under the FSA can be supplemented by local or regional by-laws.

Within municipalities, the FSA provides for the appointment and defines the role of LAFC's.[17] In municipalities that maintain a fire department, the fire chief is the LAFC.[18] The chief may then appoint other department members as LAFC's to assist him/her. If there is no fire department, then the Mayor of the municipality is the LAFC, unless the Fire Commissioner has appointed someone else. In areas that are not in a municipality, the Fire Commissioner may, upon request, appoint[19] an LAFC with the agreement of the local authorities and the RCMP. In the event that an LAFC has not been so appointed, the RCMP officers stationed in the area are the LAFC's.

Under the FSA, the LAFC has the powers of a peace officer for the purposes of the act, and is permitted at all reasonable times to enter properties to identify possible fire hazards, both upon complaint or without complaint if deemed

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[17] Fire Services Act, Section 6.
[18] Fire Services Act, Section 6 [1] [a]
[19] Fire Services Act, Section 6 (2) and 6 (3)

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advisable. The LAFC may order that any dangerous conditions be remedied by the property's owner at the owner's expense.[20]

The FSA also places a responsibility on each Municipal Council to develop a system of inspections of "*hotels* and *public buildings*" (as defined) within their community.[21] Of note, the definition of '*hotel*' includes "*any club or building where lodging is provided except a private dwelling*". The definition of '*public building*' includes a "*factory, warehouse, store, mill, school, hospital, theatre or other building other than a private dwelling*." This requirement is not extended to non-municipal areas and will not apply unless the issue is addressed in a fire prevention bylaw or other regional district requirement.

Comments

- There is a need to review contracted areas where there are separate sets of rules related to inspections or where there is a lack of fire prevention by laws.
- Fire prevention bylaws need to be reviewed and updated.

Actions

- Develop a bylaw template that can be used by various areas to initiate or update local bylaws—a form of this already exists in the manual entitled "Establishing and Operating a Fire Department[22]".
- CSRD[23] to review the current bylaws across the region and assess the need for updates to address gaps.

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[20] Fire Services Act, Sections 7, 21, 22 and 24
[21] Fire Services Act, Section 26
[22] Office of the Fire Commissioner publication
[23] Manager of Protective Services

Rationalize and Improve Fire Inspections

This topic is closely related to the previous item and would allow a local authority to ensure that it complies with the requirement to conduct regular fire inspections. Training and assistance from the larger departments within the region would provide a good level of guidance for the smaller departments along with the implementation of a regional record management system to track and manage fire inspections, if that jurisdiction has undertaken to provide fire prevention inspections as one of its services.

Comments

- Fire inspection activities within all protected and unprotected areas in the region range from good to non-existent

Actions

- Assess the demand and reasons for carrying out an inspection.
- Conduct a cost/benefit analysis and/or collect evidence of best practices from other regions with any supporting data available from them.
- Investigate role of Fire Commissioner in conducting inspections, particularly where no one else has responsibility.
- Review issues related to coordination between the CSRD and Municipalities, particularly where issues are determined to exist in areas under regional authority.

Rationalize and Improve Fire Investigations

The larger fire departments within the CSRD generally have the resources to conduct fire investigations when required, an ability that is probably lacking for

smaller departments. For many of these smaller areas, the ability to utilize trained and experienced fire investigators from departments that do have them would be a significant advantage in fulfilling their regulatory obligations.

Fire investigations are a legal requirement for all fire departments in the Province; however it is generally agreed that they are not conducted to the same level of diligence. The ability of use trained investigators from other departments would be enhanced by a regional RMS that would allow for a more uniform level of investigations as well as providing for the appropriate 'upload' of fire investigation outcomes to the Office of the Fire Commissioner.

Comments

- Fire investigations at the current time are not always available through a member of the department, especially in smaller departments.
- The Fire Services Act requires that all fires within a jurisdiction be investigated, and reported by the LAFC. In the absence of an LAFC being appointed for a non-municipal area, the RCMP is responsible to investigate the fire and report it to the fire commissioner.

Actions

- It is felt that the Fire Commissioner is currently offering less support than previously in support of fire investigations; consequently there is a need to develop another solution to the issue of fire investigations.
- Consider the use of trained investigators that exist within BC.
- Create a mechanism that would enable fire investigators to cross boundaries[24].

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[24] This may require an amendment to the Fire Services Act

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- CSRD to create and maintain a regional list of trained investigators; enter this into the RMS.
- Review authority issues of Local Assistant Fire Commissioners and their ability to operate outside of their jurisdictions.
- Review role of Fire Commissioner in paying for fire investigations[25].

Medium—Low Priority

Obtain Improved Availability of Training to Meet the Agreed Upon Standards in a Way That Addresses the Issues of Logistics, Location, Costs and Time

Training of fire fighters is less of a problem for the largest fire departments in the region, but it is a significant challenge for the small to medium departments. Part of this challenge relates to the difficulty in getting volunteer fire fighters to commit their personal time to training sessions, especially where they are at some distance from their homes and places of employment. Many volunteer fire fighters must balance competing calls for their off-duty time, and fire training is just one of them.

There are a number of ways the issue could be approached, including pooling of training time and utilization of sub-regional training centres. As these problems are the greatest for the smallest fire departments, some degree of intervention and support by the CSRD seems appropriate. It may also be appropriate to work collaboratively for greater support from the Province.

Comments

- The cost of training is currently a barrier for some departments.

- o For the smaller departments with restricted budgets it may be a better solution to bring the trainers to the department rather than attempting to send the volunteers to an external training site.
- The amount of time required to achieve competence is also raised as an issue with a drop off in participation based on the length of time required to be away from home and/or work.
  - o One option would be some form of compensation for giving up personal time to achieve a level of competence that provides a benefit to the community.
- The issue of changed work schedules for individuals who wish to become trained as volunteer fire fighters needs to be addressed[26].
  - o It is noted that the personal commitment of time is often a challenge and there are occasions when training is scheduled, but for various reasons the trainees may not always show up.
- External assessment of competence can be provided by both Comox and Courtenay at the present time for a minimal cost.
  - o Comox currently trains to the BC Standard; noted that their trainers are not usually their career staff.
- For many departments their ability to train is interrupted either by responses to emergency calls or more likely due to lack of availability of trainers.
  - o One strategy would be to 'pool' trainees together and offer them training as a group either at Comox or Courtenay.
- There is also a requirement to agree upon the level of competence for the trainer to ensure that the training received can be accredited.
  - o This requires a consensus on a) trainers and b) assessors.
- In general it was noted that the challenge of achieving competence is a bigger issue for the smaller departments. These departments have a

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[26] It is noted that some work schedules in the forest industry now require a 2 weeks in town, 2 weeks out of town which makes it more difficult to train fire fighters, and to run regular fire practices.

smaller pool of people to choose from and may not have the 'luxury' of taking one or more partially trained fire fighters to emergency scenes.

Actions

- Identify departments which offer training & certification.
- Need to agree on a training policy for fire fighters and officers which addresses the minimum standards established under point 1.
- Need to develop a training schedule that addresses the minimum standard but meets financial limitations, recruit availability & trainer availability.
- Be flexible in developing training programs to address issues of time and logistics.
- Encourage the CSRD to promote the issue of increased training with employers.
- Identify and address funding issues for officers whose training and commitment to the service is necessarily a greater burden on them and their employers.
- Identify and address funding issues for recruit training, particularly as training standards and requirements increase.
- Implementing a region-wide RMS would facilitate tracking training levels; this would be of particular assistance to smaller departments.
- Develop a working definition of what constitutes a Fire Department that incorporates the standards agreed above.

Develop an Equitable Mutual Aid Arrangement throughout the Region

With few exceptions, most fire departments within the CSRD will require support from neighbouring fire departments from time to time. This issue has been addressed in the Comox Valley which now has a formal mutual aid agreement.

For fire departments elsewhere in the regional district, the issue of travel time may make mutual aid for all but the very largest fires impractical. On the other hand a response to hazardous materials incidents will require a considerable commitment of resources and at the same time is not quite as time-critical as a structure fire. For these and similar emergencies, a pooling of resources and personnel to manage these should be considered, using the Comox Valley mutual aid agreement as a model.

Comments

- "Special Operations" (hazmat, auto extrication, high angle rescue, marine, etc.) mutual aid could and should be actively discussed.
- Need to set up an arrangement that effectively addresses bylaw and insurance limitations.
- Without an agreement, the only alternative is to approach the Provincial Emergency Program[27] [PEP] for a response. In the case of a Hazmat call, the request goes to ministry of environment first and the process may be cumbersome and slow.
- Technical rescue and "special operations" would be good subjects for mutual aid.
- Need to clarify legal and insurance issues.
- Need to clarify PEP's role and financial and legal responsibility.
- In order to receive funding and insurance, fire departments can only leave their jurisdiction when operating under a PEP task number; PEP requires that all members be signed up as volunteers, and carry a PEP volunteer card.
- The CSRD should assist in managing this by:
  - Assessing the requirements under PEP, and

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[27] http://www.pep.gov.bc.ca/index.html

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- o Ensuring all departments understand the requirements and, where required, assisting as needed in meeting requirements.

- Question as to whether it would be better idea to incorporate the region into your jurisdiction for responses e.g., highway 19 and others needs to be assessed.

- Meet with new PEP director to understand the differences and limitations in policies and entitlements for fire departments.

Actions

- Clarify the following items:
    - o Ensure that PEP volunteer cards are held across region by Fire Department members who are also PEP responders.
    - o The responses and circumstances under which carrying a PEP card is required.

- Regular, periodic reviews of bylaws and contracts (with the relevant municipality or CSRD as appropriate).

- Regular periodic reviews of insurance coverage (with the relevant municipality or CSRD as appropriate).

- Identify and work out anomalies in Fire protection boundaries and ensure that fire protection is:
    - o Provided, and
    - o Covered by empowering bylaw/contract and related insurance.

- Clarify how to respond to inquiries[28] from insurance companies and others as to:
    - o Specific incidents, and
    - o General conditions.

- Review the issue of group insurance.

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[28] CSRD should take a lead role in this; review Freedom of Information [FOI] issues

- "Cost recovery" needs to be considered in connection with mutual aid events and each region needs to consider/review its ability recover costs from "offending" parties (e.g., landowners, transportation spills, etc.).

- Need to agree the basis on which mutual aid will be provided across the region, keeping PEP issues under consideration (as PEP will not reimburse mutual aid callouts).

  o Note that there may be a role in having the CSRD negotiate an arrangement with PEP that enables the establishment of a broader mutual aid arrangement across the region, while still having the responding departments able to claim reimbursement.

Implement an Increased Use of Third-Party Evaluations of the Operations of a Department Including Training, Equipment and Management

Validation of internal training, policy and procedures represents an additional expense in terms of both cost and time for most fire departments. It is, however, a critical step in documenting that the departments are meeting their statutory obligations. Larger fire departments often have sufficient staff to 'self-certify' while for others the options may be to have certification provided by another department. For some, it currently is not done at all. Discussions with the workshop participants established that one or more departments within the CSRD were able to conduct third-party evaluations but that not all departments were aware of or taking advantage of these resources.

Comments

- Courtenay and Comox use a third party to evaluate the training delivered, as does Campbell River.

- There are a few subject areas where third party evaluations cannot be delivered by regional resources, but they are minor.
- There is probably a liability issues involved in sending out trainers to other departments; there may be a regional role in providing coverage when undertaking a regional function.
- It is likely that the CSRD could provide a coordinating role to facilitate the use of this service.

Actions

- Confirm where third party evaluations are available and create a pool of information/resources; this may require a central resource identifying qualified personnel.
- Create a regional one-stop shop to arrange for evaluation.
- Need to deal with scheduling issues for example to include the nights that the evaluator would be available.
- Consider whether resources are available from Forestry.
- Use agreed standards for when third party evaluation is required (JI standards).

Low Priority

Increased Sharing or Transferring of Current and Redundant Resources

Given the number of fire departments within the CSRD there are opportunities to share resources including 'handing down' of equipment or other material by the larger fire departments. This is certainly not a new practice and a number of examples were provided where this already occurs.

The opportunity to increase this level of support and partnership between the departments arose during the discussion by the smallest of the fire departments with regard to resources they were simply lacking. In some cases these were fairly important items they were not able to develop a budget for. Expanding on the existing informal practice of sharing resources seems to have virtually no downside, only requiring a degree of coordination that could probably be provided most effectively by the regional district.

Comments

- Mutual aid arrangements may make this more important.
- Items that could be "shared" or sold within the region:
    - Hose testing,
    - Ladder testing,
    - Mask Fit testing,
    - Servicing of self contained breathing apparatus [SCBA] and test benches,
    - Shared cost for shared tests,
    - Hearing tests,
    - Shared mechanic,
    - Shared training materials,
    - Traffic vests,
    - Cleaning turnout gear.
- Need a mechanism to ensure that economies of scale are actually realized.

Actions

- Send emails out to region advertising surplus equipment before selling outside the region.

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- CSRD to develop an inventory as part of the proposed RMS.
- CSRD to establish an email group to share these opportunities, or do this as part of an expanded chiefs' group within the region.
- Review whether equipment can be shared/sold/purchased from neighbouring regional districts (e.g., Cowichan).
- Look at issue of acquiring back-up equipment that can be used within the region and stored in appropriate locations.

Use of Mass or Group Purchasing to Reduce Capital Costs

The need to optimize purchasing power for all departments inevitably leads to consideration of group purchasing opportunities. The workshop participants noted however that in a number of areas they had department-specific requirements that might make group purchasing more complex.

It was agreed that for equipment such as turnout coats, Automatic External Defibrillators (AED's) and other items that are quite similar, some cost efficiencies could be found. Like the previous item, this would require some degree of coordination, but with the expansion of the communications that has resulted from the Fire Innovations Project and the proposed implementation of a Regional Fire Chiefs' Association, this should become more practical.

Comments

- Where equipment is standardized, cost savings may be realized.
- Some of these may work better when there is a regionalized fire service function, but may be more difficult to orchestrate across jurisdictional boundaries.

- There is a need to be certain that the economies of scale balance the administrative issues

- In the case of AED's – significant savings were realized.

- Turnout gear might be an area where this approach could successfully be implemented.

Actions

- CSRD to conduct a "best practices" review of other regional districts' practices and assess what common items are regularly being purchased for which discounts may be available.

- Recommendations to be developed based on this review.

- Departments to regularly advise the CSRD as to major purchases being made, so other departments can 'tag on'.

- Review existing government supply services and assess whether there are "group savings" (or enhanced convenience) possible through this organization.

- Consider stockpiling of certain required equipment in the event of a major emergency; done on a shared-cost approach.

Develop Workshops for Chiefs, Managers, etc., to Understand Their Potential Liability under Applicable Legislation, Including WorkSafe BC and Bill C45

Changes to legal and other regulatory matters can have a profound impact on the fire service. The recent changes to WorkSafe BC in terms of the requirement to assemble certain numbers of trained fire fighters before commencing an interior attack as well as changes to the Criminal Code regarding a supervisor's liability are two cases in point.

It was noted that the larger departments often have a budget that allows for participation in conferences and seminars where these issues are offered, however smaller departments may not currently have the opportunity to receive this information 'first hand'. In the case of the Criminal Code changes, the impact on Fire Chiefs and their departments is potentially significant.

Comments

- CSRD has a major role in disseminating information and ensuring that issues are understood.
- The CSRD raised the issue of hosting an annual conference that would examine these issues, and be accessible to all departments.
- The CSRD would work with the Comox Valley Chiefs and the fire departments to develop this conference.

Actions

- CSRD to take a role in coordinating the collection and dissemination of relevant information related to workplace safety and liability.
- Implement an annual, region-wide fire officer's conference which includes coverage of these issues.
- Develop a strategy to address all aspects of liability from WCB to Bill C-45, to insurance.

Become a More Effective Lobby Group with Senior Levels of Government and the Public

Service delivery by the fire service in BC has changed considerably in the past 25 years. Fire departments today are being asked to perform a range of activities in addition to fire suppression. These may include first responder medical

programs, hazardous materials response as well as confined space, high angle rescue and others. Each of these additional activities requires additional training in addition to operating funds.

Comments

- There is a need to encourage the Province to develop a single point of information for all Provincial actions required to be taken by the fire departments.
- Work to achieve an incentive package for volunteer members; tax incentives or other benefits.

Actions

- Lobby for tax incentives for recruits.
    - Direct to the Fire Chiefs Association of BC [FCABC]
    - To the Union of BC Municipalities [UBCM] through the CSRD & municipalities.
- Market the fire service more effectively to the local governments (bring them into practice nights, open houses, etc.) and with the public.
- Increase communication with local government by ensuring their awareness of fire prevention, fire suppression, major events, and social events.

Recommendations

As noted above, the participants in the Comox Strathcona Regional District Fire Innovations Project developed a list of key issues, which were then prioritized. The highest priority items related to the recruitment and retention of fire fighters, which was almost universally seen as being a significant and ongoing challenge.

Other issues for which recommendations were developed included increasing the level of communication and coordination within the regional district as well as clarifying ways in which the CSRD could support the smaller fire departments. Interoperation and inter-cooperation was also considered in terms of mutual aid and automatic mutual aid. In the case of mutual aid, this has already been implemented within part of the region and it is recommended that a further review of this be conducted with a view to implementing this regionally. The issue of automatic mutual aid was also discussed conceptually and while there are clear advantages to implementing this, probably on a trial basis with selected areas, there are risk management and legal issues that must first be clarified.

Finally the CSRD was identified as the one agency that could assist with coordination of data related to 'people, places and things'. The ability to share information about these various items would be handled best by the implementation of a regional record management system and the CSRD is probably best positioned to coordinate and manage the implementation of such a system.

The following recommendations are designed to specifically address the issues raised.

Recruitment and Retention

1. The Regional Fire Chiefs and the CSRD should immediately review all issues related to the recruitment and retention of volunteer fire fighters with the goals of increasing the number of ways in which they recruit and to include region-wide initiatives supported by the Regional District.

2. In parallel, the Regional Fire Chiefs and the CSRD should address all issues related to the retention of volunteer fire fighters once they have been recruited. These efforts should include a review of best practices identified in other areas, and not just limited to the BC Fire Service

Coordination

1. All departments within the regional district should be encouraged to join a Regional Fire Chiefs' Association, modelled on the Comox Valley Chiefs' Association.

2. The CSRD should implement and host a regional conference for all of the Fire Departments and Fire Protection Areas. The agenda for these annual events should be developed in consultation with the Regional Fire Chiefs.

3. Implement enhanced inter-departmental cooperation and planning.

4. Address fire prevention bylaws and contract areas.

5. Rationalize and improve fire investigations.

6. Rationalize and improve fire inspections.

Funding

1. Develop a case for increased grant and operating funding from senior levels of government.

Training and Certification

1. The Regional Fire Chiefs and the CSRD should review the options for fire fighter and fire officer training that can be conducted within the region as well as externally. The objective would be to identify one or more options for the CSRD fire departments with a focus on obtaining affordable fire fighter training for the smaller departments.

2. The issue of third-party evaluations to be conducted by other fire departments within the CSRD should be continued and expanded to provide for an evaluation of all fire department training and operations for departments that desire it.

3. Obtain improved availability to training to meet the agreed upon standards in a way that addresses logistics, locations, costs and time.

Risk Management

1. A review of the level of training and certification of all fire fighters in the CSRD should be undertaken and measured against existing agreed standards. The review of training and certification should endeavour to establish standard bench marks for fire ground participation and if possible to agree on ways to identify all fire fighters by their competence level on the fire ground.

2. The Regional District in consultation with the Regional Fire Chiefs should facilitate an annual conference to present information related to the major issues facing the fire departments. These would include, but are not

limited to the impact of Bill C-45, changes to WorkSafe BC, and the BC
Fire Model Project which is currently underway.

Interoperability

1. The existing mutual aid agreement that has been implemented for the
   Comox Valley should be reviewed to determine how it could be adapted
   for the region. Some variation in the agreement may be required to
   accommodate the limited ways in which the very smallest departments
   could contribute to a more major event in another area.
2. Automatic mutual aid should be considered as a pilot project for one or
   more areas as a way to improve service to the public and to provide
   additional resources to support the fire fighting effort.

Shared Resources

1. The CSRD should consider implementing a shared regional fire records
   management system to facilitate data management, fire reporting,
   inspections, asset management, etc. Such systems would be cost-
   prohibitive on a department-by-department basis, but are quite practical
   when implemented regionally[29].
2. The CSRD should consider ramping up its role as coordinator within the
   region to assist with identifying training opportunities as well as group
   purchase opportunities.
3. Increase the sharing and transferring of current and redundant resources
   within the CSRD.

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[29] One recent example where this has been done is the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George
which also received Fire Innovations Funding to support the project. This system currently serves
approximately 60 fire departments and is hosted by the RDFFG.

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4. Evaluate mass or group purchasing for common equipment and services.

Unprotected Areas

1. The CSRD and the Regional Fire Chiefs should review the existing unprotected areas and develop strategies to provide protection agreements where this is possible or desired by the property owners.

Conclusions

The Fire Innovations project was proposed as a way to review the many issues facing the organization and delivery of fire protection and related services within the CSRD. The facilitated workshops in May and June were well attended and achieved a high degree of consensus both as to what constituted the major issues (and their relative priority), as well as suggested approaches for dealing with the concerns that were identified. The report to this point completes phase 1 of this project.

The Fire Chiefs and other participants in the process, without exception, expressed their opinions in a forthright and respectful manner and at all times demonstrated that they had the best interests of the public and their fire fighters in mind. The representatives from the Regional District were supportive of the discussions and took the initiative to assume the role of coordinator for many of the issues and to provide a forum and facilitators for others.

These initial meetings are clearly a first step in a longer process, one that needs further consideration and work, particularly in view of the recently announced bifurcation of the CSRD into two separate regional districts. For many in the room, particularly those from the smaller communities, it was clearly the first time that they had had the opportunity to meet with their colleagues. It was also apparent, both from the formal facilitated discussions and the informal networking that took place that the larger, urban departments can play an effective role in mentoring and advising the smaller departments.

Notwithstanding any division of the CSRD into separate districts, it would be of benefit to all of the departments if the connections that were established during these meetings could be further developed and enhanced. Ultimately, as all in

the room agreed, the aim was to develop fire protection and related services to a level that offered the best possible protection for residents and others in the area. That goal should not be overshadowed even if the political boundaries are now to be reconfigured.

The recommendations that were put forward require some additional review to determine accountabilities and time lines and to confirm participation by all agencies within the region. That said, a number of the suggestions – such as increased communication within the group [Fire Chiefs and the CSRD] – have already been implemented as a direct result of the Fire Innovations Project. The process from this point, however, obviously will be affected by the recently announced division of the CSRD into two districts.

Time Lines

A timeline for implementation is proposed in the following Gantt chart. This will be further developed following discussions with the stakeholders and after determining the impact of the division of the CSRD into two regional districts.

ID		Task Name	Duration	Start	Finish
1		**Comox Strathcona Regional District Fire Innovations**	**391 days**	**Mon 9/3/07**	**Mon 3/2/09**
2		**Highest Priority**	**120 days**	**Mon 9/3/07**	**Fri 2/15/08**
3		Develop & Implement Recruitment Strategies	6 mons	Mon 9/3/07	Fri 2/15/08
4		Develop & Implement Retention Strategies	6 mons	Mon 9/3/07	Fri 2/15/08
5		**High Priority**	**391 days**	**Mon 9/3/07**	**Mon 3/2/09**
6		Establish & Implement Regional Training & Operational Standards	6 mons	Mon 9/3/07	Fri 2/15/08
7		Provide Task Upload to CSRD for Smaller Departments	3 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 3/25/08
8		Provide Methods to Provide advice and direction to Smaller Departments	3 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 3/25/08
9		Deal with Unprotected Areas	6 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 6/17/08
10		Address Interoperability & Standardization	6 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 6/17/08
11		Resolve Boundary Issues	12 mons	Tue 4/1/08	Mon 3/2/09
12		**Medium Priority**	**120 days**	**Wed 1/2/08**	**Tue 6/17/08**
13		Develop Case for Increased Grant Funding	3 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 3/25/08
14		Enhanced Cooperation and Planning	3 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 3/25/08
15		Address Fire Prevention Bylaws	6 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 6/17/08
16		Rationalize Fire Investigations	6 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 6/17/08
17		Rationalize Fire Inspections	6 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 6/17/08
18		**Medium-Low Priority**	**240 days**	**Wed 1/2/08**	**Tue 12/2/08**
19		Improved Availability to Training	6 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 6/17/08
20		Develop an Equitable Mutual Aid Agreement	12 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 12/2/08
21		Implement Third-party Evaluations	6 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 6/17/08
22		**Low Priority**	**228 days**	**Wed 1/2/08**	**Fri 11/14/08**
23		Increased Sharing of Resources	3 mons	Mon 6/2/08	Fri 8/22/08
24		Group/Mass Purchasing	3 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 3/25/08
25		Workshop for Fire Chiefs	6 mons	Wed 1/2/08	Tue 6/17/08
26		Effectively Lobby Senior Government	6 mons	Mon 6/2/08	Fri 11/14/08

Summary

The Fire Innovations project was proposed as a way to review the many issues facing the organization and delivery of fire protection and related services within the CSRD. The facilitated workshops in May and June were well attended and the degree of consensus regarding the major issues as well as ways in which to resolve them was remarkable.

The Fire Chiefs without exception expressed their opinions in a forthright and respectful manner and at all times had the best interests of the public and their fire fighters in mind. The representatives from the Regional District were supportive of the discussion and took the initiative to assume the role of coordinator for many of the issues and to become the lead on others.

The recommendations that were put forward require some additional review to determine accountabilities and time lines and to confirm participation by all agencies within the region. That said, a number of the suggestions—such as increased communication within the group [Fire Chiefs and the CSRD]—have already been implemented as a direct result of the Fire Innovations project.

The second phase of the project will be to focus on completing an action plan by the end of 2007 to address the highest priority issues identified, which were recruitment and retention, along with training and operating standards.

APPENDIX "A": Scope of Work

The Consultant will provide "the Services", consisting of the following:

A. Research and identify what fire protection services are available now. Must include an in depth technical analysis in order to facilitate workshop discussion.

B. Prepare committee workshop agenda material.

C. Conduct at least four fire innovations project team workshops to:

a. Review project goals, establish communication and project timelines,
b. Review research analysis; develop strategies or action plan for specific objectives.
c. Identify challenges/barriers:
i. Identify common roadblocks;
ii. Identify roadblocks for current and long-term fire protection service delivery. (focus on needs versus wants; day to day needs; out of the box opportunities).

D. Prepare and present a findings report to the fire innovations project team.

E. Develop recommendations and implementation plan based on fire innovations project team feedback.

F. Prepare and present full report to CSRD committee of the whole meeting.

APPENDIX "B": CSRD Fire Innovations Project – Background Information

<u>Overview</u>

The Comox Strathcona Regional District is seeking proposals for consulting services that will lead the fire innovations project team through a consultative and study process. The fire innovations project team includes representation from Comox Strathcona Regional District staff, fire protection service providers, emergency services and related industry expertise.

The overall objective of the project is to develop a coordinated program that will provide the optimum protection to all populated areas through the collaboration and pooling of regional resources.

The three primary goals of the project are:

1. A review of existing fire protection service areas to ensure area residents are receiving the most efficient and cost-effective fire protection service delivery.
2. To identify gaps (unprotected areas) of fire protection service for electoral areas and recommend options for service to these areas.
3. To select one or more of the following priorities and develop an implementation plan for each of them:

Priority list:
   a. Develop a best practice guideline for the establishment of fire service boundaries.
   b. Capital asset infrastructure management, including funding options, life cycle planning, etc.
   c. Develop best practice guideline for volunteer recruitment.
   d. Inventory water supply and development of protocols, policies for the management of water sources.
   e. Develop best practice guideline for the management of hazmat incidents.
   f. Inter-fire department emergency response agreement (see Comox Valley fire chiefs memorandum of understanding as potential regional model).
   g. Identify specialized training expertise for each fire department.
   h. Develop standard fire protection service provision agreements for First Nation communities.

The CSRD Fire Innovations project will be carried out in two phrases:

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Phase 1 - Planning stage – a study of the fire protection areas and unprotected populated areas in conjunction with all fire jurisdictions within the CSRD. Review with the fire innovations project team to identify improvements to the provision of fire protection service areas and response times.

Phase 2 – Work with the fire innovations project team to develop and recommend a program that could be implemented to provide the coordinated delivery of fire protection services within the CSRD. Present findings, recommendations and an implementation action plan to the CSRD committee of the whole.

APPENDIX "C": Terms and Phrases

- AED
    - Automatic external defibrillator
- Bill C45
    - Amendment to Criminal Code of Canada to further define the liability of a supervisor in terms of workplace actions
- CAD
    - Computer aided dispatch
- FCABC
    - Fire Chiefs Association of BC
- FSA
    - Fire Services Act
- JEPP
    - Joint Emergency Preparedness Program
- LAFC
    - Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner
- O/G
    - Operational Guideline; the phrase proposed for use in the BC Fire Service by the Office of the Fire Commissioner
- PEP
    - Provincial Emergency Program
- RMS
    - A Record Management System is an integrated software system that provides a 'one-write' approach to all aspects of fire service management; an RMS normally includes modules for: incidents—including an automated upload to the Office of the Fire Commissioner, personnel, properties, inspections, training and certification, pre-plans, asset management and preventive maintenance, recruitment and station journal
- SCBA
    - Self contained breathing apparatus
- O/G
    - Standard Operating Guideline; the accepted term in BC is Operational Guideline
- UBCM
    - Union of British Columbia Municipalities

APPENDIX "D": Participating Fire Departments and Agencies

The following Fire Departments and Agencies participated with the initial workshops in May and June, 2007.

- City of Campbell River
- City of Courtenay
- Comox Fire Protection District
- Comox Strathcona Regional District
- Courtenay Fire Protection District
- Dave Mitchell & Associates Ltd.
- Denman Island Residents Association/Fire Department
- Fanny Bay Fire Department
- Mount Washington Resort
- North Island 911 Corporation
- Oyster River Volunteer Fire Rescue Association
- Ship's Point Improvement District/Fire Department
- Town of Comox Fire Department
- Union Bay Improvement District/Fire Department
- Village of Cumberland Fire Department
- Village of Gold River Fire Department
- Village of Sayward Fire Department
- Village of Zeballos Fire Department

The following were unable to participate with the initial workshops but received minutes and other material and were subsequently contacted for their input.

- Cortes Island Fire Association
- Hornby Island Residents Associations/Fire Department
- Merville Fire Protection District
- Royston Improvement District
- Village of Tahsis Fire Department

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