

Community Response

Frequently Asked Questions

For rural/remote non-Indigenous communities

General

1. What is Community Response?

Community Response, previously known as Cooperative Community Wildfire Response, is an initiative led by the BC Wildfire Service to understand existing wildfire response capacity in rural and remote communities. Solutions, or pathways to cooperation, are being explored in collaboration with community response societies, local governments and emergency response agencies.

To date, this work has focused on the most high-risk communities outside of fire protection areas.

2. What are the goals of the initiative?

Goals are to:

- Understand and support the development of Indigenous and rural non-Indigenous community wildfire preparedness and response capacity.
 - Develop pathways, building on what already exists, for both Indigenous and rural, non-Indigenous community wildfire response, in cooperation with BC Wildfire Service.
 - Acknowledge and highlight local and traditional knowledge and experience in fire management.
 - Improve engagement and cooperation between communities and BC Wildfire Service.
-

1. What is a community response society?

For the purposes of wildfire response, a community response society is a self-organized community group that has some sort of business entity (i.e., incorporated as a non-profit society) and can maintain a bank account, take out insurance, receive funds, own property and equipment, and has an accountable leadership structure. These societies are distinct from fire departments, which are formed by First Nations, local government

or societies that have jurisdiction over a fire protection area, and meet minimum standards set out by the Inter-Agency Agreement.

The term “fire brigade” refers to a self-organized group of individuals who are willing and ready to respond to a wildfire, but that may or may not be incorporated as a society.

The BC Wildfire Service does not oversee structural fire departments.

Structural Fire Departments:

- Training standards for structural fire departments are overseen by the Office of the Fire Commissioner of BC;
- Structural fire departments may be administered and funded by a local government, an improvement district, a First Nation, a non-profit society or a strata;
- Typically, local government administered structural fire departments are funded by taxation, whereas a non-profit society fire department may charge fees or operate based on donations and fundraising;
- Structural fire departments are established and operated as a Local Authority service responsible for the prevention or suppression of fires in a defined Fire Protection Area by a Local Authority or a board, or commission of a registered society having the responsibility for the management or conduct of work or services through a service agreement, or equivalent of any of the above;
- A key concept is “area having jurisdiction” which is deemed as a geographic area that the structural fire department operates in;
- Most structural fire departments are cross trained to respond to wildfires, and can utilize the inter-agency agreement with BC Wildfire Service.

3. What are the requirements for a society to participate?

To be considered for the 2024 season, interested communities must be outside of structural fire protection jurisdiction, show an earnest desire to be involved, be organized as a cohesive society able to receive funding (e.g. non-profit society or association), and be eager to work under the BC Wildfire Service command and direction.

Societies activated for wildfire response must follow the Standard Operating Guideline for Rural and Remote Community Cooperative Wildfire Response: Hiring Emergency Fire Fighters.

4. What are the requirements for individuals to participate?

Each society member must complete a [Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire \(PAR-Q\)](#) to ensure they are cleared for physical activity, and have the following:

- One WorkSafe BC approved hard hat complete with chinstrap and attached earmuffs or other approved hearing protection;
- One high visibility vest when working around heavy equipment;
- One pair of work gloves as described in Section 8.19 of the BC Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (OH&S Regulation);
- One pair of CSA certified safety eyewear for working around helicopters, foam, or hose nozzle;
- One pair of footwear appropriate for the work conditions, with coverage above the ankle and no nylon or running shoes;
- Flame resistant clothing that meets CAN/CGSB 155.22-2014 (or 97) or NFPA 1977 standards. Flame resistant clothing must be in any colour **other** than red; and
- One 4 (four) inch compress dressing.
- Sufficient amount of food and water for the workday (minimum of 2 litres of water per workday).

BC Wildfire Service will provide any required flagging tape.

5. How was it decided who would be involved?

Societies were identified by the Fraser Basin Council, through Wildfire Roundtable engagements in the B.C. Interior, through Electoral Area Directors or through word of mouth from BC Wildfire Service staff and partners.

6. Why was my community response society not included this year?

We recognize there is significant interest in this initiative across the province. To get started, the BC Wildfire Service chose to focus on communities outside of fire protection boundaries, at high risk of being impacted by a wildfire. Further engagement will continue as we explore and trial solutions in the coming years.

7. My community response society meets criteria to participate, but we were not offered training. What can we do to be involved?

We understand and appreciate that many societies and individuals want to be involved in the protection of their communities. Public and staff safety is our topmost priority as we continue to explore different cooperative response opportunities, therefore it's important that we take a measured approach. We also need to consider our own capacity to effectively engage and supervise community response societies in addition to regular operations.

We recognize that there are likely a number of community response societies that meet the criteria outlined who have not been engaged or offered training for 2024. There are a number of other ways to support your community during an emergency:

- Monitor and report. If you see a fire, report it to 1-800-663-5555 or *5555 on a cellphone. Wildfire reports can also be made on the BC Wildfire Service mobile app.
- Become an Emergency Support Services (ESS) [volunteer](#). Contact your local authority or ESS team for training opportunities.
- Visit the BC Wildfire Service [website](#) for firefighting and heavy equipment contract opportunities.
- Consider joining the BC Wildfire Service. The Province is opening the door for more wildland firefighters with in-depth knowledge of local terrain to join the service.
- Learn more about how you can [FireSmart](#) your home and community.
- Connect with your local government regarding other funding opportunities for training ([Community Resiliency Investment](#), [Community Emergency and Preparedness Fund](#), Natural Resources Canada's [Fighting and Managing Wildfire in a Changing Climate program training fund](#), and ClimateReadyBC's [Funding and investment opportunities](#)).
- Stay connected with your local government as more information becomes available and a longer-term model for cooperative response takes form.
- Join your local volunteer fire department or emergency services organization.

8. What is the nearest organization to me that I can join? How do I contact them/get involved?

BC Wildfire Service is not organizing local societies. Societies interested in potentially supporting wildfire response are self-organized. Connect with your local authority and/or community members to learn more.

9. What efforts have been made to reach out to communities/community members involved in/experienced with firefighting?

- Wildfire Roundtables engagements in Williams Lake, Prince George, Quesnel, Lillooet, Clearwater, Clinton, Salmon Arm.
 - UBCM workshop.
 - Survey and follow-up message to electoral area directors.
 - One-on-one communication with societies who self-identified.
 - Fraser Basin Council's limited training offering to pre-identified societies.
 - Engagements with regional districts.
-

10. Can we sign up/join mid-season?

To date, the BC Wildfire Service has only engaged with self-organized pre-identified response societies. Newly formed societies meeting all eligibility requirements should have a designated contact person notify their local authorities and fire centre. The BC Wildfire Service will reach out to societies via the designated contact person if their support is required. There is no guarantee that a society will be asked to participate in wildfire response locally regardless of when they were identified.

11. What is the minimum age to be able to do this?

19 years old per the [Age of Majority Act in BC](#).

12. Do I need to be physically fit to participate?

Firefighting is a dangerous, physically demanding activity and is done by highly trained firefighters who undergo an annual [WFX Fit Test](#). The fit test is not currently a requirement of community response societies, however each society member must complete a [Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire \(PAR-Q\)](#) to ensure they are cleared for physical activity.

13. Are there any other roles I can support if I am not able to physically participate?

There are a number of ways individuals or societies can support their communities and get involved:

- Monitor and report. If you see a fire, report it to 1-800-663-5555 or *5555 on a cellphone. Wildfire reports can also be made on the BC Wildfire Service mobile app.
- Become an Emergency Support Services (ESS) [volunteer](#). Contact your local authority or ESS team for training opportunities.

- Visit the BC Wildfire Service [website](#) for firefighting and heavy equipment contract opportunities.
 - Consider joining the BC Wildfire Service. The Province is opening the door for more wildland firefighters with in-depth knowledge of local terrain to join the service.
 - Learn more about how you can [FireSmart](#) your home and community.
 - Connect with your local government regarding other funding opportunities for training ([Community Resiliency Investment](#), [Community Emergency and Preparedness Fund](#), Natural Resources Canada's [Fighting and Managing Wildfire in a Changing Climate program training fund](#), and ClimateReadyBC's [Funding and investment opportunities](#)).
 - Stay connected with your local government as more information becomes available and a longer-term model for cooperative response takes form.
 - Join your local volunteer fire department or emergency services organization.
-

14. What are the societies/communities area of responsibility?

Societies will respond under the direction of a BC Wildfire Service supervisor, who will determine where work will occur. Response societies do not have jurisdiction or areas of responsibility.

15. Will there be opportunity for on-site training for communities mid-season?

For 2024, the BC Wildfire Service is committed to training members of pre-identified community response societies who will then be connected to their local zone or fire centre. The BC Wildfire Service typically does not have capacity to pull staff off of the fireline to do on-site training mid-season. Communities are welcome and encouraged to pursue training through [approved contractors](#).

Expectations

16. When will response societies be activated or asked to assist?

Societies will be activated upon BC Wildfire Service's request, as necessary. A Wildfire Officer or Incident Commander will contact the society via their representative/s and provide direction. The BC Wildfire Service will not deploy societies outside of their local area.

17. How will BC Wildfire Service communicate with and dispatch my society?

Societies will be activated by a BC Wildfire Service staff member in their local area. The BC Wildfire Service staff member will contact the society's singular point of contact, offer to activate the society, and provide direction for where to go and work expected..

18. If I see fire or smoke, can I/my society act?

If you see fire or smoke, report it to the BC Wildfire Service at 1-800-663-5555 or *5555 on a cellphone. Wildfire reports can also be made on the BC Wildfire Service mobile app.

Firefighting is inherently dangerous, and there are significant safety concerns—including danger trees, smoke inhalation, unknown explosives, and live power lines—for community response societies without firefighting experience and knowledge to participate in initial attack or to respond without BC Wildfire Service supervision or guidance.

If a society responds voluntarily, it is not part of integrated response with BC Wildfire Service as an Emergency Fire Fighter for 2024. Members should be aware of the risks and liability. Societies will be activated upon BC Wildfire Service request, as necessary.

19. Does this give me permission to stay behind during evacuations?

Evacuation orders are put in place to ensure the safety and protection of people and first responders during dangerous and unpredictable situations. Just as any BC Wildfire Service staff member or structural firefighter with residence in an evacuation order area would not be exempt from abiding by evacuation orders, neither are society members.

20. What are the consequences of defying evacuation orders?

Cooperative response is not an alternative to complying with evacuation orders. If a BC Wildfire Service staff member observes behaviour that does not follow the Standard Operating Guideline for Rural and Remote Community Cooperative Wildfire Response: Hiring Emergency Fire Fighters, such as someone defying evacuation orders, it will be reported. Societies found to not follow direction will likely no longer be requested to respond.

21. Is there a plan to engage non-organized societies?

We understand many societies and individuals want to be involved, but at this time the BC Wildfire Service has limited capacity to engage and supervise individuals with minimal fire suppression and incident command system experience, in addition to regular operations. We recognize the value of local knowledge and relationships and

encourage these societies to consider forming a society or association, or get involved in other ways:

- Monitor and report. If you see a fire, report it to 1-800-663-5555 or *5555 on a cellphone. Wildfire reports can also be made on the BC Wildfire Service mobile app.
- Become an Emergency Support Services (ESS) [volunteer](#). Contact your local authority or ESS team for training opportunities.
- Visit the BC Wildfire Service [website](#) for firefighting and heavy equipment contract opportunities.
- Consider joining the BC Wildfire Service. The Province is opening the door for more wildland firefighters with in-depth knowledge of local terrain to join the service.
- Learn more about how you can [FireSmart](#) your home and community.
- Connect with your local government regarding other funding opportunities for training ([Community Resiliency Investment](#), [Community Emergency and Preparedness Fund](#), Natural Resources Canada's [Fighting and Managing Wildfire in a Changing Climate program training fund](#), and ClimateReadyBC's [Funding and investment opportunities](#)).
- Stay connected with your local government as more information becomes available and a longer-term model for cooperative response takes form.
- Join your local volunteer fire department or emergency services organization.

22. How are these societies different than volunteer or local fire departments?

Cooperative response societies are outside of fire protection areas, and not serviced by a fire department. The BC Wildfire Service already works with structural fire departments through the Interagency Agreement.

Some of the community response societies engaged expressed interest in building towards a volunteer fire department. Municipalities are responsible for provision of fire protection through their local fire departments and should be the first point of contact for societies interested in this pathway.

Key qualities of structural fire departments:

- Minimum training standards for structural fire departments are overseen by the Office of the Fire Commissioner of BC.
- Structural fire departments may be administered and funded by a local government, an improvement district, a First Nation, a non-profit society or a strata.
- Typically, local government administered structural fire departments are funded by taxation, whereas a non-profit society fire department may charge fees or operate based on donations and fundraising.

- Structural fire departments are established and operated as a Local Authority service responsible for the prevention or suppression of fires in a defined Fire Protection Area by a Local Authority or a board, or commission of a registered society having the responsibility for the management or conduct of work or services through a service agreement, or equivalent of any of the above.
- Most structural fire departments are cross trained to respond to wildfires and can utilize the inter-agency agreement with BC Wildfire Service.

23. Local Government: What consultation was done with local governments to ensure success?

A portion of the UBCM agenda at the Electoral Area Directors' Forum was arranged for Fraser Basin Council to present on cooperative wildfire response September 19, 2023.

Realizing that not all electoral area directors may be present, a survey was completed in electronic form as well as a paper copy. The electronic survey was open until October 15, 2023. All 89 electoral area directors across 13 regional districts (CORD, CRD, CSRD, PRRD, RDOS, RDCK, RDBK, RDEK, RDFFG, RDBN, RDNO, SLRD, TNRD) in the BC Interior were reminded of the survey completion deadline by email on September 30, 2023; the email also had a one-page summary of the Community Cooperative Wildfire Response initiative. UBCM survey results were analyzed by late October, and an email was sent to 30 organized community associations.

The following is the number of responses received by electoral area:

- 89 total electoral areas in the BC Interior across 13 regional districts
- 52/89 did not complete the survey
- 37/89 completed the survey
 - Of those 37, 2 do not have communities outside of structural fire protection
 - Of those 37, 35 have communities outside of structural fire protection
 - Of those 35, 24 of those electoral areas have organized community response societies
 - Of those 35, 11 of those electoral areas have unorganized community response societies
 - Of those 37, 15 don't have an informal fire brigade, and 22 have some sort of informal fire brigade, some which are incorporated as societies, some not

*Some coastal electoral area directors were present in the session and completed the survey. They are not included in the numbers above but were connected with the Coastal Fire Centre.

Safety

24. Who oversees safety expectations?

BC Wildfire Service is the prime contractor. Standard processes are to be followed for reporting injury to WorkSafe BC.

25. Is the work dangerous?

Firefighting is a dangerous, physically demanding activity and is done by highly trained firefighters who undergo annual fitness testing. There are a number of risks present every day when firefighting:

- Burns,
 - Smoke inhalation,
 - Hazards like dangerous burnt-out trees and ash pits,
 - Various topography and terrain which may increase the likelihood of slips, trips and falls,
 - Weather which influences fire behaviour,
 - Working for extended periods of time in varying weather conditions.
-

26. What do we do if we think the work isn't safe?

Safety is the topmost priority for the BC Wildfire Service as we explore cooperative response.

BC Wildfire Service supervisors are expected to assign Emergency Fire Fighters to tasks that are appropriate for their level of skill and experience. However, individuals should be aware that this work will still be physically demanding and done under varying weather conditions.

In British Columbia, the [Workers Compensation Act](#) and [Occupational Health and Safety Regulations](#) provide all workers with the right to refuse unsafe work.

27. Will there be first aid available on site with us?

As the prime contractor, BC Wildfire Service is required to meet WorkSafe regulations for first aid coverage. This may be done with BC Wildfire Service staff or contracted first aid on site.

28. Are we covered by insurance?

Once someone has entered a statutory hire agreement with the BC Wildfire Service, they become a temporary employee covered by WorkSafe BC. WorkSafe BC provides benefits if you're injured because of, or during, your duties.

Volunteers are generally not covered by WorkSafeBC. Societies should be aware that voluntary response not conducted under BC Wildfire Service supervision is not covered by WorkSafeBC and is done at the society's own risk.

Training

29. Which courses are required?

For 2024, the following courses will be required for completion either online or by correspondence through JIBC:

- S-100
- S-185
- ICS-100
- FireSmart Wildfire Risk Reduction Course

First aid training is not part of the requirements for 2024 but is highly recommended.

BC Wildfire Service staff, it's contractors and cooperative response society members will require recertification on an annual basis.

30. Who is supplying the training/certifications for identified societies and associations for 2024?

Trainers on the BC Wildfire Service [recognized instructor list](#) are providing training to pre-identified societies for 2024 only.

31. Are we held to the same physical testing standards as BC Wildfire Service crew members?

BC Wildfire Service crew members must complete the annual WFX Fit Test and maintain a high level of fitness throughout the year.

Individuals hired as Emergency Fire Fighters will be hired on an as-needed basis and supervised by a BC Wildfire Service staff member. If activated, individuals may participate in physically demanding work such as mop up and patrolling. Individuals must complete a [Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire \(PAR-Q\)](#) to ensure they are cleared for physical activity.

Contracts / Compensation

32. Is this a volunteer or paid position?

If activated by a BC Wildfire Service staff member for response to a wildfire, societies will be paid for their efforts.

33. How much will I be paid?

Rates are standardized and dictated by [legislation](#).

34. Who is paying for this initiative?

The BC Wildfire Service is funding training for identified community response societies for 2024. Societies will have been in touch with the Fraser Basin Council, which is coordinating this training through contract trainers in the B.C. Interior. Currently, there is no plan to continue this training series beyond 2024.

35. Will there be a contract in place in advance?

Community response societies and associations will engage with fire centres and zones during pre-season pre-organization, and may sign a statutory hire agreement with the BC Wildfire Service then. The contract is not initiated unless the society is activated by the BC Wildfire Service. Societies that were not engaged or who would like to get involved during the season, and who meet eligibility criteria, may be employed through a statutory hire agreement as-needed, if the BC Wildfire Service has capacity to provide supervision and work appropriate for the group's experience and skill level.

36. When am I “on the clock”? Is there a standby rate?

Societies will only be paid for time working under BC Wildfire Service supervision when they are requested to activate. A daily time report needs to be completed and submitted for each day worked.

37. Might I be called for patrol, detection, education, i.e. Fire Warden program? Can I sign up for this program?

Yes, a person can be hired to perform other duties under the Statutory Hire Agreement, subject to rate changes in Schedule 4 of the Wildfire Regulations. Fire Wardens have a specific job description and additional hiring criteria. This is an eligible Statutory Hire position as long as standards are met.

38. Can I receive reimbursement for PPE, equipment or other purchases?

The BC Wildfire Service will not reimbursement societies or individuals for PPE, equipment or other purchases required to participate in cooperative response.

Equipment

39. Do I get a uniform or PPE?

No, a uniform and PPE will not be provided by the BC Wildfire Service. Society members must have the following:

- One WorkSafe BC approved hard hat complete with chinstrap and attached earmuffs or other approved hearing protection;
- One high visibility vest when working around heavy equipment
- One pair of work gloves as described in Section 8.19 of the BC Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (OH&S Regulation);
- One pair of CSA certified safety eyewear for working around helicopters, foam, or hose nozzle;
- One pair of footwear appropriate for the work conditions, with coverage above the ankle and no nylon or running shoes;
- Flame resistant clothing that meets CAN/CGSB 155.22-2014 (or 97) or NFPA 1977 standards. Flame resistant clothing must be in any colour **other** than red; and
- One 4 (four) inch compress dressing.
- Sufficient amount of food and water for the Work Day (minimum of 2 litres of water per Work Day).

BC Wildfire Service will provide any required flagging tape.

40. I don't want to do the training, but I have equipment you can use – do I give it to the community organization or contract to BC Wildfire Service directly?

Most equipment is hired prior to and early in the fire season (March to May) by the local fire centre(s). To supply equipment listed in the BC Wildfire Service Equipment Rates, equipment owners should contact their local fire centre to be registered for “as and

when required” work. Contact information for fire centres in B.C. is available [here](#). For more information on the BC Wildfire Service contracting process and opportunities, please visit the [website](#).

Fireline

41. Will I have to work if we are called?

No. If a society is activated, individuals pre-identified as having the required training have the option to participate.

42. Can I work near to my home?

Emergency Fire Fighters will work under the direction of the BC Wildfire Service, which will determine the worksite. Societies will not be deployed outside of their local area.

43. What kinds of situations will I be working in (initial attack, urban interface, mop up, etc.)?

If a society is activated, they will be employed for activities such as mop up, patrolling, and other support roles.

Firefighting is inherently dangerous, and there are significant safety concerns for community response societies without firefighting experience and knowledge to participate in initial attack or to take action in situations where there is no BC Wildfire Service supervision or guidance.

Staff, experienced members of the public and contractors have all expressed significant safety concerns that must be addressed if we expand this model.

For individuals or societies interested in participating in structural protection, it’s recommended to consider joining a local volunteer fire department.

44. How long are the expected shifts?

Shift length is situationally dependent.

45. Will I always be working with BC Wildfire Service staff?

Yes, society members hired as Emergency Fire Fighters will always operate under direct BC Wildfire Service supervision.

46. Who will be giving us work assignments and making sure the work is right?

A BC Wildfire Service staff member will supervise the society and give direction.

47. Am I working only in the forest?

The work location is situationally dependent.

48. Can we protect homes/businesses?

Structural fire fighting requires additional training and PPE to be conducted safely and is not included in the cooperative response model the BC Wildfire Service is currently pursuing.

The BC Wildfire Service works closely with structural fire services societies responsible for fire activity near structures. For individuals or societies interested in participating in structural protection, it's recommended to consider joining a local volunteer fire department.

The best action communities can take to protect homes and businesses is to engage in prevention early on. [FireSmart BC](#) has a number of resources to guide this work.

49. Can I ride in helicopters or in the airtankers?

No, only authorized personnel essential to the mission are to be on board aircraft hired by the Ministry.

Other

50. Are meals / drinks provided?

No. Each society member must have a sufficient amount of food and water for the workday (minimum of 2 litres of water per workday), as mentioned in the Standard Operating Guideline for Rural and Remote Community Cooperative Wildfire Response: Hiring Emergency Fire Fighters.

51. Do we stay in camps, or are we allowed to stay at home even if there is an evacuation order?

No person is permitted to stay in evacuation order areas. Just as any BC Wildfire Service staff member or structural firefighter with residence in an evacuation order area would not be exempt from abiding by evacuation orders, neither are society members. The accommodation requirements are situationally dependent.

52. How do I organize my community or society to meet the requirements to be considered eligible?

To be eligible for participation in wildfire response as an Emergency Fire Fighter, community members must:

- Be outside of structural fire protection jurisdiction;
- Show an earnest desire to be involved;
- Be organized as a cohesive society able to receive funding, such as a non-profit society;
- Be eager to work under the BC Wildfire Service command and direction.

Non-profit societies/organizations follow a simple business structure that enables them to create and maintain a bank account, take out insurance, have a WorkSafe BC account, hold assets and more. For information on how to form a society within your community, please visit the resources on the BC Government [website](#).

Self-organized societies must also meet the minimum training and safety requirements for statutory hires.
