

# **Nova Scotia Fire and Associated Services**

**Fire Services Senior Officials Committee  
Report**

**December 14, 2012**

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## Executive Summary

The Fire Services Senior Officials Committee (FSSOC) was established on January 30, 2012 by the Fire Service Deputy Ministers Standing Committee to examine current fire and associated services in Nova Scotia. Participation included senior staff from the Nova Scotia Departments of Labour and Advanced Education (Office of the Fire Marshal); Justice (Emergency Management Office); Health and Wellness; Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations; Natural Resources; and Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

The FSSOC was mandated to finalize a report by December 31, 2012 with recommendations concerning:

- opportunities to better align and coordinate fire and associated services throughout the province;
- opportunities for efficiencies and to minimize risk to communities and responders; and
- the future governance and operations of the fire and associated services in Nova Scotia.

In the course of developing the recommendations presented in this report, the FSSOC conducted an extensive literature review of previous Nova Scotia reports related to fire and associated services and completed a jurisdictional comparative analysis between fire and associated services in Nova Scotia and all other provinces and territories in Canada.

This report presents 16 recommendations associated with the key themes of governance and authority; accountability; operations; finance; equipment and vehicles; tactical communications; training; human resources; and interoperability. Included in the recommendations is an engagement process that identifies the priorities, timeline and level of effort required to enable implementation of the recommendations.

**Background**

As detailed in the Nova Scotia *Fire Safety Act*, the Office of the Fire Marshall (OFM) oversees fire prevention and fire investigation. Fire and associated services delivery is a shared responsibility between municipal fire departments and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) which oversees wildland fires. Municipalities decide for themselves the level of fire suppression they wish to have based on the known risk.

**Membership**

The following provincial senior officials participated in the FSSOC:

Russell Stuart (Chair) Director, Health Services Emergency Management, Health and Wellness	Harold Pothier Fire Marshal, Labour and Advanced Education
Tony Eden Director, Ground Ambulance, Emergency Health Services, Health and Wellness	Bruce Langille Director, Risk Management, Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal
Julie Towers Executive Director, Renewable Resources, Natural Resources	George Muise Emergency Management Planning Officer, Emergency Management Office, Justice
Dave Smith Provincial Director of Planning, Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations	Anne Partridge Director, Conciliation and Labour Tribunals, Labour and Advanced Education

**Mandate**

The FSSOC was mandated to review and analyze fire and associated service delivery in the province. The associated services include, but are not limited to:

- hazardous material response;
- ice, water and confined space rescue;
- vehicle extraction; and
- medical first response.

This report focuses on the key themes of governance and authority; accountability; operations; finance; equipment and vehicles; tactical communications; training; human resources; and interoperability.

The FSSOC was mandated with identifying:

- opportunities to better align and coordinate services throughout the province;
- opportunities for efficiencies and the minimization of risk to communities and responders; and
- recommending future governance and operations structures of the fire and associated services in Nova Scotia.

## Objectives

The work of the FSSOC was divided into three phases, namely:

- **Phase I:** Analysis
- **Phase II:** Coordination, Engagement Process and Going Forward
- **Phase III:** Recommendations

## PHASE I: Analysis

Based on research methods, the FSSOC produced analysis of fire services in Nova Scotia and the overall state of fire services and governance in Canada.

## Literature Review

For the literature review, 10 reports, dated 1974-2009, were analyzed. Subject matter experts validated and updated the status of the recommendations contained within these reports. (see Annex B)

## Jurisdictional Review

The jurisdictional review consists of a comparative analysis between fire and associated services in Nova Scotia and all other provinces and territories in Canada. (see Annex C)

## Metrics

Additionally, in the first phase of the work of the FSSOC, the committee developed metrics to provide contextual measurements for system design and system performance. (see Annex D)

## Key Themes

Aggregated findings of literature and jurisdictional reviews identified the following key themes:

### Governance and Authority

The relevant Acts and the responsibilities of the various government departments and levels of government.

### Accountability

The mechanisms in place to ensure the system adheres to quality standards and is responsive to the proper authority.

### Operations

The consistency of service throughout a jurisdiction.

### Finance

The budget parameters and the costs of administering the system.

### Equipment and Vehicles

The extent to which fire departments are equipped with the same or comparable equipment.

### Tactical Communications

The public access points and dispatch systems.

### Training

The training requirements for firefighters.

### Human Resources

Staffing levels and the mix of professional and volunteer firefighters.

### Interoperability

The extent to which various emergency responders can 'speak to each other' in an emergency response situation.

## **PHASE II: Coordination, Engagement Process and Going Forward**

The work of Phase II encompasses the defining of an engagement process to implement the recommendations; a summary of the roles and responsibilities of the various government departments involved in the fire and associated services; and a prioritization of the recommendations.

### **Engagement Process**

*The design of an effective engagement process to facilitate the solicitation of input from various stakeholders into the issues and opportunities to improve and strengthen fire and associated services.<sup>1</sup>*

In developing the 16 recommendations, the following criteria were identified in order to develop an effective engagement process:

#### Impact:

- The impact for the recommendations is defined as high, medium or low. This distinction defines the impact the implementation of the recommendation will have on the fire and associated services.

#### Time to Implement:

- The timeline for implementation is broken down to 0 to 2 years, 3 to 5 years or five plus years. The purpose for these periods recognizes that certain recommendations need to be implemented before other recommendations can be achieved.

#### Level of Effort:

- The level of effort to implement the recommendations is defined as either low, moderate or difficult. There are a

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<sup>1</sup> TOR



number of factors that were considered in providing this analysis.

A table summarizing the recommendations, impact, timeline and level of effort is contained at the end of this report. Additionally, a graphic depiction of the recommendations, impact, timeline and level of effort is contained in Annex E.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

*A review of roles and responsibilities of various provincial government departments to ensure better coordination of programs and services, including collaboration with and at all levels of government.<sup>2</sup>*

In defining the roles and responsibilities of the various Nova Scotia government department involved in fire and associated services, a table was developed that details the departments; program or service; annual funding in dollars; and any other investments. (see Annex F)

Additionally, list of stakeholders was developed that identifies fire, municipal, provincial, federal and private departments, agencies, committees or organizations that have a role in fire and associated services. (see Annex G)

## **Priorities**

*The determination of key areas for development and improvement, and priorities for the next 3-5 years.<sup>3</sup>*

In defining key areas for development and improvement, the recommendations were further prioritized to 0-2 years, 3 – 5 years and 5 plus years. This was considered necessary since some recommendations are contingent on earlier work being complete.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

## PHASE III: Recommendations

The FSSOC developed 16 recommendations related to the key themes of governance and authority; accountability; operations; finance; equipment and vehicles; tactical communications; training; human resources; and interoperability.

Each of the recommendations identify the level of impact, time frame, and level of effort information.

The discussion for each recommendation has been developed through consideration of the literature and jurisdictional reviews where applicable.

A table with a summary of the recommendations is contained at the end of this report.

## Governance and Authority

### 1 - Centralize Emergency Services

Centralized Emergency Services governance and authority provided by fire services including prevention, suppression, specialty teams and investigations within a single provincial department within the NS government. Assign accountability within an existing department or create a public safety department that would be province led with governance, not oversight, accountability.

*Impact – high*

*Timeline – 2 years*

*Level of Effort – difficult*

#### Discussion

Nova Scotia houses the governance responsibilities for fire prevention in a separate department from that of emergency management. The majority of provinces and territories house these responsibilities in the same department.

Nova Scotia is unique in housing structural fire prevention, structural fire suppression, wildland fire suppression and emergency management responsibilities in different

departments. Manitoba is the only other jurisdiction that separates the governance of all three.

One province, Alberta, has a Safety Codes Council which represents all disciplines related to public safety in the built environment, advises the Minister on any issues regarding safety, and also acts as an appeal board for any decisions made by a safety codes officer.

References “Graham Report 1974”; “FSANS position paper 2009” ; “Fire and Emergency Services Scan of Canadian Provinces and Territories Report of the Fire Services Senior Officials Committee” p.6; p.12; p.16

## 2 - Municipalities Work Together

In collaboration with the province, municipalities work together to provide local leadership for integrated, and efficient, sustainable fire service for all communities in Nova Scotia.

*Impact – high*

*Timeline – 2 years*

*Level of Effort – moderate*

### Discussion

Most provinces and territories give municipalities the authority to determine for themselves if they want to have fire services, and to what level.

However, Nova Scotia does not have a quality assurance process for municipal fire prevention and suppression and this should become a priority through a collaborative effort with the municipalities to achieve consistent service standards.

References: FSANS position paper 2009; “Graham Report” 1974; “Fire and Emergency Services Scan” p.5; p.17; p.18

## Accountability

### 3 - Performance Based Reporting

Develop a performance based reporting system to support the collection of data and information for all fire service activities in the province including operational, financial and administrative.

*Impact – high*

*Timeline – 2 years*

*Level of Effort – difficult*

#### Discussion

Most provinces and territories require at least some formal reporting from municipal fire departments on a regular basis. There is a mix of systems in use, including custom designed in-house databases. Several provinces and territories use the Flexible Data Management (FDM) system.

A coordinated and comprehensive data collection system could be supported by establishing a unified dispatch service.

There are reporting requirements in existing legislation but these mechanisms are not coordinated or comprehensive of the system of fire and associated services.

The metrics provide the contextual measurements for system design and system performance. (see Annex D)

References: “Auditor General’s Report 2010” recommendation 6.11; “Graham Commission 1974”; “Threat and Risk Assessment of the Volunteer Public Safety Dispatch and Paging/Notification Services in Nova Scotia”; Fire and Emergency Services Scan” p.22

## Operations

### 4 - Standards for Emergency Services

Establish standards for emergency service activities including staffing, training, response configuration, vehicles and equipment, telecommunications, and interoperability.

*Impact – high*  
*Timeline – 3 to 5 years*  
*Level of Effort – difficult*

### Discussion

Almost all provinces and territories currently give local authorities the option of providing certain services, as opposed to a directive to do so. Each municipality decides what level of service they want to provide, if any. This can lead to differences in capacity and capability. The level of local service depends on the ability of the community to support it, including factors such as local leadership and taxation.

As noted previously, Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Quebec provide some amount of equipment to municipal fire departments. This can help ensure common standards for equipment.

Nova Scotia does not have established training standards or subsidized training for municipal fire fighters.

Important considerations are the potential for fire services to be rebranded as part of a multi-jurisdictional and province-wide emergency service and, rationalizing the numbers and strategic placement of fire halls in the province.

References: “FSANS position paper 2009”; “Fire and Emergency Services Scan” p.31

## **Finance**

### 5 - Standard Insurance

Establish one standard insurance program for all public fire departments in the province.

*Impact – medium*  
*Timeline – 2 years*  
*Level of Effort – low*

### Discussion

Risk assurance and net cost savings inform the recommendation to pursue a cost recovery, potentially bulk

purchase, insurance program for both municipalities and local fire services organizations, with levies based on per organization volume of operations, equipment and staffing.

References: “Moody Report 1984”

## 6 - Coordination and Efficient Utilization of Provincial Programs

Coordination and efficient utilization of provincial programs, services and funding, e.g. training, equipment, fire school grants, communications, etc.

*Impact – low*

*Timeline – 2 years*

*Level of Effort – low*

### Discussion

Most provinces and territories apart from Nova Scotia have standards for equipment, or processes to ensure quality equipment is used in the fire service. Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Quebec provide some amount of equipment to municipal fire departments which facilitates standardization.

A review and rationalization of the current grants regime should be undertaken to facilitate better access to funding by local fire services organizations.

References: “Moody Report 1984”; “FSANS position paper 2009”; Fire and Emergency Services Scan” p.47

## 7 - Appropriate Funding

Determine appropriate funding programs, and sources of revenue provided by the province; e.g. for training and insurance; and by the municipality, e.g. operations and staffing.

*Impact – high*

*Timeline – 2 years*

*Level of Effort – moderate*

### Discussion

By example, Manitoba’s Office of the Fire Commissioner operates as a Special Operating Agency. The OFC consequently

is mainly financially self-sufficient, with most revenue generated from a tax levy, and from tuition fees at the emergency services college. The OFC presents an annual business plan to the provincial Treasury Board in order to receive any government funding.

Manitoba is the only jurisdiction in Canada where a tax levy goes directly into the budget of the OFC. In all other jurisdictions, the dollars go into the provincial and territorial general revenues.

While potentially politically sensitive should levied funds not go to general revenue, there may be alternatives worth exploring such as more funding from the Province for the fire services (OFM) from the annual fire tax levy.

References: "Graham Report 1974"; "Fire and Emergency Services Scan" p.9

## 8 - Service Fees

Establish appropriate service fees for fire and related services in NS.

*Impact – medium*

*Timeline - 3 to 5 years*

*Level of Effort – moderate*

### Discussion

A consistent and fair schedule of service fees could link the municipal tax rate to responses for fire and associated services in each municipality through the concept of user pay.

References: N/A

## 9 - Procurement and Bulk Purchasing

Explore single procurement/ bulk purchasing and materiel management (Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Vehicles, Fuel, Uniforms, and Telecommunications, etc.)

*Impact – medium*

*Timeline – 2 years*

*Level of Effort – low*

### Discussion

In Nova Scotia, medical responders' consumable supplies are provided through Emergency Health Services. Most fire departments, with the exception of Halifax and Cape Breton Regional Municipalities, acquire their supplies either through the department or the municipality. Efforts are currently being made to coordinate bulk purchasing through municipalities and fire departments.

References: "Moody Report 1984"; "Fire and Emergency Services Scan" p.40

## **Equipment and Vehicles**

### 10 - Minimum Standards for Equipment and Vehicles

Establish minimum standards and specifications for vehicles and equipment used by fire departments in delivery of emergency services in NS, including technical specifications, service and maintenance schedules.

*Impact – high*

*Timeline – 3 to 5 years*

*Level of Effort – moderate*

### Discussion

Unlike other jurisdictions, Nova Scotia does not have established standards for equipment.

As stated previously under Recommendation #5, most provinces and territories apart from Nova Scotia have standards for equipment, or processes to ensure quality equipment is used in the fire service. Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Quebec provide some amount of equipment to municipal fire departments which facilitates standardization.

References: "Moody Report 1984"; "Select Committee on Fire Safety 2002"; "Fire and Emergency Services Scan" p.38



## Tactical Communications

### 11 - Dispatch Response System

There should be a coordinated Dispatch Response System in Nova Scotia.

*Impact – high*

*Timeline – 3 to 5 years*

*Level of Effort – difficult*

#### Discussion

Nova Scotia's fire dispatch is managed solely at the local level. Most provinces and territories have some dispatch services managed at the local/municipal level. In six jurisdictions dispatch is managed exclusively at the local level, in the others, it is split between provincial and territorial management for some communities and local management for others.

As noted under Recommendation #3, the establishment of a unified dispatch service would support a provincial scope coordinated and comprehensive data collection system.

A coordinated effort in deploying resources and responding to emergency needs supports the provincial fire services' ability to provide rapid and effective emergency response.

References: "Threat and Risk Assessment 2007"; "Select Committee on Fire Safety 2002"; "Fire and Emergency Services Scan" p.40

### 12 - Telecommunications Interoperability

Fire Services has telecommunications capabilities to provide interoperability amongst fire service providers and linked with other emergency service providers.

*Impact – high*

*Timeline – 5+ years*

*Level of Effort – difficult*

#### Discussion

Each fire department in Nova Scotia is provided with TMR communications radios from the Department of

Transportation and Public Works' Public Safety Division. This provides interoperability possibilities between fire and other emergency response agencies.

Nova Scotia has more interoperable radio and telecommunications system for fire and emergency responders than most other provinces and territories; however, this varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

A further enhancement would be the installation of the TMR system in every fire service vehicle.

References: "Moody Report 1984"; "Threat and Risk Assessment of the Volunteer Public Safety Dispatch and Paging/Notification Services in Nova Scotia"; "Fire and Emergency Services Scan" p.42

## Training

### 13 - Training Standards

Develop a uniform training standard for the fire and associated services.

*Impact – high*

*Timeline - 5+ years*

*Level of Effort – difficult*

#### Discussion

Most jurisdictions have standards for fire fighter training and education, promoting consistency of service.

Nova Scotia does not have established training standards.

Efforts to standardize training will need to be mindful of impacts on recruitment and retention, as well as costs associated with standards oversight.

References: "Hollett Report 1994"; "FSANS position paper 2009"; "Fire and Emergency Services Scan" p.30

### 14 - Single Training Authority

Establish one training authority to maintain standard for fire services training and education. Such training includes initial

training, and in service skills maintenance and upgrading to new standards.

*Impact – high*

*Timeline – 3 to 5 years*

*Level of Effort – difficult*

#### Discussion

Ontario's Fire Marshal, under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, has the duty to develop training programs and evaluation systems for persons involved in the provision of the fire protection services and to provide programs to improve practices relating to fire protection services.

Quebec's provincial fire services legislation establishes a firefighting school.

References: "Moody Report 1984"; "Hollett Report 1994" p.24; "Fire and Emergency Services Scan" p.15

## **Human Resources**

### 15 - Policy for Incentives

Establish a provincial policy for non-remunerative incentives, e.g. honoraria, incentives, medals, achievement awards.

*Impact – medium*

*Timeline – 5+ years*

*Level of Effort – moderate*

#### Discussion

Nova Scotia has a mix of professional and volunteer firefighters working in full time, composite, volunteer and industrial departments. Some fire services provide compensation based on attendance, which can be considered part-time employment.

While the proportions and percentages differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, every jurisdiction has a mix of professional and part time firefighters. Ten percent of Nova Scotia's fire departments overall have paid staff.

Some communities have a high turnover rate in fire departments, which leads to a loss of corporate knowledge and potential inconsistencies in procedures and services.

Rural depopulation over time has led to insufficiently staffed fire departments. In some communities, this was followed by re-population, which created more pressures and demands on already understaffed fire departments. Smaller municipalities have difficulties having enough members on their fire departments.

References: “FSANS position paper 2009”; “Moody Report 1984”; “Fire and Emergency Services Scan” p.5

## **Interoperability**

### **16 - Mutual Aid Agreements**

Establish requirements for mutual aid agreements among emergency services.

*Impact – medium*

*Timeline – 3 to 5 years*

*Level of Effort – moderate*

#### Discussion

Most fire departments in Nova Scotia have mutual aid agreements in place. However, there is minimal consistency of content and scope within these agreements. In Nova Scotia, the OFM plays no role in formulating these agreements.

Developing consistency in mutual aid agreements would promote efficiencies in service delivery, response effectiveness and geographic coverage contributing to higher levels of integration and risk assurance.

References: “Moody Report 1984” p.61; p.52; “Fire and Emergency Services Scan” p.43

## Conclusion

In developing the 16 recommendations related to the fire and associated services in Nova Scotia, a literature review was conducted that examined 10 reports dating from 1974 to 2009 and a jurisdictional analysis was completed that compared fire and associated services in Nova Scotia with the other provinces and territories in Canada. This analysis identified the key themes of governance and authority; accountability; operations; finance; equipment and vehicles; tactical communications; training; human resources; and interoperability. In addition, the committee developed metrics to provide contextual measurements for system design and system performance.

An engagement strategy was developed that identified the impact, time line and level of effort for implementing each of the recommendations. This analysis, combined with identification of existing departments, program, services, annual funding and stakeholders, defines the necessary components for the successful engagement strategy for implementing the 16 recommendations.

The FSSOC would like to acknowledge their appreciation to the Fire Services Deputy Ministers Standing Committee for the opportunity to participate in this work and wish them success in implementing the recommendations.

## Summary of Recommendations

Summary of Recommendations		Impact	Timeline (years)	Level of Effort
<b>Governance and Authority</b>	1. Centralize Emergency Services	High	2	Difficult
	2. Municipalities Work Together	High	2	Moderate
<b>Accountability</b>	3. Performance Based Reporting	High	2	Difficult
<b>Operations</b>	4. Standards for Emergency Services	High	3-5	Difficult
<b>Finance</b>	5. Standard Insurance	Medium	2	low
	6. Coordination and Efficient Utilization of Provincial Programs	low	2	Low
	7. Appropriate Funding	High	3-5	Moderate
	8. Service Fees	Medium	2	Moderate
	9. Procurement and Bulk Purchasing	Medium	3-5	Low
<b>Equipment and Vehicles</b>	10. Minimum Standards for Equipment and Vehicles	High	3-5	Moderate
<b>Tactical Communications</b>	11. Dispatch Response System	High	3-5	Difficult
	12. Telecommunication Interoperability	High	5+	Difficult
<b>Training</b>	13. Training Standards	High	5+	Difficult
	14. Single Training Authority	High	3-5	Difficult
<b>Human Resources</b>	15. Policy for Incentives	Medium	5+	Moderate
<b>Interoperability</b>	16. Mutual Aid Agreements	Medium	3-5	Moderate