



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

INAN • NUMBER 094 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, February 8, 2018

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Chair

The Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to the INAN committee. We're studying fires and emergency management in indigenous communities.

I first want to recognize that we're on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people. We've started a process across the country of truth and reconciliation as one small piece of recognizing our history and an important step forward in the process of truth and reconciliation.

You are the second-last panel, so very close to the very best. We'll give you 10 minutes to present for each one of you, and then we go into a series of questions from the MPs.

I'd like to start with Chief Randall Phillips, please.

Chief Randall Phillips (Oneida Nation of the Thames): Welcome, Madam Chair, and welcome, committee members.

[Member spoke in Oneida]

My name is Randall Phillips, and I am currently the elected chief at the Oneida Nation of the Thames. It is an Oneida community. It is located about 25 kilometres southwest of London, Ontario. It's a unique community in itself in that we established our community around 1830. We were at a forced relocation from our homelands in the United States, and we ended up in what we called our traditional beaver hunting grounds. With respect to the Algonquins of this territory, we also have a shared interest in this land.

First of all, thank you very much for inviting me to this. Unfortunately, I am the recipient of this invitation because of certain tragedies that happened in our communities and to our people.

I want to let you know that, as of December last year... I know that even that was announced by the Prime Minister on the news in terms of the disaster that took the lives of one of our men and four of our children, but that was not the only fire disaster that has happened in our community within the last 10 years.

We have had other losses, too. One young lady who was very instrumental within our community in terms of gathering herbs and passing that message on—very much what we might call a healer—perished in a fire. She couldn't get out. She had a wheelchair ramp, so there were mobility issues. We had another fire in approximately 2011, and the same thing happened. We are not immune in terms of this disaster, that's for sure.

We are the fifth-largest community in Ontario in terms of population, not in size, but in population. Our community currently has over 500 houses, and approximately 35% of those houses are in need of repair. Approximately 10% of those houses are in need of destruction. We have approximately 40 houses like that, so 8%, that should be demolished right now. They're uninhabitable, but we have an overcrowding issue at our community, just like a lot of communities.

We tend to, as Iroquoian people and Haudenosaunee people, stick together, and we also share our same houses. We have that problem. We can see a disaster with respect to the Antone family, in terms of how that happened. We were lucky that three other young people plus the mother were gone, so that could have been even worse.

That's the sort of situation we find ourselves in. There are social and economic conditions that add to this, and we can't just simply look at a fire management program or a fire suppression program and try to address this. I understand the need for incrementalism, and I also understand the need to move on issues where we can move on them.

For our community, and certainly for myself as the leader and chief, I've had some issues with our fire protection for a long time, not from the people who provide the service, not from our volunteers, but in terms of our capacity, in terms of trying to do what we can do. Again, as a larger community, we have access to equipment that other communities don't have. We have access to the nearby city of London, which also provided some training to us as well. Other communities don't have that either.

The one thing they have that we don't have is a base in terms of our firefighters and our professionals who do this work. They're volunteers. If any of you have been on the road in terms of this kind of volunteer work, you will know very quickly that your first disaster, the first limb that you see severed, or your first horrific sight is going to change your perspective on whether you think that's a profession for you or not. Unfortunately, our first responders in our communities have to see that. Not only do they have to see that, they have to see that knowing they know who that person is.

We look at that. I look at our own current staff and the struggles that they go through, and I'm sure my colleagues to the left of me will tell you the same thing with regard to their staffing.

●(1535)

In terms of aftercare, I don't know what the word is in the fire profession, but certainly we need to take care of our staff. If we're going to have them perform at their their peak whenever we need them, then we need to take care of them. I don't see any systems that allow us to do that properly.

When it comes to our staffing, it's the old adage of "robbing Peter to pay Paul". We have one full-time fire staff on duty, and that is the fire chief. That's a nine-to-five job, an administrative job. We're looking at that. We certainly all need access to this whole notion of staff capacity, complement of equipment, and constant training. Certainly we need more resources from our community to do that.

Again, our community is one of the largest ones, as is my sister community to the left of me. The current funding formula from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs stops at a population threshold of 1,200 people. We have 6,000 so we have to find other monies for all these public services, and we try. We have the equipment, but we don't have the men.

That's just one side, so you might have questions on that. I'm trying to speed up, Madam Chair.

The other issue I wanted to talk to you about as well is our capacity in terms of that equipment. Right now, our community is serviced through our own aquifer. However, there is limited access to that water. Four-inch-diameter pipes were installed throughout our community. Anybody in the profession can confirm that's not adequate pressure. This was one of the problems in the last fire: we didn't have enough pressure. We need infrastructure development and investment to change the rest of those four-inch pipes to six-inch pipes. We need more hydrants in our community. Again, we're one of the biggest ones.

We have an awful lot of roads to maintain, and we're going to continue to grow. If I can take one step back with regard to our firefighters, we've been working on a program with an outside agency to get them trained to deal with roof-mounted solar panel fires. We know they're dangerous and need to be dealt with in a special way, so we're providing that training to our firefighters. We're one of the first first nations communities to provide that training, because we have those facilities in our community. They will be gone once the city of London and the other municipalities around us find out they have that training; then we're back to square one.

Those are two of the things we need. One of the keys here is there needs to be a look at our housing programs. Again, this can't be done in isolation. The tragedies that occurred in our community were preventable, but the structures were old and very susceptible to fire. We really didn't have a chance. When we put in housing standards they have to be appropriate. The housing standards for a first nations national housing program will not meet the needs of southern Ontario. They will be different from northern Ontario so we have to look at that. The fire standards of how many officers, how many this and how many that, might be nice for some kind of budgeting process, but they need to meet the reality of what's going on in the community.

We try our best to support everybody we can, but we certainly need your help. Our firefighters and our emergency services can't do

it alone. Oneida is the fifth-largest community in Ontario, and we have all these services. Other people in other communities rely on us as well, because that's what we're supposed to do with our brothers and sisters. We're supposed to help them.

●(1540)

It's very difficult to try to provide that help when we just simply don't have the capacity.

I wanted to say thank you very much for listening to that story, and I appreciate the invite. *Yaw? 'ko*

The Chair: Thank you, Chief.

Now we move on to our next presenters, the Mohawk Council.

Go ahead.

Ms. Kellyann Meloche (General Manager, Emergency Preparedness and Planning, Public Safety, Mohawk Council of Kahnawake): First, thank you, Madam Chair and to the standing committee for inviting me.

To give you a background, I am Kellyann Meloche. I'm from the Mohawk community of Kahnawake. My Mohawk name is actually Tekariwenhawi, which means she's coming with a message. It's quite appropriate, isn't it?

My background in emergency management is that I've been doing this for the last 24 years, working with the Mohawk Council in our community. Also I've spent 18 years as a firefighter and paramedic in our community, as well. I know the boots on the ground helps me be a better planner and manager. I also had the privilege in the last three years of working with the nine Cree communities in Quebec. I've also worked in 11 states in the United States, with first nations communities and tribal communities down there, as well, and got to know quite a lot. With that knowledge and with the experience, I'd like to give you some information here today.

Emergency preparedness has evolved within the world to that of a four-phase approach entitled emergency management. We started off with emergency preparedness, and then all of a sudden it went to emergency management and the four pillars.

As a Mohawk of Kahnawake, having worked with many indigenous communities in Canada and the United States, I've had the privilege of learning their programs, viewing their plans, meeting their committees, and providing guidance for improvement. Based on my experiences, I'd like to give you three simple proactive steps. Ask. Listen. Act. It's that easy, honestly.

Number one is ask. Each community is at a different level within emergency management. They have different resources, locations, threats, risk, etc. In terms of resources, I'm even talking human and equipment. Infrastructure is different. Although the community size can be different, the resource needs are the same. We all need fire protection. We all need first responders, whether you only have 10 houses or 2,000 houses.

There is no cookie-cutter solution. We need to understand that. We cannot just develop a template and provide this to the communities and say here, fill it out, here's your emergency plan. It's not going to work.

Outreach to each on their needs. What level are they? How much knowledge do they have regarding emergency management? Some are scared when they hear that I'm even going to their community to assist them with their emergency plan. It's flustering for them because they say, goodness, where's that plan at? Do you know where the emergency plan is? I need to find it. And then they dust it off the shelf, and they say, okay, here it is, here's a 200-page emergency preparedness plan, and the resources are not there anymore, the people aren't there anymore, phone numbers have changed, and their knowledge of emergency planning is minimal. They think that the answer is in this 200-page document, when the answer should be already up here. What do I need to do? Who do I call?

A simple assessment can be completed with each of these communities. The inventory has to be done. What are your human resources? What type of equipment do you currently have, and what is the knowledge that you have on the use of that equipment? It's okay to have a fire truck or a pumper truck or a ladder truck, but if you don't know how to use it and you don't have the training for it, it's useless.

Number two is listen. All too often, I've sat in presentations where we're told here's the solution, here's how we can help you, here's how to better your problems. This can be very frustrating. We live and work in our communities. We know the challenges that we face, and we also have some solutions. Working with us by listening and offering guidance is the best way. How did X and X community do this and succeed? What are the success stories, and how can we apply it in our communities?

Government, volunteer organizations, and emergency services, should participate in presentations on how to work with indigenous communities. How can you come and work with us? We'll be happy to tell you. Knock on our door and ask, how can we work with you, similar to this with the committee. Get to know the communities. Although INAC or DIAND have the responsibility for our communities, we are a people and we are your neighbours.

Standardized training given across Canada should be accessible, not something that was specifically developed for our communities.

• (1545)

The one thing that I noticed when I started out in emergency management is.... I took a specific course with INAC or with DIAND, I don't know what the name was then, but I took a course with them. Then I went to the Canadian Emergency Preparedness College in Amprrior, when it was still open. It was a great place to

learn. It was totally different, what I learned there. It was almost like I took the college course there and then I took the grade 2 course with INAC, and it didn't work. We need to have standardized training across Canada, for all the people here in Canada.

Next, a thorough gap and overlap analysis must be completed with indigenous community on emergency management response.... Where are the gaps falling? I feel that it's not only within the equipment resources, but also within the training for how to use those resources. I find it's a huge gap.

Number three is act. This seems to be the step that's always missing in operational plans. We need to act. Once you've asked the questions, once you've learned about the communities, it's time to act on the suggestions that they've given you. I have a few suggestions for you.

We need emergency operations centres. EOCs are the operational beehives of emergency response. If community EOCs are not available, have a regional one specifically for indigenous communities, staffed by those people from those surrounding communities. If we cannot afford to have individual emergency operations centres in each community, let's have a regional one, with people from those communities who can coordinate both.

Support organizations that have response experience to work with our communities. Partner with the likes of the Red Cross, with St. John Ambulance, with the Justice Institute of B.C., for example, and have local representatives. When I say local representatives, I mean indigenous representatives, trained as members of the Red Cross. We are also members of the Red Cross.

Develop a first nations coordinators association that would allow indigenous emergency managers to work together, share experiences, provide peer advice, and just help one another.

In Kahnawake, we've had a lot of emergencies, unfortunately, but we've got a lot of successes, and it's worked. We can share that information with others.

Next, within each provincial emergency operations centre, have a representative specifically for indigenous communities who is of indigenous descent. We understand our brothers and sisters. We know the needs of other communities. Although I'm from a different nation or community, I understand, when I go to my brother and sister community, where they're coming from.

Assign an indigenous member to act as liaison within the government. This would help build relationships and trust and share the knowledge. The person in this position would advise emergency management coordinators of external resources and the steps to be taken when an emergency occurs.

Now, if we have someone working with you from and representing the indigenous communities, we can ask those questions that are needed. I've heard so many stories of the evacuation taking so long, the Red Cross not getting there for weeks, whatever the examples are.... "Well, did you make the call?" or "Who were you waiting for? Did you need permission from somebody, is that what it was? Why were you waiting?"

Funding for emergency management is good. Allowing a full-time emergency management coordinator is great, but don't just leave them afterwards. Guidance and direction on steps to take, how to plan, and what that plan looks like elsewhere are key.

During an emergency, the focus should be on life, property, and environment, not on keeping track of financial transactions as requested by DIAND. Gaining knowledge on memorandums of understanding with surrounding communities, understanding that it can be done now, no permission should be needed to call upon external services.

Finally, before a disaster strikes, proper funding should be given to ensure homes are built to code, preferably by local contractors from those communities. Infrastructure, having hydrants—the insurance companies know if it's not built to code and there's no hydrants there, your rates go up, and you're paying a lot more for something that costs a lot less.

Any community taking on emergency management can find it overwhelming at first. Looking at the big picture, preparedness can be accomplished one step at a time, by working together.

Thank you very much.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now onto our questions and answers.

We're going to start with MP Salma Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thanks to all the witnesses for coming and providing us this important information in regard to completion of our study.

My first question would be to Chief Phillips. We have heard testimonies from the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada, and from some of the witnesses last year, about the lack of education and awareness campaigns on how community leaders and members can prepare for fire emergencies. How do you think we can address those gaps?

Chief Randall Phillips: I just want to let you know that it comes back to this idea of providing some educational resources for us; and they exist, if you know what I mean. We can link with the Canadian firefighters association or pretty well anybody in the province, and link with those types of things, and bring that to our communities. We've tried here at Oneida. We've already gone through a public education program. Since this disaster we've also gone from house to

house and we've also installed all brand-new carbon monoxide detectors as well.

We're trying to educate the community on a regular basis but I guess it comes down, again, to staffing, and the materials that exist. We keep doing that but that's where we would need help. I think my colleague talked about this notion of a coordinator, a crisis or emergency management coordinator who would easily be able to do those types of things when it comes to fire and other safety issues around the house as well.

● (1555)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: You mentioned materials, and the staff. In regard to materials, what do you think the gap is with regard to getting the appropriate materials to provide to the community members?

Chief Randall Phillips: I don't think there has been any specific conscious gap. It has just been the relationship that we've had with communities over the years and years, and it just doesn't exist. Now with this idea of reconciliation, people are finding out more, but more and more what we've had are individuals from the communities who have started to link within fire professions, and they've started to bring these things home.

It's our firefighters who understand the need for this. They're making the connections. There's no formal connection out there. They're just going ahead and saying, here, we need this; or they say that they went to another body and met a colleague who did this.

This is what my colleague was talking about, a more formalized approach in terms of finding out what resources are there and being able to share them and bring them to our community. I want to be skeptical...I think Kellyann said it clearly. We're still all people. We don't need a specific Haudenosaunee.... This is a fire. We all know what a fire is, so there's a lot of common ground that we have in terms of that understanding.

The idea that it needs to be translated into specific cultural ways is not always the key. Give us information first and foremost in terms of what to do if there's a fire. Are we doing the proper things? Are you doing the proper things in your home? Are you doing the proper things in the earth? That's how it can start. The cultural aspect will come in from the individual families making sure that those things are done within the home.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: The Nishnawbe Aski Nation told us that their schools do not do fire drills, and that even a number of homes in their community are without smoke detectors.

Ms. Meloche, are these issues a common experience from what you have seen working in many communities? What would you recommend as a way to address them, and what steps do your communities take to ensure that youth engagement and education is there with regard to safety and emergency preparedness?

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: For sure, I have seen it in other communities. I have seen even the lack of smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, completing drills from the schools. And this is the law, I believe, that you have to do at least two drills in schools with children.

I don't understand. What ends up happening is that they believe it will not happen here, it can't happen here; and this is not just within indigenous communities.

When I go there I even ask them about a winter snowstorm, or a major power failure, or what if their telecommunication goes down? What about all those possibilities? Do you practise those drills? They say that they didn't think about it.

Sometimes I say, as an emergency manager, that I'm coming there giving them solutions to problems they didn't even know existed. And this is the truth. We have to identify these things, and knock on doors and tell people about the resources that are available, and here's the reason why. We tell them why they have to do fire drills, and why we need to test their plan, and why they need to actually start that truck and get it rolling, and see how long it takes to get them to the school. They need to see how long it takes that truck to go to the pond, fill up with water, and get to the airport and put out that plane on fire. Let's see how long it takes. You're supposed to do it within eight minutes. If it takes you 27, that's too long.

Just putting it out there, giving a reality check, is important.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: With regard to the seniors at these reserves, do you have complete data about the number of seniors there and what their needs are, in case of evacuation and how their needs will be met?

Mr. Arnold Lazare (Director of Public Safety, Mohawk Council of Kahnawake): My name is Arnold Lazare. I'm the director of public safety for the Mohawk Council. I'm also the president of the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada.

The sad reality is we don't have statistics. In 2007 HRDC stopped collecting statistics. As part of the indigenous fire marshal program, we're looking to reimplement the statistics-gathering on which communities have fire departments, whether their fire departments are operating. If the community does not have a fire department, we're looking at how we can implement a fire prevention program.

• (1600)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

The Chair: We're done that round, and we're moving on to MP Cathy McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you to both of the presenters. I think you both had excellent insight and practical suggestions, so I really appreciate it. When you said your experience in the field helped you do a better job managing, that certainly hit home for me in terms of what you shared with us.

This study is very important, but part of the impetus for it was the tragic deaths and the B.C. wildfires. I'm going to start with the funding for fire service. I didn't realize that your funding from INAC was population-dependent to 1,200 people. What's the maximum you get per year to support fire service?

Chief Randall Phillips: I don't have that figure with me right now in terms of what we actually get from INAC. For the population that we have, there is just an old formula. There are Oneida, Akwesasne, Six Nations.... There are five communities here. We've been trying to get the federal government to change that. I was elected chief 12 years ago when we started that initiative, and there's been no movement on it whatsoever.

We just have to do our best, I guess. I can't really answer your question, because there's only so much money. We have 200 administrative staff. We just don't have the money for it.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: It sounded as though Mr. Lazare had an answer.

Mr. Arnold Lazare: It's just over \$56 a home, and it's capped. The funding that's provided is for residential fire protection only. To operate a modern-day fire department, you have to consider the hazardous materials, the vehicle extrication, and all of the training that goes along with it. About eight years ago the Mohawk Council did an evaluation on the Kahnawake budget, and it should be well over \$1 million for a department that size. The funding formula is about 35 years old, I believe.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Some communities have relationships with the city that's right nearby, so I can think of some where they've actually contracted with the.... In our case Kamloops is completely contracted to provide service.

Does the funding that the department gives vary at all when there's a contracted service?

Mr. Arnold Lazare: I'm led to believe that in some instances the community will pay an outside department more to be covered than what they would pay if the community had its own fire department.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: We should perhaps pursue getting the details around the funding formulas and the contracting. I think that's interesting.

There was some talk about partnerships, and Kellyann, I really appreciate your comments regarding having someone in the EOCs. Certainly I looked at the emergency support services in British Columbia, and of course they were receiving people from all over the interior region of British Columbia. It would have been a very simple matter to have taken some community members. Some of them were quite bored because they were evacuated, and they would have been absolutely thrilled to be trained and be part of that ESS. To me it should be automatic, to get people trained—because that's not a long training program. Then you have someone who's helping with the emergency support services.

For both Chief Phillips and Kellyann, are there ways that we can facilitate and support those local relationships? Really, the fire doesn't know its boundaries, and working as communities together... Some isolated communities are on their own, but sometimes there could be better coordination and co-operation, and some federal government assistance.

• (1605)

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: Within the Red Cross, they provide emergency social services training. Actually, Arnold and I are representatives of the Red Cross as well. We provide the emergency social services training for our brother and sister communities.

Giving that knowledge to other indigenous communities as well is so helpful. You don't know if you don't ask, but then again, you don't know the questions to ask. Sometimes you don't know the doors to knock on. Even getting the information out there from the Red Cross would be helpful, saying, for example, "How about looking at getting a representative from your community to act as a Red Cross rep? That way, when something occurs, we'll know you're the Red Cross rep and we can call upon you."

That is probably the easiest thing to do—to have someone locally, or within emergency social services, as a Red Cross rep. It could be something else in their community or their area, and then once they have that training, they'll know.

They should also know that for developing memorandums of understanding, now is probably the better time to do it, not during an emergency. That's not the time to call Red Cross. It's also not the time to learn about those steps either, to say, "What do I have to do?" The time to sign those memorandums of understanding between the community, the chief, and the Red Cross is now. Just that knowledge alone would assist greatly.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: In the communities you're responsible for, is there also a tripartite relationship with the province, or how is it set up?

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: I only work for Kahnawake. I work full time with the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, and we share our knowledge with brother and sister communities when they ask. However, it is definitely encouraged. Any time I go to speak within a brother or sister community, I always tell them to get out there and knock on the doors—go talk to their neighbours, to that chemical company, and to that railway—find out what's going on, and get some mutual training from them.

The Chair: That basically wraps up your allotted time.

We move on to MP Georgina Jolibois.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Thank you very much. I am a Dene from northern Saskatchewan, and we share the same common themes you're sharing. I come from a municipal background, though a first nation. I evacuated people, went through the same process, and have the same concerns.

For today's purpose, I would like to take it in a different direction, if you could bear with me. Where I come from, climate change impacts not only forest fires, but the house fires we're talking about in our communities. In your region, is there an impact that you see or that you know of? The question is for both of you.

Chief Randall Phillips: In our community, we have definitely noticed the change with regard to the temperature variations, and some of our elders have noticed that as well. The climate has changed with respect to being hotter. Summers are longer and drier, and that creates the conditions for these types of things.

We are all going to be participating in a climate change symposium within the next couple of weeks, so hopefully we'll have a better idea in terms of what those impacts will be and what we're trying to do to address them.

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: Yes, I have noticed an impact when it comes to climate change and our weather patterns. For the very first time, this past fall, I actually had to put out a tornado warning in our area. We're just south of Montreal. We're on the other side of the St. Lawrence River. For the very first time, I put out a tornado warning, because one was spotted close by. That would never have happened before.

Our winter storms seem to be more fierce. In summer, we're putting out high heat warnings that seem to be higher than before. I definitely see an impact, and as an emergency planner, I have to look at all possibilities. We have three earthquake fault lines that go through our community. I'm really considering looking at the impacts of that change and how it could activate.

• (1610)

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: In terms of partnerships, in terms of help from government for emergency preparedness levels, from both your areas—especially with such disasters—what kind of support is there from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments in terms of tornadoes and other disasters that occur in our communities?

Chief Randall Phillips: I was thinking of exactly this on the way in. I'll use an example that happened a few years ago, and that was SARS. SARS became an emergency everywhere, and our communities wanted to be involved with that. The region was asked to put together a plan, the province was asked to put together a plan, the feds were asked to put together a plan, and we were left out of that plan. We were left out of that right until the end.

What you're talking about here is just the relationships that we've never had before. They're asking, "How come you didn't work with this group?" Well, we've never worked with that group. We're starting to now, because we have individuals who are making that outreach; it's not coming from an organization to a first nations community.

However, that is a perfect example of where we were told we needed to prepare a community plan and all these things, but when we did, there was absolutely no linkage back to the local municipality or to the provincial plan.

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: Within my experience, prior to the joint emergency preparedness program, JEPP, when we looked at accessing funding from both provincial and federal governments, my experience is that the province tells us it's a federal responsibility. So, if you're from Kahnawake, it's a federal responsibility, and you need to contact your federal department.

Then we contact the federal departments.... I have been trying to make really good relationships with the Coast Guard, because we've just developed a new search and rescue team. When we have the Coast Guard, and we get training, then it's, "You're from a native community, okay federal government, you should access funding from that".

Then we call INAC or the federal government, and it seems there are a lot of curve balls that we get thrown. It's getting through a maze to find the end result. It can be trying at times. Finally, it's getting back to, "Can we can work together? I just want to work together with you. Who is your provincial contact? Who is your federal contact?"

Locally or regionally, it really does take that face to-face. We really need to go there and do that face to face and ask if we can work together. You know, I'm your neighbour over here, and I'm here in the province. How can we work together? How can we help you? How can you help us?

But it does start individually with the community. How can you prepare yourself to be better prepared and help yourself and your community? That's where it starts.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: In terms of housing, when there's been a house fire—and God forbid that happens in our communities—how quickly is that house replaced when there's been a fire and the family is out of a house?

Chief Randall Phillips: In the fires that I mentioned in my opening statement, the houses were never rebuilt.

Mr. Arnold Lazare: We're a "have" community, and usually within two months there'll be a lot of public support. You have to remember that most of our houses are owned by certificate of possession, so it's up to the individual homeowner. More and more people are having their own personal home insurance.

I think it's apples and oranges when you're in a community that has community-owned housing.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you.

The Chair: For seven minutes we have MP Amos.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses. It's nice to see you both again.

I appreciate your bringing to our attention situations that many of us have not experienced. I think that's one of the most valuable things that we've had throughout this study. As non-aboriginal, non-indigenous people, we do not necessarily understand this reality. The idea that you would not have a smoke detector in your home, I think, would shock Canadians. We have a lot of work to do, and I appreciate how you are suggesting we advance.

My question is of the nature of a tough-decision question.

If you were the finance minister, how would you suggest limited funds be prioritized for expenditure in the context of achieving the greatest degree of enhanced fire safety across Canada? We don't, unfortunately, live in a world where we have all the resources necessary.

This is the only question I have, so feel free to take your time on it. I'm not going to press you with another one.

● (1615)

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: I'd like to start by acknowledging the communities that I have gone to and shared our lessons with. A lot of times, the emergency manager role or public safety role is put on the fire chief's desk, which is one of the hats he's wearing. He could also be the school bus driver, the public works guy, the fire chief, and the emergency manager. Wearing all of these hats within a small community is tasking. To say that you're going to be the fire chief and the coordinator at the same time is very difficult, because you're taking care of fire and your department, but you also have to have that outside look in terms of coordination and the big picture of the community.

On funding, I would leave that answer to Arnold. If he were the finance minister, how would he spend it? He would probably give 100% to the fire department.

Mr. Arnold Lazare: Once again, there are dollars that are given to the fire department. In many cases, the community has to divvy up the dollars, and they don't get to the fire department.

Our current push would be education and fire prevention. The reality is that you can have the best fire department in the world, but if you don't have an operating smoke detector and a home escape plan, people are going to die. I think that whatever program is, it has to be thought out from the beginning to the end.

The Department of Indigenous Services had a program. The intent was to put smoke detectors in every native home—a very good idea, life-saving.

I'm not sure how the program was developed, but there was a lack of planning in the sense that they didn't identify how they were going to put the smoke detectors out, who was going to install them, or what would be the measure of success. What happened was that 10,000 smoke detectors were shipped out. Some ended up in the public works garage with nobody to put them out, and it ended there.

If we were to ask how many detectors were installed and whether they were working, they probably wouldn't be able to tell you. We don't have a measurable system.

Once again, it was a very good program, and the aboriginal firefighters support it, but we need to think these types of things through and maybe give extra resources for hiring somebody in the community to make sure it is followed through on. Then, more importantly, six months down the road, we need to find out if the detectors are still there and whether the batteries are in them.

I know there is a push to give a smoke detector with a 10-year battery every time a child is born, with a little bit of public education. That will save or monitor the child for the first 10 years of life. It's something that seems to be getting a lot of attention.

If we have limited resources, we need to carefully think out the programs and ensure they're followed from A to Z. The smoke detector was a very good initiative, but there were problems.

• (1620)

Chief Randall Phillips: I've been in native politics now since 1982, and have I ever had a whole list of recommendations in terms of how the federal government could spend more money on first nations issues.

As far as government efficiencies, you know yourself, in terms of what's going on in this country, that there are all kinds of monies being wasted here. All you have to do is look at the Auditor General's reports, and you can determine which areas can be corrected. That's one. That's just general government accounting. Look after your own books, and you can identify where these resources come from.

Second are priorities within a small budget. You have to make these priorities. It's going to have to be the government's decision in terms of whether they want to help people or they want to help businesses. Again, these are just simple priorities.

We're here to say that we are a priority, sir. The Prime Minister has said that he's trying to make us a priority in all of our issues. Again, it's a political decision to address them.

Mr. William Amos: Do you feel, just for greater clarity, because I think I may not have articulated it clearly enough—

The Chair: You've run out of time.

Mr. William Amos: We've run out of time. Maybe we can follow up afterwards.

What I'm really driving at is, if there's a certain budget for fire safety in indigenous communities that is additional, what should that additional money be spent on? How should it be prioritized?

Chief Randall Phillips: Oh, I see.

Mr. William Amos: That's what I'm driving at. I'll come back to it afterwards, and if you have thoughts on it, we'd love to hear them.

Chief Randall Phillips: Okay, yes. I was thinking how you guys could save money, so I'll save that. But I think we outlined that earlier in services and staffing.

The Chair: Okay.

I didn't mean to cut you off mid-sentence, but I appreciate your co-operation because we're going to wrap up this Q and A session with MP Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our guests for being here today.

Did you want to finish that thought? Because there's a \$7-million

Chief Randall Phillips: Reduction of bureaucrats, saving all their extra little bonuses for doing their jobs? You could pop up millions of dollars to any kind of small education program you have here. Of course in the end there's always deficit funding; that's how it'll go. I have already identified what key areas we need to establish fire safety. We also have ambulatory needs, first response needs. This whole notion of the emergency spectrum is not just stuck to fire. If you have priorities you can find those monies.

Sorry, sir. Thank you very much.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: That's no problem.

Kellyann, when you were talking earlier, you said something about similar training. Could you just elaborate on that a little? I brought up earlier that firefighting is firefighting. It doesn't matter who you are, but it matters where you are in the country, whether it's rural—a forest fire—or urban—a house fire or a commercial building or that kind of thing. It doesn't matter whether you're indigenous or non-indigenous, whether you're on reserve or not on reserve. It's the same thing. Can you elaborate on your comments?

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: Definitely, I wasn't referring to firefighting. It was more for emergency management. When it comes to emergency planning, it's not just about preparedness. We've gone from emergency preparedness to the four phases of emergency management—preparedness, response, mitigation.... We need to look at all of them and then teach the communities, not just give them a template on a preparedness plan and say there they go. I was referring specifically to emergency management.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Randall, you've talked extensively about how a lot of the time personal initiative or personal connections drive the development of some of these plans and also the resources that are gathered to enable this. Particularly in my line of work, it doesn't matter what we're dealing with. It always takes an individual to drive it. How can we inspire more individuals to do that, particularly in emergency management, if we're going to broaden it to that? How do we bring inspiration to that? I'll leave it at that.

•(1625)

Chief Randall Phillips: Again, I'm glad Kellyann is here, because I can always point to what she said earlier.

It's just a matter of giving our people an opportunity to grow in this. We support it. We support the environment. We support what they're doing. We support their education. We support them all along the way to say they're part of this community, that this fire department is part of it, that this ambulance service is part of it. Everybody's part of it. Once you get that notion of belonging, then you'll want to do your job better every time. I have yet to meet anybody who has been put in that environment who didn't want to succeed. That's what I'm trying to suggest here. That's the environment we need to put in our communities. We can do that, but we're being stymied by different rules and regulations and laws, and to be honest, helpful people. That's where it comes from. That's the only way to do it. You support individual opportunities. You support individuals. That's what we're trying to do with this. Emergency management is a complex thing at home. It's not one of the glory items, either. You're not going to get your face on the cover of *Time* magazine by doing this work. It's hard work, but as you see, it's important.

That's how I would do it. It just comes down to promoting; if you have a product that people will like, then they'll keep promoting it more and more. That's the key.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Kellyann, do you have any comments to add to that? You've travelled around the world, it sounds like, working on emergency management. How do you inspire local people to be that advocate for their own communities?

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: We look at community champions. Who is going to be your community champion for emergency management? I look at the emergency responders; that's where I try to pick from in getting help. I look at the responders and ask if they can champion emergency management. They've responded to community disasters or emergencies, can they look administratively? This is a wide position here, where you can work one day with social services, another day with public works, another day with transportation and buses, and then another day you're with the RCMP looking at bomb threat planning. It's a wide open field, getting that community champion and starting with the schools.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you.

The Chair: Very good. That concludes our question period.

It's time for me to thank you for coming out and talking with us about your situation in your communities and recommendations for our report. Thank you very much.

We'll take a short break and then reconvene for the second panel.

•(1625)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1635)

The Chair: Let's get started on the second panel.

We have some technical difficulties. Our presenters from Kativik are not online yet and they're trying to hook up, so we could hear from you and hopefully we can get them hooked in as well.

We're going to start. You'll have 10 minutes to present. Then we'll check in with the north and we'll go from there.

We have the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs. I

Mr. Sean Tracey (Deputy Chief, Ottawa Fire Services, Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs): Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to present here today on this crucial topic.

As you know, my name is Sean Tracey. I'm a deputy chief with the Ottawa Fire Services and have been asked to participate on behalf of my esteemed colleague, Chief Ken Block, president of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs.

I'm a fire engineer by training and previously served as a director with the Council of Canadian Fire Marshals and Fire Commissioners, as chair of the Canadian Centre for Emergency Preparedness, and as the Canadian regional manager for the National Fire Protection Association.

I am joined at this table by CAFC's executive director, Dr. Tina Saryeddine.

I'd like to begin by telling you a little about the CAFC. Founded in 1909, the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs is an independent, non-profit organization representing approximately 3,500 fire departments across Canada. The primary mission of CAFC is to promote the highest standard of public safety in an ever-changing and increasingly complex world to ensure the protection of the public through leadership, advocacy, and active collaboration with key stakeholders. This collaboration occurs primarily through a national advisory council on which we have the honour of having each of the provincial fire chief associations as well as the national affiliate associations.

One of these groups is the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada, AFAC, with which we have the privilege of collaborating closely. As fire chiefs, in either aboriginal or non-aboriginal departments or regions, we all have the same goal: safety of our people and communities. Unfortunately for our aboriginal communities, the situation is far more grave than anywhere else in Canada.

According to the 2007 CMHC study, “Fire Prevention in Aboriginal Communities”, aboriginal communities experience a fire death rate 10.4 greater and a fire damage rate 2.1 times greater than the Canadian average. Additionally, these communities are often at the greatest risk to wild land/urban interface fires like we've recently seen in Fort McMurray and Slave Lake.

CAFC recognizes the significantly proportional losses and the challenges aboriginal communities face and, as a result, has been working with AFAC to advocate for a better way to correct this aberration. We believe that a three-pronged approach is the way forward.

First, CAFC strongly supports the establishment of programs that look at fire prevention and public education as a first line of defence in protecting these lives.

Second, CAFC believes that services in these communities must be based on community risk assessments that provide them with services comparable to an equivalent non-aboriginal community.

Third, CAFC is working with and supports the efforts of AFAC and the Department of Indigenous Services Canada, DISC, in the establishment of an indigenous fire marshal's office.

Please allow us to expand on each of these points.

Fire prevention and public education programs are the cornerstones of any loss reduction program. Every community or band should have, as a minimum, a fire prevention and public education program that focuses on working smoke alarms. This is the norm in all provinces and we have seen significant gains as a result.

Having public education programs adapted for cultural references will be key and have been proven successful in the past. For example, national programs developed by organizations such as the National Fire Protection Association, the not-for-profit organization that brings you Fire Prevention Week, have adapted programs including Wisdom of the Fire, Risk Watch, and Remembering When. Future programs can include promotion of culturally specific messaging for Fire Prevention Week. It can include best practice programs such as presenting the family of every newborn with a working smoke alarm with a 10-year battery and instruction on what to do in event of a fire. Unfortunately, such programs need support in their adaptation and implementation in the communities.

Community risk assessments need to be developed for each aboriginal community so as to prioritize these limited resources. This would look at the number and condition of housing, businesses and industries and their risks. It would include demographic and geographical factors, the threat from wildfires, available mutual aid, isolation, etc.

● (1640)

This would then look at comparable services provided to nearby non-aboriginal communities with similar risk profiles, neighbouring communities where their citizens have funded their fire services through their tax bases. These risk assessments would determine the service levels that would form the basis for annual program spending. It would build capability through firefighter training programs, fund existing departments, and build capital expenditure planning. This would create long-term, sustainable fire protection

capabilities in these communities. AFAC, with participation by CAFC, has done extensive work in developing a new level of service standards for DISC based on such risk assessments. This should be implemented and funded appropriately to ensure levels of protection on a par with non-aboriginal communities.

Finally and critically, there is the establishment of an indigenous fire marshal's office supported by legislation. The IFMO would be responsible for the further development of these concepts and the delivery of these services. The IFMO, with regional offices, would be able to develop and distribute prevention programs, work on their adaptation with local champions, and report on fire loss statistics. The IFMO staff can also guide communities in their development of risk assessments and ensure a uniform application of standards across the country. They can collect best practices and communicate these to their regions. They can run regional training programs for firefighters and prioritize equipment programs—all benefits that every province currently reaps through their fire marshal's offices but that are not available to aboriginal communities. The establishment of the IFMO can correct this.

In conclusion, CAFC firmly believes that the above elements are critical for the reduction of fire losses to these at-risk communities. All of these programs are deliverable by indigenous persons for their communities. We just need the commitment from you to make this happen. To the best of my recollection, we have never been as close as we are now to accomplishing our goal of reducing the embarrassing record of fire deaths in our aboriginal communities. It is critical that we follow through with these programs.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're having a few technical difficulties here.

● (1645)

Mr. Sean Tracey: Madam Chair, can I address a question that was raised to the previous group?

The Chair: Since we're waiting, absolutely; please do.

Mr. Sean Tracey: There was a question raised about what to do with regard to the limited use of funds and what you would direct these limited funds toward. The second point we had addressed was that of looking at risk-based comparisons for communities, setting a level of service standards. We believe this is actually a critical key, because past experience has been that program spending did not necessarily result in the best application of these limited resources in communities.

If we look at communities, it may not be that they can support a fire truck or an apparatus and all of the follow-on components that are necessary. But by comparing them and benchmarking them to a comparable community in their region that has a municipal tax base, we can then say, well, this is what you should have for a comparable level of service. You perhaps don't need a truck because you don't have the firefighters who can man the truck. What you need is a prevention program. We need individuals to go into the communities to run a smoke alarm campaign, and eventually maybe you can build up the capability, if you have proven yourselves to build up these capabilities, but it needs to be based on comparable services on risk assessments.

Thank you.

The Chair: Very good.

We have Craig Lingard on the telephone.

You have 10 minutes to present.

Mr. Craig Lingard (Coordinator, Civil Security Section, Kativik Regional Government): I apologize for the technical glitch here.

On behalf of the regional government, we have submitted two documents for your record: our most recent statistic in our 14 Inuit communities here in Nunavik, northern Quebec, under the governance of the Kativik regional government. We have also submitted a PowerPoint presentation we developed and presented recently on the SAR data management and the challenges and objectives of our search and rescue management in the region. Both are very helpful and supportive documents in giving some of the background, the challenges, and the achievements we've made in recent years.

Of course, what we anticipate and continue to deal with as a major problem and a major obstacle is the lack of adequate funding to be able to achieve corrective measures in all of our challenges. We have very young municipalities, in that most or all are only slightly over 30 years since incorporation.

We're all isolated. There are no roads or rail connecting our communities with the rest of Canada. We have a smaller demographic—a smaller pool of people and resources to draw from—which is a challenge, but we are dedicated and we have been creative. The isolation and remoteness force us to be activated in all circumstances of local emergency, search and rescue, and fire intervention. Because of the distance, we cannot depend on any partnership with any other community, so there is a need for optimized local resources.

Communications are a challenge and continue to be, as we are experiencing here today: we have video conference capability, but it's not working for us—my apologies. We have very, very slow—

sometimes non-existent—bandwidth for Internet connection, but we are growing and progressing.

We have made great achievements, and we continue to work hard towards that objective. We have professionally trained some 70 Fire Fighter 1 qualified volunteer firefighters from throughout our region, and we have another six who are doing our non-urban officer qualification to the NFPA standard. We've developed a great resource of local regional trainers who are able to communicate in the mother tongue Inuktitut language. This, we feel, is the key to enabling our people to work, train, and gain success for ourselves.

You have some of the statistics. You have some of the challenges we've laid out. These are fairly accurate and most recent.

I know you are all at the end of your day and of your meeting schedule, so I will relinquish the opportunity to continue speaking and answer any questions you may have for us.

Thank you.

• (1650)

The Chair: All right. We're going to move into our question period. We have a special request from MP Vance Badawey. Do you want to bring Kellyann up?

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): That would be wonderful, if we can bring Kellyann up.

The Chair: Do we have agreement? Did anybody else want to ask her a question as well?

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: We really appreciated your communication style and your knowledge, so we're glad to have you up.

We are going to start with a seven-minute round, with MP Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Actually, MP Badawey was going to start first.

Mr. Vance Badawey: We'll switch. That's fine. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

By the way, great job earlier. I think you were bang-on.

And, Chief, I think you're bang-on as well with respect to some of the comments you made. In coming back to my former life as a mayor in a municipality, this is something that's very near and dear to my heart, having worked on strategic planning. The points that you both made very credibly are on how important it is to look at a more holistic approach and the bigger picture as it relates to not just emergency services, emergency preparedness, but really a plan for everything that is touched on and by emergency services, such as infrastructure, building code. And they were about the entire community's working together to ensure that, again, it's a community, bigger-picture plan to deal with these challenges.

I want to dive in a bit deeper because my desire here is to, hopefully, after this process, receive from you recommendations. I do sit on the indigenous caucus. This is something we're talking about when it comes to economic development, emergency preparedness, infrastructure, and the list goes on. I need to get something out of this versus just listening, and hearing, and talking.

What I want to gear at is the “how” to the “what”. We know what the “what” is here, and we know that there's individual strategic planning, identify deliverables, attach actions to those. And there are adequacy standards; Chief, you touched on how those are, essentially, not in a cookie cutter but specific to each individual community. There are emergency preparedness protocols, whether they be per incident or in the bigger picture in terms of emergency situations that are more community, regional, if not even provincial, in nature; the governance side with respect to the budget and being stewards of where the money goes, especially from capital; the operations side in terms of where money goes with respect to response, prevention. And I'll even throw emergency medical services, EMS, into that as well.

I'm not sure how you're dispatched. I'm not sure how you're tiered. I'm assuming that you're dispatched more on a regional area in different first nations communities. It would be more of a question, who actually does the dispatch, and are they tiered, and who are they tiered to with respect to fire, police, and EMS? Of course, included in all that is proper building code, which includes fire alarms, smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms. Then with all that is your infrastructure, ensuring proper infrastructure, and we can go on from there. Then lastly is the economic development of all this, human resources. Who's actually going to person your EMS, your fire, your police, and so on and so forth? As well, with respect to infrastructure, who's going to build the infrastructure? Who's going to build the homes? Who's going to actually establish the inspections of the building code within those homes?

I throw all that on the table. Now I'm going to be quiet. I want to hear from you on recommendations that you think can actually satisfy all of the above so that this committee can actually make recommendations to the ministries to actually make this happen.

•(1655)

Mr. Craig Lingard: Madam Chair, may I respond, or was there another question that was going to be brought?

The Chair: Please respond.

Mr. Craig Lingard: You're obviously knowledgeable about the challenges we face.

For the sake of time, I'll try to summarize. Within our region, we are very young. We have a population that's growing exponentially. I believe the last census puts our population under the age of 25 at close to 60% of our regional population, so that's very high growth and an expanding population factor.

That said, we have limited demographics and limited resources that we can call upon. We have many people in small communities who wear many hats, and we ask those who are capable of doing to do as much as they can and more. We have volunteer firefighters, volunteer first responders, and volunteer Canadian Rangers. We have many who step up and meet the call.

That said, volunteering is not necessarily in the same sense that we know it traditionally in the country, because employment and salaried or great jobs or good jobs are very hard to find, so remuneration for any volunteer is very important.

I don't mean to digress here. I just want to try to touch on all of it for your question.

With regard to housing, it's probably one of the most complicated and compounding issues we face. We are facing a shortage of I believe 800 to 1,000 housing units in the region, depending on the last census, the last survey. It's not uncommon to see three and four generations living in a house. We have parents with children and their common-law spouses with their children living in the same house, as well as elders. It's not uncommon to see more than 10 or 12 people living in a three-bedroom house. This causes major problems for many reasons. Also, if we do lose a house to a fire, it just compounds all of the problems exponentially and socially. Because of the climate, the geography, and the remoteness, we can't deal with that for probably a year after the fact, so it's a very devastating issue when we do have fires.

Mr. Vance Badawey: I'm going to cut you off for a second, because I'd like to hear from Kellyann, if I may.

If you want to get more answers in later, you can fit them into somebody else's question.

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: Thank you very much.

What I noticed is that he was talking about someone who wears many hats in the community. It's that lack of human resources. I touched on that earlier about the training. It's nice to have the truck, but if you don't have the training and knowledge to use it, it's useless. In terms of having that one person in the community who is the do-all, the go-getter, or the champion, they're great, but they can't do it all, especially in emergency management.

In terms of knowing and having that resource available to do the emergency social services, who's going to look after it in the event that we have to evacuate? How about what we can do prior to evacuation? What types of prevention methods can we use? How can we clean up the areas around our homes—being fire smart in the FireSmart program—for communities to protect their homes from forest fires or wildland fires? Those types of things would definitely help greatly. It's about getting that information out to the communities, knowing where all the communities are, what the population is there, and then saying, “Here are the resources available to you.”

Like I said, they don't know what doors to knock on. They don't know what programs are out there. It's unfortunate, but I have not seen DIAND go out to say, "Guess what—here's all the funding that's available to you." There is a certain base amount that's available for an emergency coordinator. Did they know that? No, they didn't know that, so now they have to go out and get it. It's about being aware of what's available to them. Honestly, knowledge is the key for sure.

• (1700)

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you.

The Chair: The questioning now moves to MP Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thanks again to all of you for coming, and thanks, Craig, for getting connected through a land line. They still exist, which is good.

We've sat around this table for weeks. You are the final group to come to us. We've talked about Kamloops. We've talked about the northern fires in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. With all due respect, with all the talk we've had here for a month to two months, we're waiting for the next catastrophe. We haven't learned from Fort McMurray. We haven't learned a damn thing from Slave Lake.

This committee is the most frustrating, because this report is going to go probably nowhere. The next catastrophe will come. We just don't know where. What are doing? All the talk I've heard for the last eight weeks means nothing. I haven't heard a solution. I have heard some ideas.

Go ahead, Mr. Tracey.

Mr. Sean Tracey: Thank you.

As somebody who has given testimony post those incidents, in my role with the Canadian Centre for Emergency Preparedness and with the National Fire Protection Association, I would say we have solutions. We identified, probably 10 years ago, the requirement to introduce into the National Building Code the requirement to identify and require higher standards of construction in areas that are prone to wildland-urban interface fires so that there is the proper separation, requirements, and protection for those.

It's similar to when we build in a seismic zone or we build in high-wind areas. This is a risk. We require higher standards of protection in those communities, and those construction methods work. We know that through the National Fire Protection Association.

The FireSmart or the Firewise programs are education programs that can be brought into these communities as a requirement as well when they identify these risk components, and build capabilities so they understand how to....

All of these materials are out there. We need them in the building codes. We have been trying, but we have been stymied in the building codes and given the runaround—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: By who?

Mr. Sean Tracey: —by the Canadian codes commission and those who have a specific interest in making sure that higher standards of construction are not required for houses—the home builders.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: How do we get this changed?

Mr. Sean Tracey: Direct it. Order it. Just as we have higher requirements now for higher energy standards on homes, require the codes to protect and identify the requirements for wildland-urban interface protection.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: As parliamentarians, within the next month, we're going to see a TV clip of another house that has been burned on a reserve. Ninety per cent of them probably don't have fire detectors, and carbon monoxide detectors are not even on the radar for most of these reserves. Let's face it.

The building codes are atrocious and we've talked about that. Nobody wants to fix that, as you just said.

As parliamentarians, we sit around here and we're talking about fire safety and emergency management. It doesn't matter what part of the country you come from; it's the same story.

Tina, maybe just as the executive director—

This is frustrating for us, because this is going to happen again and again and again.

Ms. Tina Saryeddine (Executive Director, Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs): Thank you for the opportunity, and certainly we support what Chief Tracey has presented.

I think part of connecting the dots involves finding the mechanics that you can leverage backstage. For example, in terms of the country's building codes, it's not just on reserves or in the aboriginal communities where that's a problem. It's a problem writ large, so how do you grasp some of these issues that are not specific only to aboriginal communities?

In terms of the building codes committee, which Chief Tracey co-chairs, we've asked the federal government to assist the fire service in strengthening its voice by allowing it to have better resources for research and innovation. Right now when we want to put in a change to the building code we have to go through the same process that industry or academia would have to go through. Fire departments aren't resourced to do that, so we don't stand a good chance of changing the building code.

I think part of it, as you said, for parliamentarians is to understand the very complex process that goes on backstage to the building code process, so we certainly appreciate the line of questions and the focus on solutions.

• (1705)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Craig, if you don't mind, you're so remote. You have language issues; you're very isolated; and you've been a community for only 30 years, but boy, have you done a pretty good job—70 firefighter 1s.

Maybe you can just talk about that, because it's going to take hours to get to you, and you guys are on your own. Let's face it: you're so far north that it's up to you to solve all the issues.

Mr. Craig Lingard: We have been very autonomous, and I liken it to the will and the passion of the people in the region here.

In 1999 we sustained a devastating accident, which created civil security with the regional government. In 2001 the provincial government, by decree, asked everybody to do a statement of risk or a fire safety cover plan. We committed to that process and entered into one in 2011.

We're now in the process of revitalizing it. We've identified priorities, and we've committed to a reasonable plan of action over a timeline. We need continued funding to address infrastructure, capital assets, training needs, and personnel with skills, but the bottom line is empowering those who have the will and the skill to take care of our own people. It's working with the resources in the region, optimizing local resources, I think, and partnering of course with our federal and provincial partners.

To that end, I think we need better collaboration with federal partners in our region. We don't have direct or timely access to all programs. We sometimes don't know or aren't aware of the appropriate programs, such as those through Public Safety National Search and Rescue Secretariat, or others, for example.

Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You both mentioned education.

I'm out of time. Okay.

The Chair: Next we're going to MP Georgina Jolibois.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I was a small-town mayor and was responsible for the local fire department, which was based on limited resources. Over the years, the community has done well because the rules applied in the provincial area are different from the rules applied on the reserve. The federal government is responsible for the reserve.

How can we place pressure on the federal government to allow for the same rules you're talking about, things like FireSmart and the long list of things we do? I see that frustration when I go on reserve because of the limitations felt by the rules in place federally. How can we improve that? That's a loaded question, but I want to ask that question.

Mr. Sean Tracey: Again, we think the key to that is the second prong of the approach we were suggesting. That was community-based risk assessments, similar to what we have seen in Quebec with the *schéma de couverture de risques*. Every community has to do a risk-based model, and from that, it dictates the level of service standards it should have. Through the service-level agreements, DISC would then fund the community to that full level of service. Maybe we should then have, according to these service-level standards, an equivalent fire department with four full-time personnel and a full-time fire chief. The funding is there. They get the equipment and the maintenance funds to sustain that and make it happen. They then get ongoing training and support in the budget to make that happen.

The problem is that a lot of times these communities don't understand the resources and don't have assistance, and we need this fire marshal's office to be able to assist them, support them, and drive them through that risk process and assessment to get them the

resources, help them meet the NFPA 1001 standards and certifications, and have these programs set up. We believe it will build this capability by having that level of service comparable to a neighbouring non-aboriginal community.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you.

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: The communities need to realize... Every time I go to a community and help teach them, I always tell them that they're on their own and that they need to understand they are responsible for their community and people. Then I ask them what plan we can make, what mitigation efforts we can do, and what training we can have. Anything extra is an added bonus, but I want them to plan. I want them to mitigate now as if they're by themselves and on their own. That then opens the eyes.

It's like when your child finally turns of age, you kick them out the door and say that they're on their own. You're not paying their rent or groceries anymore. It's like that, and asking how we can mitigate it and protect our community. We need to work together and stick together. That then makes them stronger. It's that reality check that help might be hundreds of kilometres away or hours away.

• (1710)

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Craig, can you answer that question?

Mr. Craig Lingard: That's a pretty tough question. I understand. We are living it up here in that we have young communities. Amongst all of the challenges they have to face in municipal management and governance, they have an obligation to create and maintain a capable fire department and emergency services—and they do that without adequate funding. Because of the nature of our communities, we do not have industry to draw taxation from, so all of our funding comes from a government source or municipal service.

Any money we give to the fire service, we have to negotiate every time we have a need, and we're trying to do that more efficiently and more effectively through the fire safety cover plan process. We're optimistic, but it's always a challenge, and we're always chasing. We're always chasing and always depending on the generosity or on the partnership or on the understanding.

That being said, we've put a lot of energy and creativity into prevention programs and education. We visit the schools and talk with the kids at different ages. We try to have every house in our community visited once a year for fire safety to review the use of their life-safety devices, their means of egress.

We try to work with housing providers to make sure they're up to date on any issues that are dangerous, and work in partnership with education and prevention with them as well. It's a multi-faceted, multi-level approach, but we can't rely on any one agency or individual to achieve it. It has to be co-operative, and it has to be grassroots.

But we need access to adequate funding, and we need to implement long-term strategies with short-term goals.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Mr. Tracey, you talked about the Aboriginal Firefighters Association. I'm curious. We heard from our friend over there saying that what she said is the indigenous communities must be consulted, must be asked, must play a key role in it, with the Aboriginal Firefighters Association and the Canadian association.

What kind of relationship is there between the two?

Mr. Sean Tracey: Right now, the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada is one of our affiliate associations that are on our national advisory council and have direct input in dealing with the CAFC on a regular basis.

Ms. Tina Saryeddine: Ms. Jolibois, the nature of your question is really important. Chief Lazare and Chief Tracey, chiefs from aboriginal communities, from non-aboriginal communities, are all members of the CAFC if they choose to be.

I really appreciate the nature of your question, because, with your permission, we'll take it back. I think it speaks to the importance of organizations like the CAFC, the work that Chief Tracey, Chief Lazare, and their colleagues do to work together on issues of best practice.

Like you said earlier, Mr. Viersen, issues of fire are issues of fire. They are worsened in certain circumstances, in certain contexts. But we all have a responsibility to work together and speak together on it. When you asked the earlier question on how we bring standards of practice up, I'd love to take that back to the chiefs, with you, Chief Tracey, and Chief Lazare as well and just say that that question was raised and ask what we can do collectively.

Thank you for that.

• (1715)

The Chair: We're going to have to move the questioning over to MP Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, panel, for joining us. I really want to acknowledge Kuujuaq. I know as a committee, it was probably the first place we travelled earlier on, in 2016. It really put a lot of light into many of the challenges that are faced by indigenous communities. I appreciate the work, how hard it is to work in a very remote area. I think it puts a lot of things in perspective.

I want to pick up on a couple things that were mentioned earlier, particularly with respect to the indigenous fire marshal's office. Right now my understanding is that fire marshal offices are provincially mandated, and there are some exceptional powers that rest within the provincial fire marshal's office.

How do each one of you feel the indigenous fire marshal's office could be empowered, and what kind of specific investigative powers

and powers of ordering certain things to be done.... What kind of specific powers do you envision the fire marshal's office to have?

I'm going to start with Craig and then Kellyann and the firefighters. I also want to make sure we have at least a minute and a half for a final question.

Mr. Craig Lingard: I would defer our comments to our colleagues. I think they've done better background and better preparation for this concept. We would welcome the opportunity to be able to establish that in our region, but knowing that they've done so much homework, preparation, study, and analysis of it, I would defer to them to speak.

Mr. Sean Tracey: I'll start, then.

Just this Monday, we were meeting with the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada to address that exact question. One of the key things we identified as a requirement was that the minimum they should have in every province is the creation and sustaining of a public education program. That office then would be able to take a look at the bands or communities within their region; to look at getting out public education materials, if necessary working with them to adapt and deliver them; to work with developing capabilities for mavens in the community who would be the public safety experts to train and deliver these programs; to report back on fire statistics, which has been a problem for us; and to look at the training and development programs.

Also, then, look at the running and development of community risk-based models and collection of the data; help communities develop those community risk-based models, which then drives the funding that they are then able to get; and assist those communities in funding, talking to councils to ensure that the directed funding is appropriately applied for the services in those communities. They would report back on a national level to the indigenous fire marshal's office.

Those would be the key minimum components to look at that would be a level of service that's provided on a par with the average fire marshal's office, in my opinion.

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: From an emergency management standpoint, I would look at echoing what I said earlier, the same. What type of authority and powers does the fire marshal's office of Canada have? That's the same thing that we would need from our indigenous one.

Within our offices, prevention, mitigation, education, and driving those numbers down....

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

I'm going to give my time to Mr. Amos.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you, and I've only got one question, so I'm happy to pass off the time to my other colleagues if they have further questions.

My question is for Mr. Tracey and for Ms. Meloche. We heard testimony two days ago, and it was repeated today, that statistics around fire incidents and more generally around the impact of fires in indigenous communities ceased to be collected. Today it was said it stopped around 2007, and they were citing HRSDC. Previous witnesses cited 2010, so maybe we need a bit of clarification. The main message was that there was a lack of data.

I wonder if Mr. Tracey could comment on the importance of collecting such data, and whether the failure to collect it puts communities at risk.

I would ask the same question directly to you, Ms. Meloche.

• (1720)

Mr. Sean Tracey: I am a past member of the Council of Canadian Fire Marshals and Commissioners, and we were responsible in our jurisdictions for collecting data and reporting that up to a national framework.

In about 2010, HRSDC at the time ceased collecting the data part and parcel because some of the provinces also began to fail to collect data within their provinces, so it created a gap in the national network. Since that time, CAFC and the Canadian Council of Fire Marshals and Fire Commissioners have been trying to re-create or have a national database, so it has been a problem nationally. I'm not sure if Tina wants to give us an update on where that stands, but CAFC has been working on that.

The 2007 CMHC report was the last report that I know specifically addressed aboriginal fire losses in our communities. Nothing that I have seen on a national front would give me any sort of pause for relief to think that this number and that fire loss trend has improved in any way whatsoever.

Yes, it's a problem. It causes us a problem trying to address things like the National Building Code. What are the changes? It's of critical importance. We do know anecdotally that the fire losses for structure fires have gone up proportionately, and NRC's reporting that. Houses are burning faster, and fires are more damaging than they've ever been because of the contents and of how inexpensively we build houses these days. That's a greater challenge that's not unique or specific to aboriginal communities.

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: Data and statistics are going to help us with future prevention programs. How can we measure the possibility of a prevention or education program's successes if we don't know the data from the start? From 2007 or 2010 until now, in the last eight years or so, how much has it improved, if any, and then what does that do in building codes, losses, lives lost, and the like? Statistics and data will help us to measure the education programs we have to push, where do we have to talk, what do we have to teach? Is it about the building codes or is it about getting a smoke detector in the home? That brings us knowledge.

The Chair: We're going to conclude our round of questioning with MP McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to pick up on the data issue also.

I think we all recognize that having good data helps do just as you said. I was involved in health care for many years, and I know that

the collection of data became an issue because many first nations communities were very perturbed about providing that information to the government. It sounds as if there were issues with the provinces, so there was this sense of not wanting to give us this data, because it sounds as if the government is saying it was a failure. This was a voluntary mechanism. Is anyone suggesting that to provide this data should be mandatory, or should communities have options around the provision of the data?

As I say, in the health care area that I represented a lot of important data were not being collected anymore at the desire of the first nations community. So first, should it be mandatory? Second, would the indigenous fire marshal issue support that particular...? Would there perhaps be more voluntary provision because there would be greater confidence?

• (1725)

Ms. Kellyann Meloche: I would wager that if there is an indigenous fire marshal's office, which is a great idea, our communities would be more likely to share that information with the office. It's building trust. Any time you're asking for numbers or information or anything like that from our communities, it's scary because we're wondering how you're going to use it against us. It's silly, but it's more how can we work together and how can we build our programs? If we're talking nation to nation or indigenous to indigenous, it's more willing to be shareable.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: It sounds as if Tina wants to interject.

Ms. Tina Saryeddine: Yes, I'd like to follow up on deputy fire chief Tracey's solution to the national fire information database, and what we learned from that. This database has over 10 years of data about fire incidences and injuries in our country. It was an effort to collect data from across the country, and we learned the issues of data collection are not unique to the aboriginal communities. Many provinces had a lot of difficulty providing data. That also challenges us to ask how much data you need before you know there's a problem. I do see the importance of an evidence-informed approach, of data collection. We're extraordinarily grateful to Public Safety and DRDC for funding this initiative. I invite you to go to nfidcanada.ca to see the results of this project. But it's a cautionary tale. Collecting data from across the provinces in different ways is not cheap, it's not fast, it's not easy. It's a work in progress, we're evolving, and I think we probably know about some of the issues with or without the data, some of the education issues, some of the smoke alarm issues, etc. Thank you.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair—

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Sorry, I agreed to share my time.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Just for my own benefit, I'm not really familiar.... I worked with the fire chief in my hometown. He was a volunteer fire chief up in northern Alberta. I don't know much beyond my own town as to how a fire marshal works. You mentioned there was a provincial fire marshal. Is there a Canadian fire marshal?

Mr. Sean Tracey: No. The closest equivalent that we have in any federal department is the Canadian Forces fire marshal, who is the fire marshal for the Department of National Defence and addresses all of their properties, their facilities, and their training.

One of the issues we currently have is that there is no federal fire marshal, as such. That is a current gap, so nobody is looking at individual federal facilities or buildings. It's the responsibility of each of the individual departments, and the heads of those departments are responsible for fire protection issues within those.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Okay, so when we're calling for an indigenous fire marshal, a Canadian national fire marshal might be part of that conversation.

Mr. Sean Tracey: I'll let Tina address that one.

Ms. Tina Saryeddine: If I could just add to that, Chief Tracey, in fact, the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs is on the record, this year in our pre-budget submission and in many of our policy

documents, asking for consideration of a national fire adviser because of the number of issues that affect fire.

There are issues related to aboriginals, but within the common issues in non-aboriginal communities are mental health issues, building code issues, and issues related to transportation, trains, and transportation of dangerous goods.

All of these issues, including the question that was raised earlier about how to level the playing field between aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities, would probably be well served by consideration of a national fire advisory role.

Thank you.

• (1730)

The Chair: That concludes our session. It's a good place to stop.

Thanks, Tina.

Thank you to everybody for your participation.

That concludes our public hearings on the study. We'll now prepare the report.

The meeting is adjourned.

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