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EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT THINK TANK REPORT
IN COLLABORATION WITH EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
LOGISTICS CANADA & PUBLIC SAFETY CANADA

RAPPORT DU GROUPE DE RÉFLEXION SUR LA GESTION DES
URGENCES EN COLLABORATION AVEC EMERGENCY
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Contents

Emergency Management Think Tank: First Steps to Advance Canadian Emergency Management	1
Methodology.....	2
Results.....	3
Legislation, Policy, and Funding	3
Emerging Technology and EM Data	5
Community and local level Engagement	6
Training, Education, and EM as a Profession	7
EM Concepts.....	8
Recommendations and Observations	8
Conclusion	10

“We are gathered here on the traditional unceded lands of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people. Emergency situations do not discriminate based on cultural background, heritage or boundaries and can affect any individual or community. The sharing of knowledge and commitment to work together helps us better prepare for and respond to situations to ensure we can all pursue safe and prosperous lives.”

-Land acknowledgement delivered at the Emergency Management Think Tank on June 7th, 2023.

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Emergency Management Think Tank: First Steps to Advance Canadian Emergency Management

Emergency management is a complex, ever-evolving profession. Emergency management practitioners and stakeholders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors have a unique professional obligation and moral responsibility to both set and stay well ahead of emerging trends. In recognition of this responsibility and the evolving post-pandemic landscape, The *Canadian Journal of Emergency Management* (CJEM), Public Safety Canada, and Emergency Management Logistics Canada (EMLC) hosted a Think Tank under Chatham House rules on June 7th, 2023 with participants from coast to coast and across the private sector, academia, the Government of Canada, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The purpose of this Think Tank was to bring together individuals with diverse experiences and points of view to discuss and explore the future of emergency management (EM) in the Canadian context. CJEM and EMLC's 2023 Think Tank was conducted in a conference space provided by Public Safety Canada in Ottawa, Ontario, and fostered an environment of open and candid discussions.

In doing so, CJEM and EMLC targeted a broad and diverse cross-section of Canadians. While the Think Tank did not completely achieve its representation goals, organizers' efforts were significant and sincere, and the team is committed to increasing representation and inclusion in the future.

As the activity was conducted under Chatham House rules, specific participants cannot be named; however, their representation included:

Organization / Sector	Participants
Canadian Journal of Emergency Management	2
Emergency Management Logistics Canada	1
Public Safety Canada	3
Academia	6
Non-Governmental Organizations	5
Private Sector	2
Total Participants	19

Methodology

In groups of four, participants interviewed each other on four key questions on a rotational basis. There were six rounds of questions to maximize discussion. Then, as a group, participants explained their responses and white-boarded theme headings, prioritizing specific themes with a mark to “vote” on prioritization. Conversation expanded on these priorities and produced recommendations on the first steps Canada needs to take to advance EM.

Key Questions

The initial discussion phase involved participants forming small groups and engaging in exploratory discussions on four principal questions:

1. What are three existing policies/practices in Canada that, if scaled up, could significantly improve EM in Canada?
2. What are three current realities that must be addressed to significantly enhance EM in Canada?
3. What critical opportunities exist to improve EM education, training and technology in Canada?
and
4. What is required to enhance EM capacity and resilience locally in Canadian communities?

Beginning with these questions, Think Tank organizers guided participants in a series of structured discussions, analytical exchanges, and presentations showcasing diverse perspectives on the future of EM in Canada. Through this process, several overlapping key themes were identified including: legislation, policy, and funding; emerging technology and EM data, and community resilience and empowerment. Participants also engaged in some debate on the merits and challenges of national standards for EM practitioners both in the conduct of EM operations as well as in training and educational certifications. This report summarizes the conversations, challenges, and solutions prioritized by the participants.

Results

Legislation, Policy, and Funding

The challenges of, and possible improvements to, existing policy across levels of government, and the subsequent allocation of funding and resources associated with these policies, were recurring themes in the Think Tank's discussions.

For example, participants suggested that policy differences across organizational and governmental lines create friction and risk in EM operations and planning. This is especially true when considering the increasing complexity and scale of disasters in Canada which often require the participation of multiple stakeholders whose operational mandates, policies, and standard operating procedures may not coordinate easily. While participants recognized the difficulty of doing so, by better integrating emergency management policies across organizations, emergency managers could enhance multi-jurisdictional collaboration. It was noted that policy initiatives would also need to take private sector organizations into consideration, which are increasingly important to EM in the Canadian context.

Think Tank participants suggested that capability-based planning, supported with additional funding, could serve as an alternative to the present reality which sees funding allocated predominantly in response to disasters, outside of deeply entrenched and inflexible grants and contribution programs. In addition, pursuing less tangible but more rewarding investments in disaster risk prevention and mitigation, via proper development planning and risk mitigation capital projects (for example), could further shift the funding focus from response operations and disjointed, narrow transfer payment programs.

As with financial contributions, participants urged that EM practitioners must also properly organize and deploy available labour across the stages of EM. Participants generally believed that Canadians are increasingly "tuned-in" to the dangers and costs of disasters and repercussions of not being adequately prepared. EM practitioners should therefore capitalize on existing public attention towards EM by promoting community resilience and empowerment. This includes quickly developing and implementing policies at the provincial and federal levels to enable grassroots and community volunteer groups, capitalizing on the important work done in the humanitarian work force program. It was theorized that this could be accomplished through public education which promotes citizen preparedness, growing a sense of personal accountability, empowerment, and buy-in to EM initiatives. Community members should feel empowered, involved, and prepared, rather than fearful of trends and future impacts. EM practitioners should therefore utilize integrative and collaborative partnerships within

their communities, the private sector, as well as with other professions, such as insurers and urban planners. That is to say, Canadians need to understand the practical reality that, due to a variety of factors including limited capacity, government resources are likely not coming to their rescue in the early stages of a disaster, if at all.

Think Tank participants simultaneously argued that provincial and federal governments should not shift primary responsibility for EM to municipalities, communities, or grassroots organizations. While it was agreed that much could be accomplished at the local level to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters, climate change and other systemic challenges inherently require action at the strategic level. Effectively, while the National Emergency Response System and the *Emergency Management Framework for Canada* remain valid, federal and provincial governments must take steps to actively reduce disaster risk or help communities prepare for it – which, despite their stated positions, they are not doing effectively now.

Participants remarked that increased funding would directly result in increased capacity. As the frequency and scale of disasters continues to increase, local EM practitioners are often stretched to the limits of their capacity to effectively respond. This has resulted in frequent requests through provincial governments for federal support which, in turn, requires a response from the Canadian Armed Forces – an organization with its own capacity limitations. While participants realise that doing so would require significant political will, Canadian policymakers should consider establishing a dedicated, funded EM workforce, building immediately and urgently on the important work of the humanitarian workforce program with more paid, professional staff. If it is true that funding increases would result directly in capacity increases, federal and provincial governments should have confidence that grant program design for EM workforces would be welcomed and bought-in to.

In addition, funding for Incident Command System (ICS) Canada should be increased. There is a significant language barrier that divides the country's EM practitioners, and offering bilingual ICS training and services can close that gap. Training in ICS should be mandated for all responders, and Canada should encourage the creation of Incident Management Teams. Particularly, it was noted that critical infrastructure and critical infrastructure assurance require more attention, training and support from emergency managers. Critical infrastructure owner/operators need to be encouraged to take up ICS doctrine.

Participants also stressed that funding and training should prioritize enhancing Canadian communities' local capacity and resilience. They further advocated for a collective pooling of resources for EM training

and education, the likes of which hasn't existed since the 2012 closure of the Canadian Emergency Management College. Funding stakeholders such as municipalities, provinces, and others should focus on integrating mitigation tools within funding proposal pre-conditions. That means that funding criteria should include completion of a Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment, *Fire Smart* programming, planning practitioner programming for public/private partnership agreements, etc.

The Government of Canada must mandate specific, proactive training and professional development for emergency managers across Canada. Mandatory training is especially important for certain positions and the onus should thus transition from personal motivation to professional regulation. The International Association of Emergency Managers – Canada is one body that was identified as potentially having the ability to support professionalization discussions.

Emerging Technology and EM Data

As with managing financial and human resources, EM practitioners must also properly manage, allocate and share information and data. As we continue to digitally transform as a society, digital literacy is more important than ever, and EM organizations must evolve their data and information management practices. Participants stressed that an excess of raw, under-utilized data exists in EM. Participants hypothesized that digital transformation could begin by removing unnecessary data siloing of EM organizations. Participants recognized that EM practitioners must acknowledge the limits of quantitative data and its utility to produce predictive models. Data alone will not remedy all existing issues with the deployment and management of disaster response systems, and values need to be incorporated into decision-making too. But these are not excuses to shy away from digital transformation of EM. As such, The Government of Canada has an opportunity to lead dialogue on the establishment of national standards for EM data practices and establishing open data sources to support all phases of emergency management. Above all, participants stressed the importance of “wisdom in where we utilize data.”

EM practitioners would, in most cases, require training on data literacy. Participants speculated that through a combination of data literacy training and education and strategic messaging, EM practitioners would be able to leverage data for the purpose of effective risk reduction programs, emergency planning, public messaging.

Building upon this, EM practitioners should embrace emerging technology. This includes leveraging recent technological advancements like generative artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning.

Further, we should utilize connectivity and meta-analysis for both prediction and education purposes. The industry needs improved access, awareness, understanding and usability of data and information.

Community and local level Engagement

Participants generally agreed that the public has significant agency to make positive contributions to all stages of EM at the local level. Still, inconsistencies exist both between and within local communities on the awareness of the importance of emergency preparedness and management. While participants agreed that awareness of EM was increasing in Canada, significant differences exist in the rate of growth in community awareness across Canada. Participants asserted that awareness can be generated through a variety of initiatives, including policies and strategic communications aimed at building a culture of resilience, and increasing community ownership of local emergency preparedness. With appropriate support, communities are often more capable than they realize: they are often the first responders to disasters. Harnessing and honing this innate capability will build and sustain resilient communities.

Participants agreed on the importance of building fundamental awareness of emergency management and emergency preparedness at the local level. Implementing proactive public education, not limited to core emergency management topics but expanded outward to include core emergency preparedness skills and knowledge, would help build community resilience. Think Tank participants also generally supported the notion that emergency preparedness education in school curricula would be an important factor in building sustainable cultures of resilience among Canadians.

EM practitioners have a responsibility to eliminate an “us and them” cognitive framing of government and public relations. This can be achieved by securing buy-in for preparedness across diverse communities and stakeholders, in partnership with instead of subordination to governments, and exposing communities to core emergency management philosophies. EM practitioners should think beyond typical academia-based qualifications and involve diverse viewpoints and lived experiences in the national conversation on how to make emergency management better.

Anticipatory response and pre-deployment of assets, people, and supplies, well in advance of emergency events is important for community resilience. Participants emphasized the importance of proactively establishing and utilizing standing agreements with service providers. Shifting the focus from response to capability-based and resource-based planning will increase Canadian community’s capacity for disaster resilience and thus reduce our nation’s reliance on capacity “band-aids” sometimes found in the use of the Canadian Armed Forces for disaster response.

Training, Education, and EM as a Profession

There was significant discussion on EM being recognized as a unique profession. Doing so would require identifying a general scope of practice. Professionalization of EM would certainly require input and buy-in from a significant number of stakeholders across public, private, and non-profit organizations. Participants hypothesized on the possibility of re-establishing a dedicated EM post-secondary or training institution and that doing so could sharpen future emergency managers' capabilities and build professional identity. EM professionalization includes standardizing roles, training, and education. We should improve professional development and training opportunities. With the implementation of national standardization, we can enhance professionalization of the field, making emergency management practice more independent and transparent, free from governmental or other outward influence (a best practice in live emergency operations). Furthermore, while some participants saw value in the establishment of national training and education standards for emergency managers, others proposed that doing so would reduce the flexibility of the EM community – a trait which participants argued as being of fundamental importance to the industry. The establishment of national EM standards would require support from federal and provincial authorities.

Building upon this, some participants argued that contemporary EM in Canada is too government-centric. In response, emergency managers should strive to foster civic engagement and public education and awareness for the field to thrive, tying back to the discussion on community preparedness and empowerment. EM practitioners could better utilise volunteer management to achieve this. They should strive to add seats to the conversation table and engage diverse community members including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis populations, youth, and other vulnerable populations. Diversity includes representation from across Canada's wide geography. The future of EM demands community-led initiatives, facilitated and financially supported by government yet unhindered by typical bureaucratic attitudes and processes: EM is, after all, a matter of life and death, and financially and communally disastrous consequences.

Training and education intersect via critical thinking and adaptive capability. We must therefore train emergency management leaders in complexity, prioritizing an establishment of and commitment to national standards, training, and education. There should be an increase in funding to non-government organizations for training, for field experience opportunities, and for the promotion of emergency management literacy.

EM Concepts

Participants were generally in agreement that a re-examination of the pillars (prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery) and other constructs would benefit the EM community at large. More specifically, planning and preparedness should be placed at the forefront of EM while simultaneously normalizing disaster risk reduction, and better defining differences between risk reduction and emergency response. Furthermore, EM practitioners must be proactive and engage in long term planning beyond emergency response, rather than let predictable outward influence drive events. EM industry leaders and policymakers should do more to directly educate the public and the industry on the consequences of identifiable trends like climate change as well as re-assess how risk itself is addressed.

EM plans need to innovate and grow beyond the traditional “concept of operations” summary. For example, investing in collaborative, social impact start-ups could innovate how and what EM practitioners use to prepare for and respond to disaster. EM practitioners should also utilize system complexity thinking and applied system design. By harnessing and leveraging existing and future technologies such as analytics software or geographic information systems, the EM industry can sharpen anticipatory response and pre-deployment of assets, people, and supplies.

EM practitioners must also recognize and identify their own local limitations. By speaking out in appropriate forums about emergency management policy and program weaknesses, we hold ourselves to a higher standard of accountability. We should engage journalists, academics, and EM colleagues in our capacities as professionals with expertise to hold government accountable for failures such as those in development planning or improper land use. People of all viewpoints, ethnicities, genders and sexualities, abilities, and other identities should be represented in dialogue on how to better the field of emergency management and make Canada and all Canadians more resilient.

Recommendations and Observations

1. Expand on and continue the work of the humanitarian workforce development program to build coordinated local emergency response capacity using both volunteers and more paid, professional risk reduction and emergency management staff.
2. Re-establish a nationally standardized EM training institution, with a nationally standardized curriculum that develops core EM competencies. Include in this capability the ability to regionally or locally contextualize training and capability development.

3. The Government of Canada should lead development of core EM open data sets that meets broad information needs, such as community demographics, presence of critical infrastructure, and community risk profiles. Participation from the Provinces and Territories and the private sector is essential.
4. The Government of Canada should lead development of an EM data and technology strategy that supports and resources provinces/territories, communities, and private sector partners in leveraging technology and data to anticipate, sense, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.
5. Leverage technology to build emergency response capacity directly in communities, encouraging proactive planning for disaster response capabilities through service level agreements or mutual aid agreements.
6. The Government of Canada must develop a community after-action review and data capture process to improve how communities learn from and access lessons learned from disasters.
7. Formal and informal communities need to agree to be empowered, responsible, and accountable for emergency management through an accessible and achievable framework for community-driven disaster planning and management.
8. The Government of Canada and all emergency management organizations should directly and clearly communicate the public's role and responsibilities in preparing for and responding to emergencies at a community, neighbourhood, household, and individual level.
9. The National Emergency Response System, and other emergency management response systems, needs to be directly oriented toward communities to broaden the spectrum of capabilities and resources available to them in disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.
10. Indigenous people, young people, and vulnerable populations always need to be involved in emergency management and land-use planning.
11. By default, funding partners, municipalities, provinces/territories, project proponents, etc. need to produce Hazard Identification and Risk Assessments, *Fire Smart* program documentation, or proof of other disaster mitigation tools as pre-conditions for land use and development

proposals. Grant and contribution agreements and intake processes need to incorporate disaster risk reduction practices into them.

12. Incident Command System Canada needs more funding from the Government of Canada to expand its training curriculum, training offerings, and multilingualism.

Conclusion

EM is an exceptionally complex field. It is an ever-evolving collaboration of individuals across levels of government, communities, and the private sector working in psychologically and physically challenging situations and environments. CJEM's and EMLC's June 7th, 2023 Emergency Management Think Tank facilitated an important conversation with a number of perspectives on the key problems and solutions for EM in Canada. It is with great hope, a constructive spirit, and a sense of curiosity and duty that we publish this report for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners to build upon.