An Emergency Management Framework for the Northwest Territories

Emergency management is a shared responsibility that builds a sustainable, prosperous and disaster-resilient society.

An Emergency Management Framework for the Northwest Territories (NWT) guides and strengthens the way governments at the community and territorial levels work together to protect the safety and security of all NWT residents.

Preamble

The fundamental concepts and principles outlined in this framework serve to guide emergency management activities and measures undertaken in the NWT. This point of reference supports legal and policy frameworks, programs, activities, standards and other measures in order to enable and inspire all emergency management partners in the NWT to work in better collaboration to keep territorial residents safe.

This document incorporates the jurisdictional responsibilities of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) in respect to interactions at the regional and community levels. It also represents emergency management concepts and principles widely accepted by provinces, territories, and the federal government.

Introduction

In the NWT emergency management adopts an all-hazards approach that addresses both natural and human-induced hazards and disasters. These are increasing in both number and frequency across the world, resulting in ever growing human suffering and economic cost. The NWT is not immune to these events. Natural and human-induced hazards and disasters have become more prevalent in urbanized societies. These events can have profoundly negative effects on residents of the NWT.

Most emergencies in the NWT are local in nature and are managed by community governments, and, when required, with the assistance of the GNWT through its regional offices. Moreover, accumulating risks associated with factors such as increased urbanization, critical infrastructure dependencies and interdependencies, climate variability and change, animal and human health diseases and the heightened movement of people and goods around the world have increased the potential for various types of catastrophes. Such events could transcend geographic boundaries to challenge NWT emergency management, including response.

Emergency Management Components

The ultimate purpose of emergency management is to save lives, preserve the environment and protect property and the economy. The protection of life is of paramount importance. In the broadest sense, emergency management raises the understanding of risks and contributes to a safer, prosperous, sustainable, disaster resistant and resilient society in the NWT. Emergency management is comprised of four interdependent risk-based functions as follows:

- **Prevention and Mitigation** – to eliminate or reduce the impacts and risks of hazards through pro-active measures taken before an emergency or disaster occurs, for example land-use management, public education and protective structures such as flood dykes. Prevention and mitigation may be considered independently or one may include the other.

- **Preparedness** – to be ready to respond to a disaster and manage its consequences through measures taken prior to an event, for example emergency response plans, mutual assistance agreements, resource inventories and training, equipment and exercise programs.

- **Response** – to act during or immediately after a disaster to manage its consequences through, for example, emergency public communication, search and rescue, emergency medical assistance and evacuation to minimize suffering and losses associated with disasters.

- **Recovery** – to repair or restore conditions to an acceptable level through measures taken after a disaster, for example return of evacuees, trauma counselling, reconstruction, economic impact studies and financial assistance. There is a strong relationship between long-term recovery and prevention and mitigation of future disasters.

These four interdependent functions may be undertaken sequentially or concurrently, but they are not independent of each other. Emergency management organizations at the territorial, regional and community level adopts a comprehensive all-hazards approach to coordinate and integrate prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery functions to maximize the safety of residents of the NWT. Ensuring a strong and seamless relationship across these functions, and with appropriate emergency management partners, is critical to effective emergency management.

Traditionally, emergency management in the NWT has focused on preparedness and response. The changing risk environment now demands that emergency management also deals with specific risks, hazards and vulnerabilities through prevention and mitigation measures in advance of emergencies and disasters. Greater attention or investment in prevention and mitigation can help prevent disasters or significantly reduce the social, economic and environmental costs and damages when events occur.

Principles

The principles described below are at the heart of an emergency management framework for the NWT. They reflect the essence of emergency management in the NWT and they frame the key underlying beliefs and goals of emergency management. These principles are to be considered as a whole to facilitate the attainment of their intended purpose. They aim to support the design, implementation and ongoing improvement of frameworks, programs, procedures, guidelines and activities that taken together comprise the emergency management systems of the NWT.

Responsibility

Legal and policy frameworks and other arrangements establish guidelines and standards to ensure that due diligence is exercised and accountability is respected in the conduct of emergency management activities. Emergency management responsibilities in the NWT are shared by governments and their partners, including individual citizens who have a responsibility to be prepared for disasters. The GNWT and community governments have responsibility for emergency management within their respective jurisdictions. The federal government exercises leadership at the national level relating to emergency management responsibilities in its exclusive fields of jurisdictions and on lands and properties under federal responsibility.

In an emergency, the first response is almost always by the community government because disasters occur most often locally. Should a community government require resources beyond their own in an emergency or disaster response, the Government of the Northwest Territories, through its regional offices, responds rapidly to any request for assistance.

Comprehensive

The GNWT has adopted a comprehensive approach to emergency management. The approach is proactive and integrates risk-based measures, all-hazards, partners from all parts of society and coordinates and balances efforts across the prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery functions.

Partnerships

All residents are involved in emergency management. Individual citizens, community governments, the territorial government, First Nations, emergency first responders, the private sector (both business and industry), volunteer and non-government organizations, academia, as well as federal and international allies may be involved in emergency management. Good partnerships based on effective collaboration, coordination and communication are a key component of NWT emergency management systems.

Coherency of Action

Emergency management requires collaboration, coordination and integration to facilitate complementary and coherent action by all partners to ensure the most effective use of emergency management resources and execution of activities. Complementary emergency management systems at all levels provide for concerted efforts to facilitate timely and effective prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery measures to deal with disasters. Coherency of action relies on the existence of clear and appropriate roles, responsibilities, authorities and capacities of emergency management partners. Collaborative action based on widely shared expectations, understanding and support for these factors is paramount for coherency of action.

Risk-based

A risk-based approach informs the interdependent functions of emergency management in the NWT. This approach emphasizes the importance of assessing vulnerability to all hazards at the outset to determine the optimal balance and integration of functions to address vulnerabilities and risks. The presence of a hazard or a threat that is related to vulnerability constitutes a risk. Risk management practices facilitate improved decision-making by clarifying the dimensions of risk, including its causes, likelihood of occurrence and possible severity of consequences. Placing greater emphasis on risk reduction measures is a sustainable way to address the trend of rising social-economic costs of disasters that has occurred under approaches focused heavily on preparedness and response.

Emphasis on 'up-stream' prevention and mitigation activities reduces susceptibility to hazards and increases resiliency. This focus is critical because although many hazards cannot be prevented, disasters may be prevented. A systematic assessment of hazards, threats, risks and vulnerabilities relating to people in a geographic area or an organization by appropriate authorities should be carried out before appropriate emergency management measures may be developed. Inadequate management of risks can produce extreme adverse consequences for society, community governments, organizations or individuals. Recognized, flexible and effective risk-based approaches allow emergency management activities, programs and systems to be

tailored to address particular environments and to accept that living with certain risks may be both prudent and safe.

All-hazards

Emergency management adopts an all-hazards approach in every jurisdiction in the NWT by addressing vulnerabilities exposed by both natural and human-induced hazards and disasters. Hazards are sources of potential harm or loss. Emergencies and disasters result when a hazard interacts with a vulnerability to produce serious and adverse consequences that may, for an undetermined period of time, exceed the ability to cope.

Natural hazards and disasters that are relevant to emergency management include extreme natural events such as floods, hurricanes, storm surges, avalanches, landslides, tornadoes, forest fires and earthquakes. Human-induced disasters that concern emergency management include intentional events that encompass part of the spectrum of human conflict, such as electrical power outages or other disruptions to a critical infrastructure sector (for example, finance, water supply and telecommunications) that result from a human or technological accident or failure. In addition, biological hazards, for example animal or human health diseases that risk causing a pandemic influenza, concern emergency management in the NWT. Each hazard should be identified and assessed by appropriate authorities in order to prioritize hazards against potential vulnerabilities in society. By assessing the risks associated with all hazards in an integrated way, efforts may be broadly effective in reducing the vulnerability of people, property, the environment and the economy.

Resilience

Resilience is the capacity of a system, community or society to adapt to disturbances resulting from hazards by persevering, recuperating or changing to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning. Emergency management aims to strengthen the resiliency of citizens, responders, organizations, governments, systems and society overall to keep hazards from becoming disasters. Resilience minimizes vulnerability or susceptibility to damage from hazards by creating or strengthening social and physical capacity in the human and built environment to cope with, adapt to, respond to, and recover and learn from disasters.

Clear Communications

The GNWT aims to be as open as possible about the responsibilities of all partners in respect to emergency management. Clear communications by appropriate authorities are a critical and continuous process before, during and after an emergency. Prior to an emergency, communication objectives focus on public education concerning emergency management to enhance awareness of hazards, risks and vulnerabilities, strengthen prevention, mitigation and preparedness measures; and provide information on all aspects of emergency management. Communications during and directly after a disaster explains and guides immediate response actions to minimize impacts. These communications are imperative for short, medium and long-term recovery.

Continuous Improvement

Lessons learned and knowledge generated from evidence-based and qualitative information is used to develop improved practices. After emergencies or disasters occur, a systematic approach is used to learn lessons from the experience, increase effectiveness and improve emergency management practices and processes. Recovery from a disaster may be completed by documenting and internalizing lessons learned. Continuous improvement, including incremental

and transformational change, is undertaken systemically as an integral part of emergency management functions and practices at all levels to minimize the recurrence of problems.

Conclusion

An emergency management framework for the NWT is established through territorial, regional and community government emergency management systems. The framework aims to encourage this important contribution of integrated partnership with others towards the effective functioning of an emergency management framework for the NWT enhancing the public safety of all residents.

Glossary

This glossary is provided for reference purposes and is not intended to modify existing definitions in various territorial laws in effect.

- **Critical infrastructure** – essential underlying systems and facilities upon which our standard of life relies.

- **Disaster** – essentially a social phenomenon that results when a hazard intersects with a vulnerable community in a way that exceeds or overwhelms the community's ability to cope and may cause serious harm to the safety, health, welfare, property or environment of people; may be triggered by a naturally occurring phenomenon which has its origins within the geophysical or biological environment or by human action or error, whether malicious or unintentional, including technological failures, accidents and terrorist acts.

- **Emergency** – a present or imminent event that requires prompt coordination of actions concerning persons or property to protect the health, safety or welfare of people, or to limit damage to property or the environment.

- **Emergency management** – the management of emergencies concerning all-hazards, including all activities and risk management measures related to prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

- **Hazard** – a potentially damaging physical event, phenomenon or human activity that may cause the loss of life or injury, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation.

- **Mitigation** – sustained actions taken to eliminate or reduce risks and impacts posed by hazards well before an emergency or disaster occurs; mitigation activities may be included as part of prevention.

- **Mutual Assistance Agreement** – a pre-arranged agreement developed between two or more entities to render assistance to the parties of the agreement.

- **Partner** – any individual, group, or organization that might be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by an emergency.

- **Prevention** – actions taken to avoid the occurrence of negative consequences associated with a given threat; prevention activities may be included as part of mitigation.

- **Resilience** – the capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure.

- **Resistance** – the ability to resist or withstand impacts so that inevitable damage from an extreme event does not reach 'disastrous' proportions.

- **Risk** – the combination of the likelihood and the consequence of a specified hazard being realized; refers to the vulnerability, proximity or exposure to hazards, which affects the likelihood of adverse impact.

- **Risk-based** – the concept that judicious emergency management decision-making will be based on an understanding and evaluation of hazards, risks and vulnerabilities.

- **Risk management** – the use of policies, practices and resources to analyze, assess and control risks to health, safety, environment and the economy.

- **Sustainable** – a sustainable approach is one that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

- **Threat** – the presence of a hazard and an exposure pathway; threats may be natural or human-induced, either accidental or intentional.

- **Vulnerability** – the conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards. It is a measure of how well prepared and equipped a community is to minimize the impact of or cope with hazards.