

## INTRODUCTION TO CANADIAN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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This check sheet provides researchers with a brief introduction to and overview of different emergency management responsibilities in Canada.

### » **Who is responsible for emergency management in Canada and why does this matter to researchers?**

It is important for researchers to know the answer to this question because it provides context both for the research they do and helps them connect and coordinate with emergency management more effectively in the event of a disaster.

In Canada, emergency management responsibilities are distributed among local authorities, provincial/territorial governments, and the federal government. Local authorities are usually municipalities, but can also include regional districts, reserves, national and provincial parks, and unincorporated areas. Each province defines local authority differently in its emergency management legislation.

- **Local Authorities:** They are the first line of response and are generally responsible for primary emergency management unless the event exceeds the local authority's management capacity.
- **Provincial/Territorial Governments:** Every province/territory in Canada, except Quebec, has an emergency management agency, which provides training and support for local authorities in developing their emergency management plans and creates the provincial emergency management plan.
  - Quebec's provincial emergency management is run by the Ministry of Public Security, but otherwise performs the same general functions.
  - Provincial/territorial emergency management agencies also generally step in to assist a local authority when an event exceeds its capacity.
  - Depending on the size of the government, some provinces/territories have specific areas of emergency management assigned to specific ministries or departments.
- **Federal Government:** Federally, the Department of Emergency Management (which falls under Public Safety Canada) runs the Government Operations Centre; the two bodies coordinate the primary federal response in tandem. They work on harmonizing responses between provinces/territories and monitoring specific events that could have potentially national significance.
  - A national state of emergency has never been declared under the modern legislation, but federal agencies regularly provide support to provincial/territorial responses on an as-needed basis.

Again, it is important for researchers to understand these differences because, for example, studying emergency management plans may be most effective when done at the local authority level, while looking at how multi-region responses are coordinated would be more effective from the provincial/territorial level.

» **What are the different roles and responsibilities for each jurisdiction?**

***Emergency Management Agency***

Generally, emergency management agencies are responsible for:

- Developing and updating the provincial/territorial emergency management plan.
- Leading and/or coordinating the provincial/territorial response to an emergency where necessary.
- Researching risks and hazards present in the province/territory.
- Developing and promoting information and education campaigns on how to prepare for an emergency for residents.
- Helping local authorities develop their emergency management plans.
- Training emergency management personnel in the provincial/territorial government and the local authorities.
- Supporting local authorities in their response to an emergency.
- Responding to any emergency that does not fall under the mandate of another ministry.

Specific roles and responsibilities for each agency are established by legislation. Legislation and associated regulations can be accessed for free online through [CanLII](#), the Canadian Legal Information Initiative.

***Minister/Lieutenant Governor in Council***

A state of emergency can be declared by whichever minister is responsible for their province/territory's emergency management legislation and/or the Lieutenant Governor in Council, depending on the process required by the legislation. Once declared, the minister can issue orders to respond to the emergency. The scope of the emergency powers, which limit what orders can be made, is also set out in that legislation. These can include:

- Requiring emergency plans to be implemented.
- Restricting movement on roads and highways.
- Mandating evacuation.
- Acquiring necessary goods and regulating their distribution.
- Using any good or property necessary to reduce the impact of the emergency.

Emergency management agencies are also usually under the authority of this minister.

Some provinces/territories also have specific steps that the Lieutenant Governor in Council can take to address the disruption that accompanies many emergencies, such as:

- Extending limitation periods, which are a time limit set in legislation on when a lawsuit can be filed. Normally, after that time, a lawsuit will not be heard by a court.
- Changing the process for accessing benefits, such as suspending any increase greater than one percent for compensation for public servants under collective bargaining agreements, or authorizing specific hazard pay for certain public employees.
- Temporarily suspending a requirement to pay fees, such as the requirement to immediately and fully repay any missed rent or face eviction.

***Local Authority***

The local authority is the body that typically declares a state of emergency first, giving it access to a similar range of powers to respond as the provincial/territorial minister, albeit usually with more limitations. For this and other reasons, local authorities are expected to respond the most quickly in the event of an emergency or disaster, which means having an emergency plan in place and trained personnel.

Local authorities are also responsible for coordinating the initial emergency response, requesting support from the province/territory or other local authorities, and conducting recovery activities after the emergency ends. This could include working with the provincial/territorial and/or federal governments to arrange for funding for repairs.

Most mitigation planning also happens at the local authority level. Municipalities are generally expected to set up zoning requirements that will limit damage, especially in the case of events like flooding.

### ***Disaster Relief***

Generally, provincial/territorial governments have provisions in their emergency management legislation that set out the requirements for receiving compensation for any damage. This can include not compensating for any damage that could have reasonably been covered by private insurance, or not compensating for more than what it would take to restore property to its previous condition. There is often an expectation that the property owner will contribute to repairs themselves and/or take reasonable steps to minimize the potential damage caused.

This compensation is usually coordinated between the provincial/territorial government and the local authority, who would request funding and distribute it to residents as necessary. Depending on the scale, nature, and location of the emergency, the federal government may also contribute to relief funding.

### ***Other Ministries***

Other provincial/territorial or federal ministries may assist with an emergency response if an event or activity falls within their mandate. These responsibilities may be assigned by regulation or within the emergency plan. One example would be the ministry that is responsible for forests or natural resources, since they tend to oversee wildfire responses.

### ***Other Emergency Management Agencies***

Nearly every province/territory in Canada has a wildfire agency, which may operate as an independent body or be directly overseen by the relevant ministry. While the general emergency management structures may activate if the wildfires become particularly threatening, wildfire agencies retain the primary responsibility for managing fires.

## » **How do these different jurisdictions work together?**

Provincial/territorial emergency plans set out the responsibilities of different emergency management actors and the process for activating those plans. Generally, once an emergency exceeds a local authority's capacity, the provincial/territorial emergency management agency will step in to coordinate personnel, manage the response, and mobilize the resources needed from other ministries. In Quebec and federally, this is done by the minister of public safety.

Depending on what is set out in legislation and the nature of the emergency, the emergency management agency may support the local authority's response, take over management when necessary, or manage the emergency from the outset.

