

# From Displacement to Hope: A Guide for Displaced Indigenous Communities and Host Communities



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## Contents

Introduction .....	1
Before the Disaster: Preparing for Evacuation .....	2
For Families .....	2
Put Together a Grab and Go Bags .....	2
Plan for Your Pets.....	2
Plan for Your Livestock.....	3
Photographs .....	3
Insurance.....	3
Evacuation Lists.....	3
Become Familiar with your Community's Emergency Plan .....	4
For Chiefs, Band Council and Administrators .....	4
Understand the Potential Hazards.....	4
Develop Warning Messages.....	4
Have a Written Emergency Plan .....	5
Have Designated Muster Points.....	6
Identify a Family Centre .....	6
Identify Host Communities .....	8
Document Recovery.....	9
Identify Temporary Emergency Accommodation.....	9
Consider Transportation .....	10
Complete a Skills and Knowledge Inventory.....	10

Build Capacity.....	11
During the Evacuation and Relocation.....	13
Health and Safety First .....	13
Triaging for Evacuation .....	13
Keep Families and Clans Together .....	13
Accommodation .....	14
Accommodation Planning .....	14
Staying on Reserve: .....	15
Placements Off-Reserve.....	15
Short-Term (less than 60 days) .....	16
Long-Term (more than 60 days).....	18
Eating Right .....	18
Emotional Wellness.....	20
The Wisdom of the Elders .....	20
The Importance of Cultural and Spiritual Events in Healing.....	22
Wellness Support Teams.....	22
Meeting the Needs of Children .....	23
Meeting the Needs of Youth.....	24
Supporting Older Persons .....	26
Supporting Fathers and Men .....	27
Supporting Women and Girls.....	28
Special Needs .....	29
Celebrating Holidays, Seasonal and Community Events.....	29
Effective Communication .....	30

Translation Services .....	31
Social Media .....	31
Planning for Recovery .....	32
Appoint a Disaster Coordinator (First Nations Liaison) .....	32
Providing Access.....	32
Providing Storage Containers and Places.....	33
Rebuilding or Relocation? .....	33
Determining Priorities .....	33
Using Local Resources .....	34
Tips for Host Communities.....	35
Essential Actions.....	35
Assess Your Capacity to Host First Nations Evacuees .....	35
Prepare as Much as Possible Before the Evacuation .....	36
Establish a First Nations Liaison .....	37
Establish an Emergency Planning Team including Representatives from the First Nation.....	38
Primary Considerations .....	38
Support Clear and Transparent Communications .....	38
Provide Opportunities for the Evacuated Community Members to Connect with Each Other.....	39
Help to Establish Early Relationships between the Evacuated Community and Law Enforcement.....	40
Advise Residents of Plans to Host an Evacuated First Nation .....	41
Cultural Awareness .....	41
Secondary Considerations.....	41



Provide Guidance for Schools, Youth Groups, and Sports Teams .....	41
Plan a Welcoming Ceremony .....	42
Organize a Bus or Walking Tour for Evacuees .....	42
Resource Materials .....	42
Pursue Training Opportunities Offered by Provincial, Territorial and Federal Agencies for Hosting First Nations Evacuees .....	43
Plan for Repatriating Evacuees .....	43
COMMUNITY CHECKLIST .....	44

## Introduction

Displacement and evacuations disproportionately affect First Nations communities across Canada, and there is evidence that evacuations and long-term displacement have negative consequences on community cohesion; mental health and psychosocial well-being; and overall resilience. Evacuations can exacerbate the physical, mental, spiritual, and social impacts of a disaster.

The negative impacts of recent evacuations and the long-term displacements of First Nations communities in Canada have been documented. They clearly show how families and communities face continued suffering during and post-evacuation, affecting those remaining in the community and placed with a host community. Displacements often result in social isolation; lack of access to traditional food; repeated moves; job insecurity; lack of, or inconsistent, access to education; and poor psychological health outcomes.

This guide, funded by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), **makes recommendations on how to better address the needs of First Nations communities who have been evacuated in order to avoid further harm to their residents.** These recommendations start with the need to develop pre-event planning

strategies, processes to address the evacuation process itself and initiatives and services to increase the support to evacuating communities and to improve relationships with host communities.

These recommendations are based on interviews and Talking Circles with First Nations people who have recently experienced an evacuation alert or an evacuation order, as well as findings documented in the research literature. Consideration was given to the feedback from non-Indigenous and Indigenous host communities.

It is important to realize that while the entire community may be evacuated, in many cases only part of the community is evacuated (e.g., those who live in the flood plain). To improve the planning, evacuation, relocation and recovery process, the recommendations include a number of key strategies including:

- improved and transparent communication;
- steps to ensure that communities are engaged in the decision-making processes involved in evacuation;
- factors to strengthen community cohesion pre- and post-evacuation;
- the need to hold spiritual events and gatherings to provide opportunities for healing; and
- the importance of ensuring host communities are well-prepared.

## Before the Disaster: Preparing for Evacuation

### For Families

#### Put Together a Grab and Go Bags

Families can plan ahead for a disaster by preparing a grab and go bag that contains the essentials for an evacuation. Grab and go bags typically contain things like water and non-perishable snacks for the family, and any other necessities. Key things to include in one or more Grab and Go bags are:

- Bottles of water for each person
- Non-perishable snacks
- Flashlights (and batteries)
- Cords and chargers for cell phones and other devices
- Garbage bags, toilet paper, hand wipes, soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste, deodorant and other sundries
- Waterproof matches and candles
- Extra medication and/or copies of prescriptions
- Extra glasses (e.g., older pairs of prescription glasses)
- Identification (photocopies or even photographs taken on your smart phone can be helpful)
- Insurance papers
- Sanitary items for women and incontinent supplies if necessary

- Diapers, formula, and baby food for infants



- Transistor radio (radios with a wind-up crank that also serve as a flashlight and cell phone charger can be purchased for less than \$20)

- Toys, deck of cards, books for children
- Cultural and spiritual regalia such as drums, dance costumes, and irreplaceable items
- Put aside small bills and change as following a disaster ATMs and banks may not be operational
- Family and friends contact lists – most people today have contact lists on their cell phones, but what if your phone needs to be charged? A simple paper list with key numbers could be very helpful.

*"The most difficult thing for me was leaving my dog and my cat."*

#### Plan for Your Pets

People and companion animals have

important relationships. Plan for how pets can be accommodated during an emergency or evacuation. This includes having a crate that can be used to transport your pet, a supply of pet food, an extra water and food dish, a leash, extra medications and any



papers which list vaccinations (e.g., rabies shots).



### Plan for Your Livestock

Livestock are important assets for many communities, and it is important to plan for their care

for prior to a disaster or emergency event. When possible, livestock can be corralled into a safe place on the community territory, such as a raised and fenced in area during floods.

### Photographs



For many, family photographs are very important – often post-disaster when families are asked what losses have affected

them the most, they mention the loss of family photographs.

Teenagers are often looking for things to do over the summer or spring break. Taking digital photographs of existing photographs and storing them in the “cloud” is a good project and will ensure that the family’s photos are always available.

### Insurance

Check with your Band Council to verify what insurance your Band Council has

and what insurance you need to have. In some cases the Band Council insures the actual building, but not the contents. In those cases, the residents are responsible for ensuring the contents.

If you have a business in your home it will be also important to make sure that your business has the necessary coverage. Damage to art work, supplies, fishing and hunting equipment, computers, and furniture and clothing can quickly add up. Make sure you are covered!

### Evacuation Lists

You may or may not receive a warning message depending upon the type of hazard. Some hazards such as earthquakes typically provide no warning, while others such as snow-melt floods may provide long warning periods. When you are suddenly told you have an hour to evacuate, many families are somewhat in a state of shock and in the rush they often forget to pack some essential items.

A list of items that would be important for you to take with you can be very helpful in those circumstances. In addition to your grab and go bag, if you have time, outerwear and a change of underwear will be important. Computers, cell phones, tablets and other important electronic equipment would be useful to have with you.

Medical equipment such as CPAP machines need to be added to the list.

If you have time and space, family heirlooms, family photos, jewellery and art work may be things that you can bring with you. Having a well thought out Evacuation List that you can grab and check-off when faced with an evacuation order will ensure that you don't forget anything important.

### **Become Familiar with your Community's Emergency Plan**

It is your responsibility to review your community's Emergency Plan and the potential hazards that could affect your community. You should be familiar with the Muster Points, location of the Family Centre, evacuation routes and who the key contacts are in your community.

### **For Chiefs, Band Council and Administrators**

#### **Understand the Potential Hazards**



Band administrations need to be aware of their community's hazards as well as those that could impact the region, province or territory.

Common hazards facing First Nations across Canada include flooding; forest fires; weather related hazards such as

tornadoes, snow storms, and wind storms; and hazardous material spills.

The *Aboriginal Disaster Resilience Planning* program ([adrp.jibc.ca](http://adrp.jibc.ca)) has tools to help Band administrations identify the biggest risks facing their communities. Understanding risk will help to identify what the best strategies for evacuation might be; a flood event may require a different evacuation approach than a wildfire or snowstorm.

### **Develop Warning Messages**

For every potential hazard you need to have developed warning message templates. These templates would contain the key messages and simply include lines/spaces where the specifics (e.g., date, time) can be inserted. Included in the templates would be hazard-specific instructions for residents including where they should go (e.g., the Muster Points), when they should go, and what will happen next.

It will also be important to consider how you will inform community members of the need to evacuate. Keep in mind that not all warnings occur during the daytime. If you receive a tornado warning in middle of the night, how are you going to let the community know?

## Have a Written Emergency Plan

It is important for communities to have an emergency management plan that anticipates the types of disasters they may face, and makes plans for evacuations and distributing resources. Having these plans in place will help the First Nations communities play a lead role during the evacuation process, while also working collaboratively with provincial, territorial and federal government agencies as well non-governmental agencies (NGOs) such as the Canadian Red Cross or The Salvation Army.

Having these plans in place will help Band Council and administrations take steps towards building these relationships by contacting INAC, their provincial or territorial emergency management agency and key NGOs. An emergency management plan needs to be tailored to the community's cultural and institutional context. A Band Council or administration may be able to identify municipalities that are better fits for hosting an evacuation than others, and can develop criteria to determine which municipalities are most appropriate.

By developing relationships prior to the disaster, the First Nation can work with identified Indigenous or non-Indigenous communities to improve how services will be provided and

communication protocols when an evacuation is needed. This type of planning can build institutional capacity within the First Nation and the potential host communities.

An emergency plan would include:

- A Warning and Alert plan which identifies how community residents will receive warnings and alerts of potential hazards
- Clear steps that will be taken in during an emergency, such as declaring a state of emergency, ordering an evacuation, and releasing funds
- A clear chain of command for Band Council and emergency response personnel during an emergency
- Roles and responsibilities of emergency personnel in a disaster, including a Community Liaison
- The names and phone numbers of personnel who would be involved in managing



an emergency and those organizations or agencies who would be needed post-event. These lists could include disaster recovery companies and other businesses who could provide materials and services to assist the community in the initial rescue

and later recovery phases (e.g., cranes, generators). It is also critical to identify personnel who can address the emotional impact of the disaster on the residents and responders and promote physical and emotional wellness.

Band Council and administration can look for examples of emergency management plans from other communities, and can consult the ADRP program website for additional resources (<https://adrp.jibc.ca>).

### **Have Designated Muster Points**

A muster point is simply a safe place for people to meet and be sheltered from the elements in the initial stages of a disaster. Muster points can also serve as places for medical triage if there have been significant numbers of injured. Check-off lists of community residents could be available at the Muster Points, and before anyone is sent off-reserve; names should be checked off so that administrators can identify potentially missing or unaccounted for residents. Once the disaster's impact has been identified, muster points can serve as transportation hubs to evacuate community members.

Band administrators or emergency personnel need to identify several muster points on reserve that community members can go to in case of an emergency. Muster points will

need to be located in the least risky areas, or in buildings within a community. Ideally, muster points would be located in a well-ventilated, well-known building, and be accessible by multiple routes. Having the muster point in a safe building provides for immediate shelter when freezing temperatures or weather conditions such as rain or hot sun leave residents at risk if they are outdoors.

Signage is important for directing people to muster points during both the day and night. Community members should know about muster points and how to get to them for evacuation and assembly.

Muster points are chosen for their ability to provide short-term shelter to relatively large numbers of people, provide access to water and sewage, and have a generator to provide power when power has been disrupted as a result of the disaster, and depending upon the season and weather heat or air conditioning. Additional important features would include a refrigerator (to store insulin and other temperature-sensitive medications), stored mats or blankets, dryers, and stored coffee, juices and emergency food.

### **Identify a Family Centre**

The community Muster point may also serve as a Family Centre once the initial response to the disaster has taken

place and a decision has been made to evacuate residents to host communities.

However, in some cases while the building designated as a muster point may be well situated to serve as a Family Centre that may not always be the case.

A Family Centre will need to be opened as soon as possible and be located in both the evacuated community and host community. In the evacuated

community, a Family Centre will serve as an on-going information centre for those who have been evacuated (especially those who may be staying nearby) and for those families and friends remaining in the community.

The services offered within a Family Centre will vary from community to community, and will shift over time. At the start, the Family Centre will be a source of communication –initial Information Gatherings will need to be held regularly as concerned





community residents will have lots of unanswered questions; these could be scheduled three or four times a day at specific times. All information that is disseminated from the Family Centre should be verified with trusted personnel. As time goes on, timings for Information Gatherings can be gradually reduced. Having a large information bulletin board where people can receive information and ask questions will be especially valuable.

Family Centres not only serve as information centres but also as a place where specific services can be accessed. Depending upon the degree of damage, residents may come to the Family Centre to gain information on insurance, rebuilding plans, repair contractors and ways of staying well, both physically and emotionally.

In winter a Family Centre can be a place for children to play indoors with their friends, or a place to access child care and health services. Ideally a Family Centre will have internet services and several computers can be set up for families to use email or access information.

A Family Centre can also serve as a place where cultural and spiritual events can be held. These events could include: Healing Circles, smudging ceremonies, Potlatches, community

meals, ceremonial dances and other ceremonies or holiday events.

In a host community, the Family Centre can simply be a conference room in a hotel, or a designated place at an Aboriginal Friendship Centre. Having a designated Family Centre is especially important when evacuees have been accommodated in several different locations. Family Centres are a meeting place where evacuated families can touch base with others who have been evacuated, and where Information Gatherings can be held. They also can serve as a safe meeting place for teenagers to simply hang out.



### Identify Host Communities

Prior to an evacuation, Band administrators can identify a list of criteria that will help determine a “host community of best fit.” These criteria would be tailored to the needs of the First Nation. Depending on the context and demographics of community members, some criteria may include:

- Types and locations of available accommodations
- Transportation options
- Proximity to traditional territory
- Access to schools and post-secondary education

- Access to hospitals and healthcare
- Locations of off-reserve community members
- Whether community members are familiar with the host community
- Employment opportunities
- Recreation facilities
- Existence of an Aboriginal Friendship Centre

Once these criteria have been decided upon, Band administrators can develop a list of potential best fits for host communities. When the list is developed, a designated community liaison can begin contacting potential host communities and provincial or territorial emergency management agencies to initiate discussions towards establishing evacuation protocols. See the section on “Supporting Evacuated Families: Practices to Enhance Resiliency” for additional information on choosing accommodations for evacuees.

### Document Recovery

Of benefit would be for Band Health Centre staff to have copies (scans and/or photocopies) of each member’s identification and medical history, including photocopies of prescribed medication. These can be backed up to a secure “cloud” or external server.

Having extra copies of these documents will make it easier to fill necessary prescriptions and allocate

resources and services after an evacuation has taken place. Often residents will have left their home with little warning and in the case of hazards such as tornadoes or fires, residents may have lost all of their identification and medications.

Medical histories contain sensitive information and should be kept within the health department.



During an evacuation, community members can then be able to request access to copies of their prescriptions so that they can order refills and be better prepared to access health services in a host community.

### Identify Temporary Emergency Accommodation

Temporary accommodations or group lodging can be identified ahead of time, and may include a community centre or gym, a cultural centre, or other facilities not located in a vulnerable area. Depending upon the numbers of evacuees and the existing conditions, residents whose homes have been severely damaged or destroyed may need to stay in group lodging until other accommodation is obtained.

Typically, temporary emergency accommodations sites have stored mats and/or cots, blankets and pillows.

If there are no facilities on-reserve that can be used as temporary accommodations, the Band administration can identify facilities in a host community that can be used as temporary accommodations in emergencies.

### Consider Transportation

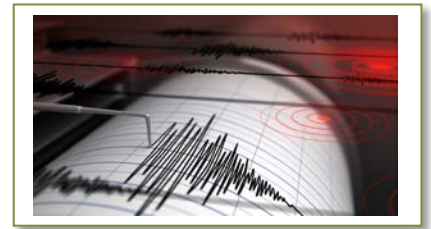
Transportation during an evacuation may be rushed and at times feel chaotic for affected community members. Planning and preparing for an evacuation includes thinking ahead about what the best transportation methods are.

Anticipated transportation procedures for the evacuation will need to be communicated transparently and as early as possible to emergency personnel and Band Council who can help to relay information to the wider community.

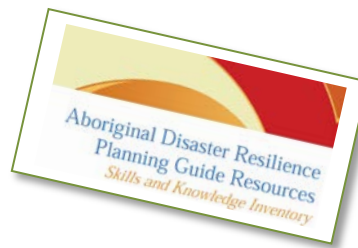
Various transportation modes and suppliers (cars, vans, buses, airplanes, boats, etc.) will need to be identified ahead of time. Of benefit will be to determine how many people own or have access to transportation and how long it will take for the various transportation modes to arrive.

The warning periods for various hazards can be anticipated and the timelines can be matched to the various types of transportation. If the First Nation reserve is remote, and if

there is only one road in and one road out of the community, if that road is blocked by the hazard (e.g., a forest fire) then alternative means of evacuation need to be identified.



When and how transportation will arrive, and how much families can take with them needs to be communicated early so that people can prepare their belongings appropriately.



### Complete a Skills and Knowledge Inventory

Of benefit would be for a community to take stock of the existing skills and knowledge across their members before a disaster strikes to have a better idea of who has the skills to help with certain tasks. A skills and knowledge inventory is a useful way to identify resilience and community strengths, and community members can be called upon for their skills after an evacuation has taken place.

Some example questions that can help guide this include:

- Who in the community is a strong navigator?



- Who in the community can easily list members of families and clans?
- Who in the community could help with gathering and preparing food?
- Who is a skilled performer?
- Who can speak multiple languages?
- Who can help with recreation, arts, and crafts?
- What are youth skilled at?
- Who has child care skills?
- What other skills are valued within the community?

A Skills and Knowledge Inventory template can be downloaded from the *Aboriginal Disaster Resiliency Planning Program* (<https://adrp.jibc.ca>).

### Build Capacity

Before a disaster event, Band Council and administrators can identify existing capacity and levels of resiliency. Knowledge keepers and family leaders can be identified and recorded, for example, and be involved in evacuation planning and implementation.



Elders and other community leaders can play an important role in the evacuation and relocation process. Capacity building can ensure that a

community is ready for an evacuation before a disaster or emergency strikes.

Decisions will need to be made quickly in emergency situations, so consulting with elders and community leaders will help to ensure that plans and messages are linguistically and culturally appropriate. This will aid in decision making both within the community and with external agencies.

Social and cultural programs, such as language and arts programs, need to be supported and kept intact whenever possible so that activities can be started wherever residents have been relocated. A community can also enhance resilience by implementing skills development programs, supporting traditional practices, and identifying knowledge keepers. Records of this information will make it easier to restart these programs after an evacuation.

One way that communities can build capacity is to host Teen Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) training. Information on how to do so is obtainable from the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) website

<https://www.fema.gov/teen-community-emergency-response-team>

The community may find it helpful to have a recorded framework that describes the general roles of community members which can be

used to match people with activities in a host community.

Encourage members of the community to take disaster and emergency training and skill building in areas that will help support evacuation, rescue and recovery efforts. One basic skill



that everyone in the community should be encouraged to develop is First Aid.

Additional skills such as training to be a volunteer fire fighter or drive a truck or bus can be invaluable when a disaster strikes.

The Aboriginal Disaster Resilience Project (<https://ardp.jibc.ca>) provides helpful tools for identifying and building capacity for disasters. Band Council and administrators can use these tools with community members to ensure that people are better prepared for disasters and potential evacuations.

Some guiding principles for building capacity include:

- Identify ongoing skills development and training programs in the community
- Identify the Traditional Knowledge Keepers in the community
- Develop a clear chain of command for Band Council and administration
- Take stock of community assets, both physical and social
- Identify the best formats for community-wide communication (i.e., in large groups or with heads of households, in-person or online)
- Identify how language and literacy may impact communications

## During the Evacuation and Relocation

### Health and Safety First

The immediate safety and physical and mental health of community members should be prioritized during the evacuation process, including during a transitory period in emergency shelters. Disaster events can cause injuries and potentially death; the safety of all affected community members will be paramount.

Evacuations can be chaotic and amplify conflict, both between community members and between a community and government and other responding agencies.

#### Guiding principles are:

- Treat evacuees as people, not numbers
- Place family and clans close to each other.
- Place families as close to their homes as possible.
- Avoid multiple moves.

### Triaging for Evacuation

If there are many people who need to be evacuated, setting criteria for evacuation will be important. Clearly those with medical needs, children and older persons deserve to be evacuated as soon as possible. First come, first serve is not a good way to determine

who is evacuated first. Often those who don't have the ability or strength to get to the front of the line are the ones who are most in need of being evacuated and reaching shelter.

Sometimes it seems to be an easy solution to allocate a "number" to each person in order to determine his or her priority for services, or to reach out to them regarding the allocation of services. "Number 72 next!" Be aware that for many First Nations people, standing in line and being allocated a "number" brings back memories of residential school and these memories can be very painful and can trigger emotional reactions. Therefore, use names and birthdates if necessary, rather than allocating numbers.

### Keep Families and Clans Together

Stress and disruptions can be exacerbated when families, friends, and clans are separated during an evacuation. This extra stress can lead to rapid communication break downs and increase the potential for conflict. Families, friends, and clans will benefit if they are kept together at all stages of the evacuation: when transported, placed in temporary accommodation, and longer term accommodations. Develop a list of community members, such as families and clans, who wish to be housed together or be placed in

close proximity to each other when they are evacuated.

Families, clans, and pets will need to be identified and recorded so that they can be transported together, and children and youth should be transported with their own families to reduce the stress and trauma associated with the evacuation process. Family groups and clans that are transported together can provide support to each other, which will reduce stress and anxiety about the evacuation.

### Accommodation

Whenever possible, accommodation preferences should be respected by responding agencies and the host community. Where evacuees are placed is very important to evacuees, whether they are placed short-term or long-term.

Displaced community members will have preferences as to who they are housed with, and may request that family or clan members be housed in the same facility or within walking distance from one another. Friends, families, and clans often cook together and share meals, spend time socializing and recreating, and provide informal peer support to each other. However, it ought to be noted, that as

in all families, this may not always apply.

### Accommodation Planning

As soon as possible, establish a sense of how long evacuees are going to be out of their homes. Try to determine if families will be out of their homes for days (potential flood that has not directly affected anyone's home); for weeks (minor damage); for a couple of months (moderate damage); or for several months (moderate to major damage or total destruction).

Once it is known that families will be out of their homes for several months, steps need to be taken to move families out of emergency shelters and into longer-term temporary housing.

Accommodations for longer term displacement need to be appropriate for a family's needs, and considerations for size and location are important factors to be addressed. It is also valuable for community members to have a meaningful role in choosing their accommodations, and it is important for evacuees not to have to move once they are settled into their home. Tenuous housing causes distress and anxiety for parents and children, and can lead to the breakdown of family and clan relationships.

*"I guess the most difficult part for me being a grandmother with all my grandchildren is moving to nine, nine hotels altogether – nine, from here to there to you don't know where you're going."*

### Staying on Reserve:

Consider the weather and existing infrastructure to determine whether or not it is possible for families to stay on or close to their homes during the recovery and reconstruction period. In a number of cases, if water and electricity are available, families may be able to stay in rented motor homes or trailers on, or close to their homes. The cost is often comparable, or less, than paying for a hotel room. It will be important to ensure that electricity is hooked up with proper safeguards and that the water used to fill the water tanks is potable.



Additionally, it will be important to ensure that sewage holding tanks can be emptied in a timely manner and taking the time to learn how the trailer's or motor home's systems work is critical.

If access to a place to empty the holding tanks is limited, depending on the situation and weather, another option is to consider renting and placing a "Porta-Potty" close by and to use the motorhome or camper primarily for accommodation, sleeping and cooking.

The benefits are that children and families can stay in touch with their families, friends and cultural networks. Children and youth can remain in contact with their friends, schools, and extra-curricular activities. If transportation to and from a placement to their home site is not an issue, then families can actively participate in the clean-up and reconstruction of their homes and their neighbours' homes.

Family or friends may be able to billet displaced residents for short-term periods. If families have the space, staying with supportive family members or friends can be very beneficial.

### Placements Off-Reserve

Factors to take in account when placing families off reserve:

- How close is the resource to medical centres; schools, banking, recreation and other services?
- Do the evacuees have their own vehicle and if not, what transportation is easily and readily accessible?
- How will the weather conditions affect access to services and to trips back to the reserve?
- What are the pre-existing medical needs of the families?

## Short-Term (less than 60 days)

### Best Choices

The first choice is to choose hotels or motels that have cooking facilities. This will allow families to maintain family practices – making and eating meals together. Families will be able to choose their own meals and accommodate special diets and medical conditions such as diabetes.

As well, the hotel or motel needs to have additional rooms or spaces that can be rented out to support day-to-day activities for families. During the day, families with small children can visit with each other and children can have play and activity centres. Parents or caregivers can also relax, play cards or BINGO, and do beading or engage in traditional arts and crafts or other activities.

In the early evening, youth can get together to do their homework, socialize, watch television and use social media. In the later evening the room can be transformed as a gathering and social centre for adults to meet and participate in activities.

Having additional rooms available on site can assist in providing meeting spaces for parents and adults to meet privately with therapists, insurance agents, band council members and administrators on site, without having to worry about transportation issues.



Facilities with recreational areas (e.g., pools and gyms) can help children,

youth and families burn off excess energy and exercise. As well, if possible rooms should have windows that open, or balconies so that families can appreciate fresh air.

Another amenity which is really appreciated is having on-site laundry facilities.

Ideally, if the facilities will accommodate pets, it will meet the needs of families to remain close to, and provide for the care of, their pets.



Facilities need to be reasonably close to transportation routes, grocery stores, pharmacies and other key service providers.

### Lodging Rules

For people living in their own homes, suddenly finding themselves living in a hotel or motel, requires a great deal of adjustment. When we are travelling, we usually have a suitcase or two and usually spend little time in our hotel rooms as we explore the community we are visiting. Living in a hotel room



for weeks at a time, is a very different situation.

Often the rules and regulations are not well understood and result in evacuees being evicted or facing conflictual situations. Residents need to be very clear about the rules:

*"If you're not used to having that security who's watching you; when you leave your room; timing you, writing it down, well, to be honest it's more like jail."*

1. How do visitors access residents' rooms? Some hotels have security systems that require guests to access their floor with their room key. How do visitors access residents?
2. Are visitors allowed to stay overnight? If so, what is the maximum number allowed in a hotel room? What extra costs are incurred and who has to pay the extra costs?
3. Noise levels. Typically, hotels close pools and recreational activities and require people to be quiet after 11pm. Excess noise, music and partying can disturb other guests.
4. Typically, evacuees are given vouchers to trade in at the hotel restaurant for their meals. Visitors may arrive and as per the way of most Indigenous people, visitors are fed when they visit. How can visitors be accommodated?
5. Rooms are generally cleaned each day. How are hotel cleaning staff

provided for given that evacuees do not have the cash to leave a tip every time the room is cleaned?

6. What are the rules around the use of the business centre? The pool? The gym? Are visitors allowed to also use the facilities?

## Security

When an emergency occurs within a community, people can be left feeling fearful and anxious. Making people feel secure on reserve or in a new host community helps to reduce this fear and lets people ease back into their old routines more easily. Additionally, hotels may feel uneasy about having many people move in without clear departure dates and ask for additional security services to be present.

However, sometimes, it is easy for security to forget the reasons why they are in place. They are not there to log every person's comings and goings or who comes to visit and when.



Ideally, it would be helpful if security companies could have a core group of security officers so that the residents can get to know them. As well, it would be beneficial to provide cultural awareness training about First Nations for security officers so that they have a better

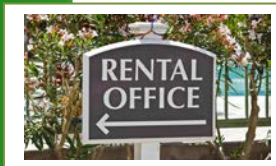
understanding of why the evacuees are placed in the hotel, the stressors affecting the evacuees and some of the important cultural and spiritual practices.

It may be possible to use local Indigenous police forces to provide additional support and/or training to local security officers.

### Long-Term (more than 60 days)

#### Best Choices

No matter how nice the hotel or motel, the reality is that families will be spending most of their time in a small room with little more than a bed, a chair or two and a desk. Often there is little privacy, visiting with family and friends is difficult, and there are few options for families to have some personal space.



Once it becomes apparent that families will not be able to return home for two months or longer, rental apartments or homes are the best option. This will allow the families to bring in whatever possessions they have to recreate a sense of normalcy, will provide for personal space, allow friends and families to socialize, and participate in day-to-day activities.

## Eating Right

Evacuations have the potential to increase trauma, and vulnerability can be exacerbated when people don't have access to their customary or traditional foods. Food preparation and consumption are important factors for physical health and well-being. When on-reserve community members are only used to living off the land, the lack of availability of traditional foods, such as wild game, salmon, and wild berries has actually made them physically ill. When people are unused to processed, Westernized, greasy, spicy or high carbohydrate foods, repeatedly eating these foods will cause digestive and gastro-intestinal related physical illness.

Throughout an evacuation, it is important to provide people with access to a variety of food sources that are healthy, fresh, and customary. Elders can be consulted about what kinds of food people are accustomed to eating and preparing, and these traditional food sources may be provided whenever possible.

Depending on where a displaced community is from, traditional foods may include wild game, such as deer, caribou, fowl, among others, and fish or seafood, such as trout, salmon, herring, and others. A host community can inquire about which traditional



foods would be most appropriate for a displaced community, and can provide some information about where it might be available.

Things to consider for supporting healthy and appropriate eating include:

- Give people several options for meals, including fresh vegetables
- Traditional foods can be made available whenever possible
- Dietary constraints and illnesses (such as diabetes, heart disease, etc.) must be considered – avoid sugar and starchy foods such as pasta and mashed potatoes

Food preparation is an opportunity for community members to get together and, therefore, it is very advantageous to have appropriately sized food preparation areas for community members, including community kitchens and eating space. Aboriginal Friendship Centres often have cultural events that feature the serving of pot luck or traditional foods; these spaces can provide opportunities for evacuees to get together and participate in food preparation and consumption.



## Emotional Wellness

Disasters and emergencies are traumatic events. Anyone who has been displaced from his or her community and who may have lost his or her home and possessions is going to be deeply affected. However, evacuees who were marginalized before the displacement are even more likely to experience trauma-related symptoms.

It is also important to realize that for some, being forced to leave their homes can trigger memories of residential schools and, for many, the terrible conditions in these schools that they experienced. Sadly, many First Nations people have developed Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of their past experiences. The triggering of emotions when faced with relocation and the possible loss of their homes can result in flashbacks, feelings of anger and helplessness and profound sadness.

These feelings, if unacknowledged, can lead to increased family violence, drug and alcohol abuse, family break-ups, attempted or actual suicides, and recruitment of community members into criminal activity. This is especially true if evacuees are accommodated in neighbourhoods that are facing their own challenges.

Poor institutional coordination and a lack of resources for emotional

support can compound these issues and re-traumatize a displaced community.

Long-term displacement is associated with stress, isolation, and social/cultural disruption, which creates patterns of anxiety and depression for those displaced. For some the trauma of being displaced can lead to Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) or Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Thus, support for the emotional well-being of evacuees is crucial to reduce trauma and distress, and the voices and needs of community members ought to be carefully considered by responding agencies and the host community. Fortunately, the emotional well-being of evacuees can be supported in many ways.

A key consideration is how to best use the Elders and Traditional Healers in the community.

### The Wisdom of the Elders

The Elders have an important role in the community. They are respected and looked up to by others. On a day-to-day basis Elders help others to reflect on their actions, help them problem solve, resolve conflicts and tensions and maximize their potential.

Often, when communities are relocated, there are so many things

happening in the chaos of the moment that the Elders of the community are forgotten. They may not be included in planning discussions and decision making. Not only does this reduce the likelihood of making optimal decisions, but it also diminishes the sense of value of the Elders and further destabilizes the existing cultural and social norms.

It is important to consider how the Elders can contribute to the community's recovery and provide support to those who are troubled.

Elders can provide advice on what traditional practices can best be used to support the community.



## The Importance of Cultural and Spiritual Events in Healing

People may have experienced a highly stressful, dangerous, and sometimes chaotic evacuation. Cultural and spiritual events can help communities reunite and begin the healing process. A feast with traditional food can be made open to everyone, allowing people feel more at ease in their new surroundings and help to return feelings of normalcy.



Elders and Healers should be consulted to identify what ceremonies would be most helpful to the evacuees. Cultural and spiritual events

can include:

- Healing Circles
- Traditional Healing Ceremonies
- Smudging, Sweat Lodges and Smoke Houses, Cedar Brushing
- Potlatches and Powwows
- Spiritual Fires

## Wellness Support Teams

Additionally teams of support workers with specific skills can directly help to address the reactions and symptoms experienced by the evacuees and it is important to get this support in place as soon as possible.

Wellness support teams should have training in helping manage the emotions and feelings of evacuees, and ideally they would have experience working with First Nations people. As well, if the First Nations community has a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team it will be important for them to consult and work with the CISM team members and peers.

The services need to be put in place immediately after the evacuation and remain active throughout the period of displacement and post-repatriation. Repatriation processes for evacuees are also greatly improved when emotional well-being is addressed for those who need it, as it reduces the potential for long-term distress.

Wellness services could include:

- Psychological First Aid;
- Crisis Management Briefings (for groups of people);
- Defusings and Critical Incident Stress Debriefings for responders;
- One-on-one counselling sessions; and
- Referrals to appropriate therapists for those exhibiting acute or on-going symptoms of trauma.

As well, a 24/7 Crisis Line can be very helpful, feelings of being overwhelmed, fear and hopelessness don't just occur between the hours of 9 to 5, Monday to Friday.

Support for those experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, ASD and PTSD should be reviewed every month to ensure that they are getting the appropriate care.

Prioritizing the emotional well-being for evacuees means that resources can be directed to supporting peer support groups, cultural events and activities, and recreation.



### Meeting the Needs of Children

Children are often greatly affected by the trauma of a disaster and subsequent evacuation. It may be the first time in their lives that they've been removed from their home and belongings,

and they are at a greater risk than adults for developing long term distress, such as anxiety and depression. Common reactions in children can include:

- exhibiting regressive behaviour such as bed-wetting or thumb sucking;
- having nightmares or night terrors and difficulty getting to sleep;
- misbehaving or becoming whiny and clingy;
- becoming afraid when they hear or see reminders of the event – for

example, the sound of the wind may trigger fears that a tornado or hurricane may be returning;

- non-stop talking;
- hurting themselves such as hitting themselves or head-banging;
- exhibiting physical symptoms such as tummy aches, headaches, nausea; and
- experiencing feelings of anxiety

Children's needs must be addressed early and consistently.

While the presence of primary caregivers is of critical importance in the healing of very young children as they get older, being with peers gains importance. It is very important to return to normal activities as quickly as possible.

Thus, as soon as possible, if school is in session, children should be placed in a school, along with their friends from the community. Ideally, children would be placed in only one school during their displacement until they can return back to their regular school. The frequent switching of schools has been described a key source of trauma for displaced children, and efforts need to be made to avoid this from occurring.

The emotional well-being of children is supported by maintaining daily routines for school and recreation, which also gives them an opportunity to develop friendships with others.

If children are to be placed for extended periods of time in a hotel room, activity rooms must be provided to allow children to play and engage in group activities. INAC promotes the need to have Child Friendly Spaces as supported by Save the Children Canada. This is especially important for pre-school children or when school is not in session. Requiring children to remain in a hotel room day-after-day without opportunities to engage in activities and to give care-givers a break in parenting can only increase the negative impacts of the evacuation.

Some guiding principles for addressing the needs of children include:

- Provide a team of support workers and counsellors trained in helping children who have been through a disaster – art and play therapists can be extremely helpful in identifying at-risk children and providing support early
- Enroll children in school as soon as possible
- Do not switch schools once a child is enrolled
- Provide transportation to and from schools for children
- Provide access to recreation and children's activities



## Meeting the Needs of Youth

Evacuations and displacement have been shown to have negative impacts on the emotional well-being of youth. Youth have reported feeling higher levels of stress, anxiety, and may be at increased risk of developing PTSD than adult evacuees. Many youth experience a loss of self-esteem, which occurs with equal frequency across both boys and girls. An entire generation of youth may face lower education outcomes because of the evacuation; youth often fall behind in schooling, leading to much lower high school graduation rates. When displaced youth face these kinds

of traumatic events, they face a much higher risk of engaging in criminal and destructive activities, such as joining gangs and organized crime groups. Youth who are feeling displaced and have lost their sense of identity or of belonging, may turn to gangs as a means of gaining acceptance and finding a connection in their new situation.

Displaced youth require special attention both in school settings and outside of school to reduce the impacts of trauma and minimize their



vulnerability to self-harm and making damaging choices.

Positive interventions can take place to reduce the risk of youth engaging in self-harming activities. Youth who may have belonged to a school team may find that all the teams have already been chosen in their new school and thus they have little opportunity to engage in their normal activities.

Thus, one of the best ways to support youth is to provide safe alternatives: recreational and sports activities can be organized at community centres or Aboriginal Friendship Centres to provide outlets to work off pent-up energy. If the hotel has a pool, swimming races and events such as water polo can be arranged as a way to further engage youth in physical activities.

Youth will benefit from having access to support workers who can help them overcome issues with stress and anxiety. Mentorship programs can be an effective way to engage youth, and could also be an opportunity to build relationships between the displaced and host communities.

Members of a displaced community will benefit from meeting with the local police force to come up with appropriate solutions for preventing youth from becoming involved in criminal activities and risk being recruited into gangs. It is important to

understand that youth are particularly vulnerable given the trauma they have just experienced.

In situations where youth have lost their cell phones, tablets or computers in the disaster, the lack of regular contact with friends via social media is particularly stressful. Giving priority to replace electronic devices to allow youth to re-establish connections with their friends and family members will be an important factor in the post-evacuation of youth.

As well, youth will have many skills and abilities that can help the community to recover from the disaster. Youth may be able to set up a community disaster website to provide residents with up-to-date information and distribute key messages using social media. They can help provide child care services to give stressed parents a break and help organize activities for younger children (e.g., treasure hunts, board games). This may also be a good opportunity to further engage youth in traditional activities such as drumming, singing and beadwork.

If youth can return to the reserve, it will be very important to get them to contribute towards the community's recovery by helping to clear debris, clean-up the



damage and work to improve the community.

Some guiding principles for addressing the needs of youth include:

- Maintain daily routines at school;
- Do not switch schools for youth;
- Provide youth with transportation to and from school and extracurricular activities;
- Engage youth support workers as soon as possible to help organize activities for youth;
- Work with schools to look for ways to engage youth in extracurricular opportunities;
- Provide youth with opportunities to engage in sports, arts and other cultural activities outside of school;
- Develop positive relationships with local law enforcement who are trained to work with youth;
- Encourage youth to participate in mentorship programs when possible;
- Provide youth with access to therapists when needed;
- Engage youth in the physical recovery of their community when it is safe to do so;
- Engage youth to maximize their skills such as setting websites or using social



media to keep the community informed; and

- Make it a priority to provide youth with access to the internet, email and social media if this is how they were used to communicating prior to the disaster

### Supporting Older Persons

Older residents are among the most vulnerable to the physical impacts of a disaster, and may experience physical distress in the evacuation process. It will be important when strategically planning for an evacuation to consider the particular physical needs of older residents, such as transporting their medical devices and replenishing prescription medication.

Medically frail older community members will need specific assistance for their physical health and emotional well-being throughout an evacuation process, but may not seek help immediately. Older persons should be asked about their needs directly. Some may feel particularly attached to their companion animals, so special attention can ensure that they are transported with their pets.

Support teams will be most effective if they have some training on addressing the needs of older persons in emergencies, including impacts around social isolation, lack of mobility, and varying



levels of physical health. A key consideration will be the need to access translators as a number of older persons may regularly communicate in their traditional language and may not have competency in English or French.

In many First Nations communities grandparents play an important role in the day-to-day care of their grandchildren. This needs to be recognized and support services need to be put in place to reach out to these grandparents to make sure that they have the time to deal with their own stressors and are not overwhelmed with the care of their grandchildren.

Aboriginal Friendship Centres can be valuable cultural resources for those who are in an urban area or new community. Isolating older persons from existing social support networks will be detrimental. Cultural spaces such as Friendship Centres can help to connect them with others, which can improve their emotional well-being. Older persons will benefit from accessible spaces that support Indigenous practices, cultures, and senses of community in the host community.

### **Supporting Fathers and Men**

The roles of fathers and men in Indigenous communities have been negatively impacted by the lasting, intergenerational effects of colonization and systems thinking

which may have disrupted men's traditional roles within their families and communities. The feelings of hopelessness and loss following an evacuation can be a source of further disempowerment.

Peer support groups have been shown to be very beneficial for Indigenous fathers and men. These groups can provide positive peer counseling for men who may be feeling angry, isolated, or who feel that the disaster has left them without a role in the community or within their family. Support groups can be important ways to maintain cohesion, reestablish confidence, break cycles of trauma, and create social activities when men are displaced.

Men and fathers can interact with their children in a positive environment with the support of others, which improves emotional well-being and resilience. These types of spaces are especially important for those who did not grow up with a father figure; seeing other Indigenous men interacting with their children in a constructive way is an educational tool and improves confidence.

Support groups can be facilitated by trained staff and community Elders can play a valuable role in reinforcing the importance of these groups. Peer support groups can take place in a community centre or an Aboriginal

Friendship Centre, and incorporation of appropriate traditional practices can be encouraged. Additional resources for participants, including information about well-being, addictions, dealing with trauma, and managing violence will be very beneficial.

### **Supporting Women and Girls**

Women and girls face unique risks for sexual violence, assault, and battery when they are evacuated and displaced. In particular, Indigenous women have been found to be at greater risk of homelessness, violence, and other forms of marginalization (such as organized crime, trafficking, and forced prostitution) when they have been displaced from their homes and disempowered socially and economically. Women may feel quite isolated in a new community as a result of the disruption of social ties and relationships with friends and family.

There is a long history of women and girls facilitating support groups in First Nations communities in Canada; these support groups can be based on a peer counseling model that provides women and girls a space and time to provide emotional care for each other, discuss women's issues, and to socialize and engage in recreational activities. Staff can be engaged to find a suitable space and to facilitate the organization of these women's groups to strengthen community cohesion,

help manage trauma and stress and enhance women's and girls' resilience.

Women and girls also have unique considerations for sexual and reproductive health that must be considered during an evacuation. Pregnant women will have concerns about the effects of displacement on their unborn child and will be disconnected

from familiar doctors and health care providers.

Priority will need to be

given to link pregnant women with appropriate medical professionals to ensure they receive the necessary care.



Additional programming will be required to address the unique health issues faced by women, and must include access to sexual and reproductive health, such as pre- and post-natal care, abortion services, contraception, and support for sexual trauma and violence. Information about crisis hotlines, women's shelters, and other services can be made available to women in a pamphlet or resource document.

Mothers (and fathers) will also need access to childcare resources. It may be difficult for working parents to replace the child care arrangements they had

in their own communities. As well, it is extremely difficult for parents who are trying to have their homes repaired or rebuilt to have to also worry about their children. Childcare workers can work with parents to organize child care, including pre-school activities and outings.

Public transportation in a new city can be overwhelming for women and girls, and can be an area where women experience harassment and fear. Clear information about common public transportation routes will need to be made available for women and girls, and a buddy system can be implemented.

Women face persistent issues during disaster and displacement, and are at a higher risk for violence, sexual assault, and homelessness. Making sure that support groups, shelters, and other activities are available to women and girls is important for reducing harm. Finally, women and girls need to be able to provide meaningful input about whether they feel safe in their accommodations.

### Special Needs

Planning consideration needs to address those with special needs. These include persons with physical and cognitive disabilities.

The disaster coordinator and others

from the band administration, such as those working in health and education departments, can create a list of the extra services that would be needed during and post-evacuation.

Additional services, resources, and general support for people with special needs will need to be planned for before an emergency. These can include services for:

- Persons with cognitive disabilities, such as autism
- Persons with diabetes
- Persons with dementia
- Persons with addictions
- Persons on dialysis
- Persons who are receiving ongoing psychological services
- Persons with probation or parole conditions
- Pregnant women
- First-time and young mothers
- Hospice services or services for those with serious illnesses or who are dying

### Celebrating Holidays, Seasonal and Community Events

Depending on the religious and cultural background of the community residents, it may be important to plan for ways to celebrate holidays and community events for the evacuees. These celebrations can provide a sense of normalcy and connectivity for



evacuees, and can be especially important for children and youth.

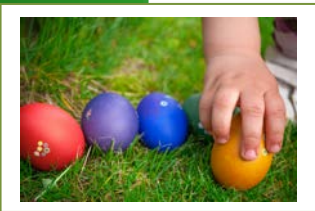
If at all possible, celebrations such as Treaty Days, Potlatches and Powwows should continue as planned and not be disrupted or postponed.

Seasonal events such as “First Tap” of the sugar maples, or salmon runs will also be important and can provide an opportunity for a community outing.

As discussed earlier, it will be important to work with the Elders and Traditional Healers in the community to look at opportunities to plan for ceremonies such as smudging, the use of Sweat Lodges and Healing Circles. These ceremonies should not overlap with other cultural events.

A number of evacuees may celebrate a variety of holiday activities, and whenever possible, especially for the children, respecting and continuing these practices will be important.

Providing materials to make decorations (e.g., Christmas) will help to normalize their situation. Providing items such as Christmas trees, holding Easter egg hunts and planning for Trick and Treating at Hallowe’en will be welcomed. As well, space for gift giving, dancing, and feasts, will provide a meaningful opportunity to engage



children, youth and adults and maintain a sense of community.

## **Effective Communication**

Clear and open communication is crucial during an evacuation. When relationships and organizational roles are well-defined prior to an emergency, there are fewer evacuation-relation conflicts. For First Nations communities, it is important to recognize and address cultural differences between the displaced community and responding agencies. Verbal and written communication needs to be culturally appropriate, respectful, and easily understood by the evacuees. Information may need to be translated so that those who speak their traditional language are able to understand what is taking place.

The roles and responsibilities of the federal government, provincial agencies, emergency social services, and the host community will need to be communicated early and transparently to all evacuees. This will reduce confusion and the potential for conflict.

Many First Nations evacuees have stated that they experienced unfair treatment during an evacuation. Conflict mediation and culturally relevant communication can prevent real or perceived injustice and reduce confusion throughout the evacuation.

It will be important to assign liaisons that represent the First Nations and host communities. These liaisons can communicate and clarify the expected roles and responsibilities of provincial emergency management agencies, the leadership of the displaced community, and the coordinators in the host community. First Nations agencies, such as Friendship Centre, can also be useful in assisting communication and translation.

The expectations for the evacuation will need to be clearly outlined, particularly concerning timelines, access to resources, and accommodations.

### Translation Services

When communicating with Elders, it may be important to have translators if they are used to talking in their own language and are not proficient in English and French. The need for translators may also be required for children and youth who are starting to speak their traditional language and may not have a full understanding of English or French.

### Social Media

Social media has changed the way people communicate with each other; information is shared faster and wider and these sites allow people to engage in multiple dialogues. In an emergency, disaster coordinators can use social

media as a communication tool to get messages out as quickly and broadly as possible. The comments sections of these posts can also help to gather feedback. Band Councils and liaisons can use social media to provide the information that the band leadership and other response authorities want the evacuees, residents and press to know.

It is important to note the social media also allows Band Councils and liaisons to monitor what information is being shared and correct anything that is misleading or rumours that are being circulated.



## Planning for Recovery

### Appoint a Disaster Coordinator (First Nations Liaison)

*In terms of doing things differently, one of the things we would have done as a community was to have a tornado coordinator, which we ended up doing a few months down the road.*

A community facing known hazard risks or experiencing an emergency can appoint a Disaster Coordinator to lead evacuation and

recovery efforts. This coordinator would communicate with host community liaisons to ensure that evacuation processes run smoothly and minimize conflict.

A disaster coordinator/First Nations liaison will act as the primary contact during an emergency and can help to clarify the roles of Emergency Operations Centres (EOC), INAC, and other local response agencies. They will be able to bring this information back to community, aiding in decision making.

Bands that have a designated a disaster coordinator prior to an emergency will be better prepared for an evacuation, liaising with responding agencies, and developing relationships with the host community.

The disaster coordinator can also advise responding agencies about the cultural context of the community. For example, they can communicate that

family and clan units will want to be evacuated together and be housed in the same facilities. Likewise, a disaster coordinator may advise that the risk triage approach to emergencies will not work well with the community due to past trauma associated with state agencies, and can suggest alternative processes.

Key responsibilities for the Disaster Coordinator include:

- Acting as or identifying a First Nations liaison to coordinate with a host community
- Participating on an EOC planning team with potential hosts
- Ensuring that an evacuation considers family units, clans, and companion animals
- Assigning accommodations based on family unit and minimizing the vulnerability of youth and children

Responding agencies need to know who the disaster coordinator is as soon as possible to begin establishing relationships. An effective evacuation will reduce further harm and ensure that people are treated with dignity. Disaster coordinators can lead the response and recovery efforts by ensuring clear communication and supporting these principles.

### Providing Access

Often, justifiably, residents are prevented from returning to the



community until everything is deemed to be safe. For many, this is the most stressful time of all. Not knowing the state of their home, and not being able to see the amount of damage adds to the trauma of the event.



As well, people are anxious to return to their homes to salvage whatever is left. The longer they are unable to do so, the greater the

chances that the elements will further damage their possessions.

Every effort should be made to provide access, even if it is limited access via an escorted bus, to affected residents. Some communities are now using drones to capture high-definition views of the damaged homes and to share the images in a supportive way with residents. As soon as it is safe to do so, residents can be allowed to return to their homes to assess the damage and salvage what they can.

### **Providing Storage Containers and Places**

When possible, and if there is time before an evacuation, storage containers could be provided for community members. Families may be able to safely store items they can not necessarily take with them such as clothing, electronics, heirlooms, pictures, and other items.

Many families have large freezers for storing hunted meat or fish. If the community's power is disrupted during an emergency, some families may lose large supplies of traditional food. Generators can help to reduce these losses, and ideally a freezer truck could be set up and powered to preserve frozen foods.

### **Rebuilding or Relocation?**

If the resident's home is located in a high-risk area it may not be possible to rebuild the home in the same place as it is likely to be damaged again the next time there is a flood or other hazardous event.

### **Determining Priorities**

Deciding whose homes get rebuilt first is always a difficult decision. Developing a list of criteria prior to a disaster and sharing it with the community will help to mitigate individual concerns of unfairness.

Typically, criteria for setting priorities for rebuilding include:

1. At-risk populations (e.g., those with serious medical or health issues)
2. Those households with children
3. Those households with older persons

Also it is important for residents to clearly understand what funds are available to them to help them re-

establish themselves and what items are eligible for compensation and which ones are not.

### Using Local Resources

The research is very clear that engaging residents in the recovery of their own community is the best way to promote recovery from disaster. If the community has not completed a Skills and Knowledge Inventory, now is the time to do so. Wherever possible, community residents should be hired to assist in the recovery efforts.



For example, teenagers can help to clear debris including trees that have been downed and dirt and sludge left from

flooding rivers. Residents can form community clean-up crews and move from home to home, cleaning up each home and preparing it for repairs.

However, it will be important to ensure that anyone participating in the cleanup have the necessary training and that the health and safety of community members is paramount. Training needs will be predicated on the hazard and the situation, but will frequently involve the use of machinery, such as the use of a chain saw to clear fallen trees and branches.

The cleanup of homes and buildings following a flood will require helpers to understand how to correctly wear Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to avoid inhaling molds or toxic substances. Some PPE has to be individually fitted and it will be important for everyone to take the necessary training to ensure that the PPE is used correctly.

Taking Food Safe courses if preparing large amounts of food for cleanup crews will help to ensure that no-one becomes ill, and child care courses can help youth provide better levels of care to children who have been traumatized by the disaster.



## Tips for Host Communities

Should our community become a host community?

Across Canada, there are no standards or criteria to determine which communities can become host communities. In some areas, communities are asked if they would like to be placed on a list of potential host communities at the start of each year. In other areas, requests are more ad-hoc and decisions are made based on the urgency of the evacuation, the hazard, the geography, transportation options and availability of housing and other resources. This can result in communities having little time to plan for the arrival of evacuees.

In some areas, local Emergency Social Services or Emergency Support Services (ESS) teams are called upon to provide for the needs of evacuees. In other areas, agencies such as the Canadian Red Cross are mandated to provide relocation services and the host community's emergency management program staff are not directly involved.

Regardless of how the system of identifying host communities occurs in your community, there is no question that preparing to become a host community will ensure a smoother, less traumatic experience for those displaced by the disaster.

Since, one never knows when one's community may be required to step up and act as a host community, it is suggested that every community and any agencies who have relocation responsibilities consider the following recommendations.

Whether or not your community is a First Nations community or a non-Indigenous community, there are certain things that will be important to have in place prior to becoming a host community. Additionally, there are steps that can be taken once evacuees are accommodated to minimize the negative impacts of a disaster.

### Essential Actions

The following activities are considered essential steps for host communities to take prior to an emergency situation and evacuation. These actions will ensure that the needs of evacuees are addressed.

#### Assess Your Capacity to Host First Nations Evacuees

When a community considers hosting First Nations evacuees, a first step is to assess its capacity prior to signing any agreement. A potential host community necessitates assessing its own hazard risk and examine any social and economic vulnerabilities. Addressing these vulnerabilities prior to a disaster will strength disaster resiliency in the host community and

minimize the potential impacts on the evacuees.

Assessing the community's capacity to host First Nations evacuees includes identifying:

- Agencies and personnel who would be involved in the evacuation response
- Where the financial resources for hosting First Nations communities will come from and any rules governing the use of these funds
- Existing social support programs and how these programs could be leveraged when hosting First Nations communities
- Suitable and accessible facilities for accommodation, over the short- or long-term
- Proximity of health care facilities and clinics
- Aboriginal Friendship Centres, Indigenous cultural groups, and other-related resources
- Schools that can accommodate evacuated children and youth
- Activities for recreation and socialization across all age groups
- Appropriate food procurement sources, keeping in mind traditional foods
- Transportation routes and other personnel, facilities, services, or resources to meet specific needs.

A potential host community will be better able to receive evacuees once it understands its own capacity.

### **Prepare as Much as Possible Before the Evacuation**

Host community or agency personnel can develop emergency preparedness and response plans to accommodate evacuees before an evacuation takes place. A representative from any First Nation community that may evacuate to the host community should be invited to participate in, and contribute to, these planning processes.

It is important to note that a community, depending upon potential hazards, geography, capacity and transportation may be a host community to nearby First Nations communities or First Nations communities many hundreds of kilometres away. Provincial, territorial and federal government personnel can be contacted to help identify communities which may require to be evacuated as a result of a disaster. Typically, in Canada communities are evacuated as a result of fires and floods. A hazard, risk and vulnerability analysis will identify communities who are at high risk from these hazards.

This information can help the First Nations communities and various levels of government plan ahead of time for potential evacuations and

identify potential host communities before the event occurs. For example, a large urban community may end up hosting evacuees flown in from remote First Nations communities because of the numbers of impacted residents and lack of access to airports in smaller communities. In other situations, where there are multiple transportation routes available, and the potential evacuated community has fewer residents, smaller communities may be a better choice.

Preparations and planning can include:

- Emergency response plans;
- Recovery and repatriation plans;
- Business continuity plans;
- Mutual aid agreements;
- Public awareness campaigns and training on emergency response and evacuation; and
- Intercultural engagement exercises.

Ideally, if communities are relatively geographically close to each other, the planning and preparation stage will provide opportunities for relationship building within the host community (e.g., between response staff, NGOs and local volunteers), and with the First Nation communities that may be relocated to the host community. Developing relationships with members of the First Nation prior to an evacuation event is important for building trust and establishing communication channels. These

relationships will reduce confusion, miscommunication, and unnecessary stress throughout the evacuation and relocation processes, while also building capacity.

### **Establish a First Nations Liaison**

Research and practice in Canada (such as was done for the Kashechewan evacuees in Cornwall) has shown that identifying a Community Liaison from both the host community or agency and the evacuated First Nation community is extremely valuable. Even if an agency is responsible for the relocation of First Nations people, the appointment of a Community Liaison from the host community can be useful.

Typically the Community Liaison serves as the key communications person for coordinating resources and services; to be the go-to-person to respond to questions and provide information. Designating liaisons ahead of an emergency will allow for relationships to be formed and roles and responsibilities are clarified.

Key principles for First Nations liaisons include:

- Identify a list of potential liaisons in the First Nation before an evacuation;
- Identify a list of liaisons in the host community before an evacuation;

- Brainstorm ways for the liaisons to get together periodically to discuss their roles;
- List some of the main duties expected of the liaisons;
- Develop a strong communications protocol with the Chief and Band Council; and
- Provide training to liaisons.

The liaison's communication and coordination efforts will promote consistency and strong partnerships.

### **Establish an Emergency Planning Team including Representatives from the First Nation**

Although the host community is not directly impacted by the event, the arrival of dozens, hundreds or even thousands of evacuees from a First Nation community will tax existing community resources. While the situation may not warrant staffing a full Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), if the host community is responsible for the relocation of evacuees, in many cases the EOC will be opened for the initial stages of the evacuation.

Even if an agency is responsible for the relocation services it is often helpful to consider including the emergency planning section of the EOC when anticipating what services may be required and thus these members can be asked to participate pre-disaster.

Clearly, the emergency planning team would benefit from representation from the First Nations communities that may need to be evacuated and the list of liaisons is a good starting point for engagement.

Additionally, representative from local volunteer groups, NGOs such as The Salvation Army and the Canadian Red Cross, health providers and other key response personnel can be invited to participate in the planning. This diversity helps to ensure that all the groups involved in an evacuation will have an understanding of the response processes and be prepared to act when needed. The relationships that are built through an emergency planning team will help to facilitate a smoother evacuation.

### **Primary Considerations**

The following activities can be taken once the essential actions have been completed. Note that some of the following actions may well be in place prior to an emergency or evacuation, but if not, they will need to be initiated as soon as possible. These actions will help the host community to be better prepared for longer term evacuations.

### **Support Clear and Transparent Communications**

Clear and timely communications is crucial to an effective evacuation; often, communication break downs

are the source of conflict and controversy, leading to tensions between an evacuated community and a host community. Key ways to ensure transparent communication include:

- Asking the First Nations Liaison to identify how best to communicate with evacuated residents. When evacuees are placed in various locations, would having a dedicated Facebook page be a good way to communicate? Would Twitter be a good way to keep people informed about the latest news? How can both the evacuated and host community's web page be adapted to provide pertinent information, and how to ensure that both reflect the same information?

Keep in mind that depending on the circumstances of the evacuation, evacuees may not have cell phones or computers/tablets with them and thus may not have access to the Internet or email.

- Considering where Information Gatherings can be held and ensure ease of accessibility for the disabled and keeping in mind transportation options. It may be expedient to rent buses in the early stages of the evacuation to make sure everyone can attend.

Depending on the number of evacuees, it may be necessary to have more than one location for

Information Gatherings. If that is the case it is critical that evacuees are very clear as to when and where the Information Gatherings are being held.

In past events, lack of clarity has resulted in both community leaders and evacuees showing up at the wrong location or the wrong time or missing important updates. This leads to increased frustration and anger when stress levels are already high.

- Communicate the evacuation timelines as early as possible to host facilities and staff.
- Be upfront about accommodation options and discuss any preferences or changes early.
- Ensure open dialogue, and give evacuated community leaders and the Chief the contact information for the Host Community Liaison.

### **Provide Opportunities for the Evacuated Community Members to Connect with Each Other**

Evacuations involving large numbers of people will result in evacuees being accommodated in various different hotels or living facilities. Evacuees will need to connect with their extended community whenever possible, and transportation will need to be made available to facilitate these connections. Various methods of

communications will need to be made available and accessible, such as telephones, internet, and computers.

Consider how those persons who have arrived without their electronic devices can replace these devices as quickly as possible. For many, especially teenagers and younger adults, not having their cell phones is a major source of anxiety.



Community members can be informed on how to request transfers to other evacuation sites.

### **Help to Establish Early Relationships between the Evacuated Community and Law Enforcement**

The members of an evacuated community are already in a stressful situation when they are placed in a host community. Many people will have had to leave behind all of their belongings; are worried about their health and their family's health, and may not feel comfortable in their new accommodations. Law enforcement will often be involved in responding to the evacuation and helping to relocate evacuees. It will be important to maintain positive relationships between them and the evacuees.

The First Nation and Host Community Liaisons can facilitate these positive

relationships by reaching out to law enforcement and letting them know how best to communicate with evacuees. Additionally, the liaisons can work with law enforcement officers and youth workers to put in place preventative programs to minimize the risk that youth will become involved in criminal or gang activities.

As well, Police School Liaison Officers can be contacted and provided with information regarding the schools where children and youth from the evacuated communities have been placed. They can be especially alert to potential bullying or attempts to take advantage of these children and youth and engaging them in criminal or gang activities. It is important to avoid communication breakdowns between the evacuated community and local law enforcement. Some guiding principles include:

- Provide cultural awareness sessions and communications training to local law enforcement about the evacuated community; ideally prior to any evacuation
- Introduce local law enforcement officers to evacuees in a safe, supportive setting
- Build relationships between the First Nations Liaisons and law enforcement through the Emergency Planning Team



## **Advise Residents of Plans to Host an Evacuated First Nation**

Local residents should be aware that the community is expecting evacuees, and be told how long the evacuation is expected to take. The host community can advise residents groups, businesses, and schools of the evacuation and that new residents will be entering the community. Positive interactions between the evacuated community and local residents will need to be supported.

A host municipality can encourage local residents to participate in events, such as a welcoming ceremony. Resident will find it helpful to be aware that the evacuated community may need time to get accustomed to transportation and other services offered in the community.

### **Cultural Awareness**

When First Nations people are evacuated and placed in a non-Indigenous community, hotel staff, security officers and other service providers may not be familiar with the history of First Nations people and their culture. Unfortunately, unfamiliarity can sometimes lead to comments that may reflect stereotypes and may appear to be racist. Clearly, if these comments or actions are taken, it can be extremely

stressful and distressing for the evacuees.

One way to combat this is to provide cultural awareness training for persons who will have a lot of contact with the evacuees. The training doesn't have to be very long, but education and awareness can go long way to dispelling misinformation and helping personnel to understand what the evacuees have gone through and display empathy.

### **Secondary Considerations**

If a host community has the time and resources available, they can implement the following activities during the evacuation.

### **Provide Guidance for Schools, Youth Groups, and Sports Teams**

When youth and children are evacuated, it is crucial to maintain their daily routines as much as possible. If an evacuation occurs during the school year, school-aged children should be able to attend local schools with their friends.

Community Liaisons can talk to schools about how many students can be expected and if the children have any special needs. Children and youth



support workers can also engage with young evacuees at the school.

Local youth groups, sports teams, and community centres can be advised that young evacuees will be in the host community. These groups can be encouraged to reach out to the evacuees and extend their programming to them. For example, a sports team could agree to accept evacuated youth mid-season.



### **Plan a Welcoming Ceremony**

A welcoming ceremony can be an effective and positive way to introduce members of a

displaced community to those in a host community. Welcoming ceremonies involve traditions, practices, music and food that are appropriate for the displaced community members.

Suitable venues for a welcoming ceremony include a local Aboriginal Friendship Centre, the hall of a community centre, or other open spaces. Venues such as these can introduce those who have been evacuated or displaced to additional resources; for example, an Aboriginal Friendship Centre may become a place where support groups are held, and a community centre may become a popular place for recreation across youth, adults, and elders.

A welcoming ceremony is one way that a host community and evacuated or displaced community can signal the beginning of a relationship. It also symbolizes that there is mutual support across members of all communities, and introduces people to potential friends, activities, and resources.

Providing traditional medicines (e.g., sage, cedar, sweet grass, and tobacco) to evacuated communities is often very much appreciated. It will be important to liaise with Elders, Band Council members and the Chief.

### **Organize a Bus or Walking Tour for Evacuees**

Evacuees may be visiting a host community for the first time during an evacuation, and will not be used to navigating around the city or town. An organized bus or vehicle tour can be a great way to build relationships with evacuees and let them become familiar with new streets and landmarks. A walking tour in summer months can also help to introduce evacuees to their surroundings.

Volunteer groups, students, and other youth groups could take a lead role in organizing this type of engagement.

### **Resource Materials**

Developing resource materials in the form of handouts or pamphlets that



provide evacuees with the location of local services and activities in the host community can be very helpful. The following is a sample

of items to include:

- Health care services (e.g., hospitals, medical clinics, pharmacies)
- Indigenous resources such as Aboriginal Friendship Centres
- Recreational centres (e.g., gyms, ice rinks, outdoor basketball or tennis courts, pools, parks)
- Activity and learning centres (e.g., community centres, libraries)
- Shopping malls, theatres, art galleries
- Legal Aid Clinics
- Women's Resources such as Transition Houses and services for victims of violence
- Resources for persons with addictions such as AA, treatment and detox centres

### **Pursue Training Opportunities Offered by Provincial, Territorial and Federal Agencies for Hosting First Nations Evacuees**

A provincial, territorial or federal emergency management office, or other organizations, may offer training for hosting evacuees, coordinating with First Nations, or for developing

mutual aid agreements. A host community should pursue this training and consult any guides or resources prior to an evacuation.

If this type of training isn't offered, a host community may want to request this type of training from the appropriate emergency management agency.

### **Plan for Repatriating Evacuees**

A host community can work with the First Nations liaison to plan ahead for repatriation efforts. When this planning is undertaken early or prior to an emergency, it reduces the amount of work required for staff, who may find themselves overworked or stressed during the evacuation.

Planning for repatriation can include:

- Compiling folders with the paperwork and documents needed for each individual,
- Identifying groups that are best suited for early repatriation,
- Identifying groups that will be repatriated last,
- Listing resources that need to be returned or services that should be stopped.



## COMMUNITY CHECKLIST

### Before the Disaster: Preparing for Evacuation

#### For Families

- ☐ Put Together a Grab and Go Bags
- ☐ Make sure you bring small bills and change
- ☐ Plan for Your Pets
- ☐ Plan for Your Livestock
- ☐ Save Your Important Photographs
- ☐ Have Insurance
- ☐ Develop an Evacuation List
- ☐ Become Familiar with your Community's Emergency Plan

#### For Chiefs, Band Council and Administrators

- ☐ Understand Potential Hazards
- ☐ Develop Warning Messages
- ☐ Have a Written Emergency Plan
- ☐ Have Designated Muster Points
- ☐ Identify a Family Centre
- ☐ Identify Potential Host Communities
- ☐ Have Document Recovery Protocols
- ☐ Identify Temporary Emergency Accommodation
- ☐ Consider Transportation Needs
- ☐ Complete a Skills and Knowledge Inventory
- ☐ Take Steps to Build Capacity

### During the Evacuation and Relocation

- ☐ Plan for the Health and Safety of Evacuees
- ☐ Develop Triage Criteria for Evacuation
- ☐ Plan to Keep Families and Clans Together

#### Accommodation Planning

- ☐ Staying on reserve
- ☐ Placements Off-Reserve
- ☐ Short-Term (less than 60 days)
- ☐ Consider Security
- ☐ Long-Term (more than 60 days)
- ☐ Eating Right – Plan for Traditional Foods

#### Emotional Wellness

- ☐ Incorporate the Wisdom of the Elders
- ☐ Identify Helpful Cultural and Spiritual Events
- ☐ Establish Wellness Teams
- ☐ Develop Plans to Meet the Needs of Children
- ☐ Develop Plans to Meet the Needs of Youth
- ☐ Develop Plans to Support Older Persons
- ☐ Develop Plans to Support Fathers and Men
- ☐ Develop Plans to Support Women and Girls

- ☐ Develop Plans to Address and Support Persons with Special Needs
- ☐ Consider how to Celebrate Holidays and Community Events

### **Effective Communication**

- ☐ Develop a Communication Plan
- ☐ Translation Services
- ☐ Have a Social Media Strategy

### **Planning for Recovery**

- ☐ Appoint a Disaster Coordinator (First Nations Liaison)
- ☐ Develop Policies for Providing Access
- ☐ Provide Storage Containers and Places
- ☐ Consider Criteria and Plans for Rebuilding or Relocation?
- ☐ Determine Priorities for Housing
- ☐ Have a Plan to Use Local Resources

### **Tips for Host Communities**

#### **Essential Actions**

- ☐ Assess Your Capacity to Host First Nations Evacuees
- ☐ Prepare as Much as Possible Before the Evacuation
- ☐ Establish a First Nations Liaison
- ☐ Establish an Emergency Planning Team including Representatives from the First Nation

### **Primary Considerations**

- ☐ Support Clear and Transparent Communications
- ☐ Provide Opportunities for the Evacuated Community to Connect with each other
- ☐ Help to Establish Early Relationships Between the Evacuated Community and Law Enforcement
- ☐ Advise Residents of Plans to Host an Evacuated First Nation
- ☐ Provide Cultural Awareness Training

### **Secondary Considerations**

- ☐ Provide Guidance for Schools, Youth Groups, and Sports Teams
- ☐ Plan a Welcoming Ceremony
- ☐ Organize a Bus or Walking Tour for Evacuees
- ☐ Develop Resource Materials
- ☐ Pursue Training Opportunities Offered by Provincial, Territorial and Federal Agencies for Hosting First Nations Evacuees
- ☐ Plan for Repatriating Evacuees





