

PLANNING FOR EMERGENCIES

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January 2020

Summary

This fact sheet discusses how your community can incorporate emergency planning into the planning process. Emergency planning is crucial because it prepares and helps the community in responding to any emergency that may occur. This fact sheet also discusses roles and responsibilities of governments that can help communities during an emergency.

Keywords: managing the process, direction-setting, building capacity

What Is Emergency Planning?

Emergency planning is done to prepare and respond to emergencies, including natural disasters, pandemics, cyber incidents, terrorism, fires and any other emergencies that may affect the whole community.¹ Some First Nations are more vulnerable to experiencing regular floods and fires due to geographic location and socio-economic factors so it is essential to understand emergency management to prepare and mitigate effects during an emergency.² It can often also be more challenging to deal with emergencies in First Nations compared to other jurisdictions because of these factors. An effective emergency response system is essential for all First Nations to minimize loss of life and resources.

In Canada, an emergency management framework is subject to the requirements under the Emergency Management Act, 2007. Preparing for emergencies is a combined effort of all levels of government. Together, Ministers of federal, provincial, and territorial governments prepared a framework and guidelines published by the Public Safety Department under the act to deal with emergencies in any community in Canada.³

Why Is Emergency Planning Important?

No community is free from the risk of natural or human-induced disasters. Emergencies such as forest fires, floods and earthquakes occur every year in many communities across Canada. When such events happen, the response taken at the early stage of a disaster is essential. A state of panic is the most common reaction to any disaster, and

effective emergency planning can help the community handle the situation effectively by providing the step-by-step instruction needed to carry out an effective response. Emergency planning ensures that effects on the health and safety of community members are minimized and prepares the communities to optimally utilize the resources available during the emergency.⁴ Emergency planning is a step-by-step process and takes place in stages, considering before, during and after-effects of the disaster.

How Is Emergency Planning Done?

Federal, provincial and territorial (FPT) governments have a responsibility for emergency management and public safety across Canada, including on First Nations lands.⁵ Public Safety Canada has implemented the “all-hazard approach” to develop Strategic Emergency Management Plans (SEMPs) specific to communities. The SEMP approach is broken down into four components applicable to all emergency plans across Canada. The components are as follows:

1 Prevention and Mitigation

The first component of any emergency plan is prevention and mitigation, which means things that can be done to reduce the risk before the incident occurs. For example: conducting specific risk assessments on critical infrastructure can help prevent failure of infrastructure systems during a disaster. A community can also develop education and training programs specific to the community which can prepare staff and community members for what to do if a disaster occurs.

2 Preparedness

The second component is preparedness. Preparedness for an emergency includes conducting mock drills, training sessions, educating the community based on past experiences, and learning from other communities. Community-specific programs can be arranged by administration to make sure that there are response plans in place specific to each possible emergency⁶. Emergency preparedness is a never-ending process and should include periodic reviews and regular testing. Preparedness helps administration avoid panic in the community and produce an adequate response during and after the disaster occurs.

3 Response

The third component is a response, which is initiated after the emergency has occurred. The response should include practical strategies informed by the prevention and mitigation, and preparedness policies and experiences. Response strategies include defining roles and responsibilities of governments, post-incident analysis, and regular updates to the emergency management plan. The goal is to protect human life, infrastructure and community assets. An effective response also involves the assessment of immediate damage and seeking financial and social support as needed. The response teams are trained beforehand to deal with the situation in the most effective way.⁷

4 Recovery

The last component of emergency management is recovery. Recovery involves the restoration of activities and operations back to normal as soon as possible. First Nations may need to get in contact with federal and provincial governments for financial support if needed. A community may also want to mobilize its members as volunteers to assist. Depending on the type of disaster, community members may be dealing with the effects of trauma. Federal guidelines state that authorities must provide counselling for those in need. After the recovery, authorities and communities should work together in putting together a 'lessons learned' document to inform responses to future disasters.⁸

These four components cover both natural and human-induced hazards and disasters. By following these components, First Nations can develop SEMP for their community and manage disasters more effectively.

How Do You Develop a SEMP for your Community?

The Strategic Emergency Management Plan developed by the federal government has five stages.

1 Initiate

The first step involves identifying and selecting the planning team based on skills and experience. The team can be inter-

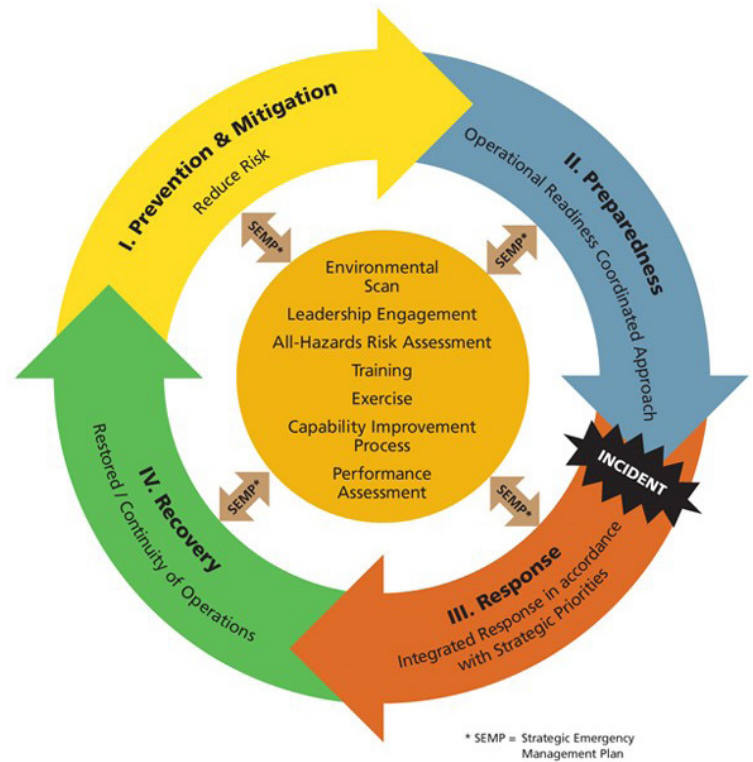


Figure 1 | Emergency Management Continuum.

Source (Public Safety Canada. "Emergency Management Planning Guide 2010-2012." Ottawa: Public Safety Canada, 2010. Accessed December 1, 2019. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/mrgnc-mngmnt-pnnng/mrgnc-mngmnt-pnnng-eng.pdf>.)

departmental. This step involves establishing accountability and clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the planning team members. Once the team is selected, a review of relevant existing legislation and policies is conducted. The team should also review existing emergency plans (if they exist) and identify the issues that need to be revised or updated. The last task of this stage is to develop a work plan which consists of realistic timelines, milestones, and assigned tasks. The team can also develop an initial budget to be used for later stages.⁹

2 Orientate

This stage starts with an environmental scan which includes research about technology, economy, policies, demography and organizations. A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis can also be conducted. Through this background research, vulnerabilities to assets and areas within the community are identified. Vulnerabilities could include outdated emergency plans, insufficient support and lack of training. The last task of this stage is to identify, analyze and evaluate risks by conducting an all-hazard risk assessment.

For more information, see the *Conducting a SWOT Analysis* fact sheet.

Risk assessments consider natural hazards, intentional, and unintentional human actions. The analysis of a risk assessment includes understanding past studies and the impacts of the risk for all kinds of emergencies. The evaluation of a risk will help you categorize the risk into low, moderate or high-risk priority levels. By the end of this stage, the emergency plan has identified and evaluated the risks which the community is most likely to face.¹⁰

3 Develop SEMP Building Blocks

This stage involves establishing an emergency management governance and establishing a senior management team, communication plan, legal services, and security. In this step, limitations and constraints are identified and the emergency management continuum discussed above is applied to identified risks. The outputs of this stage are specific plans that support SEMP and planning considerations that can be used in the implementation.¹¹

4 Write the SEMP and Seek Approval

This stage involves writing a draft SEMP which should include risk assessment, roles and responsibilities, support and resource requirements, timelines, updated procedures and a list of key people who will carry out implementation. The plan goes for approval to senior management and after approval can move towards the implementation stage.

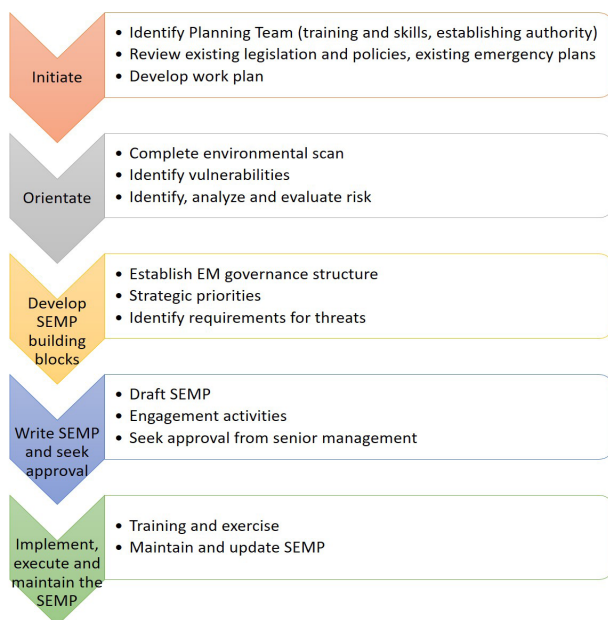


Figure 2 | Steps to develop a SEMP.

Source (Public Safety Canada. "Emergency Management Planning Guide 2010-2012." Ottawa: Public Safety Canada, 2010. Accessed December 1, 2019. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/mrgnc-mngmnt-pnng/mrgnc-mngmnt-pnng-eng.pdf>.)

5 Implement, Execute and Maintain the SEMP

To implement the approved SEMP, the plan should be distributed to Chief and Council, band administration, and

other people who have key roles and responsibilities defined earlier in the plan. The SEMP is an important resource and should be reviewed every two years.¹²

Who Can Help Your Community during an Emergency?

Different organizations have specific roles and responsibilities during an emergency. According to the framework by the federal government, the following organizations have a responsibility when a community experiences an emergency.

1 First Nation Governments

First Nation governments have a crucial role since they are responsible for the immediate response to an emergency. Public Safety Canada states that it is the responsibility of First Nation governments to keep their emergency plans revised and clear. First Nations governments can use local resources to handle the situation, and if the situation gets out of control, it is their responsibility to request funds from provincial or federal governments.

First Nations governments can also provide social supports including mental health, spiritual, and cultural supports to the community. First Nations governments are encouraged to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge in emergency planning if they choose.¹³ This can be carried out during any phase of the process.

2 Federal Government

The federal government helps to identify the risks to communities and public infrastructure. Public Safety Canada is responsible for making communities aware of all emergency plans developed by the federal government in all jurisdictions across Canada, including First Nations.¹⁴ The federal government also provides economic assistance to any community in need.

3 Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)

The federal government provides financial assistance to First Nations through ISC's Emergency Management Assistance Program (EMAP). For example, during the 2011-12 Manitoba flood, EMAP assisted 27 First Nation communities with flood mitigation efforts, and helped evacuate 12 communities.¹⁵ The majority of funds go toward fixing infrastructure lost during a disaster. ISC follows the all-hazard approach and components defined in this factsheet. ISC also helps First Nations governments review and keep their SEMPs up to date.

4 Provincial and Territorial Governments

During an emergency, there may be a loss of housing and food sources, so provincial and territorial governments provide shelter and food to the affected people. ISC helps First Nations to decide what kinds of services the provincial government will offer during an emergency.¹⁶ Some provincial

governments provide reimbursements to First Nations after disasters.

5 Health Canada

During an emergency, a health crisis can occur. Many communities are isolated, and transportation can be cut off during a flood. Health Canada can play an essential role in these situation. They provide support and health care services to affected communities. They can alsowork with First Nations governments to create response plans for potential health-related emergencies.

Final Thoughts

Emergency planning is an essential consideration in the planning process. The strategic emergency plan should be clear and reflect local knowledge, official policies, and technical expertise. Effective implementation of the four components of the emergency management continuum and the all-hazard approach has been proven effective for many First Nations across Canada and should continue to be the basis of any emergency plan in the future. The emergency planning documents should be revised regularly. All levels of government need to work together for effective planning.

Further Reading

Emergency Preparedness and First Nation Communities in Manitoba by Donna Epp

This book provides insights into the experiences of three First Nation communities (Mathis Colomb Cree Nation (Pukatawagan, Manitoba), Roseau River Anishinabe First Nation and Sioux Valley First Nation) in Manitoba who have experienced emergencies. Lessons Learned may be informative for other communities.

Canadian Red Cross

The Red Cross supports Indigenous Peoples across Canada with education and training to deal with disasters. They also provide support to families before, during and after an emergency. They provide information on some of the response carried out by First Nations who have experienced disasters.

<https://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/emergencies-and-disasters-in-canada/be-ready-emergency-preparedness-and-recovery/emergency-preparedness-for-indigenous-communities>

Endnotes

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