



BRIEF

Presented to

The Premier

And

**Government of
Newfoundland and Labrador**

January 21, 2014

By

**Newfoundland and Labrador Association
Of Fire Services**



Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services

**The Honorable Premier and
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador**

Honorable Ministers of the Social Policy Committee and Government of Newfoundland and Labrador:

On behalf of all fire services of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services I thank you for providing us this opportunity to present our annual brief of the issues concerning the fire services in this province.

It is through this continued dialogue that we have an opportunity to keep your government current on these important issues. The fire services of our province have some significant challenges lying ahead.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services (NLAFS) is a provincial organization representing more than 6000 firefighters located in almost all municipalities and local service districts in our province. Our Association is the only all-inclusive voice for the fire services in Newfoundland and Labrador

We sincerely appreciate the interest and support shown by past Social Policy Committees of Cabinet to the concerns of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services. While 2013 will not be a year that will go down as financially prosperous for the fire service, we are hopeful that in the year to come will put the support to fire services in a better place.

In an effort to be proactive as an association we would like to take this opportunity to brief you all on the current matters of concern and vision of the fire service in our province. A very high percentage of provincial fire service is comprised of volunteer firefighters, while the provision of fire services from volunteers is very cost efficient, it also places significant pressure on our communities to provide comprehensive fire protection. This pressure is no more evident than in our rural communities.

Listed below are our association's current priority issues to discuss with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador your government in the year 2014. In this document we also provide a brief summary of some significant challenges that lie ahead for your information that will require closer attention in the near future.

1. Lack of statistical fire loss data -online fire loss reporting
2. Cost sharing of fire trucks
3. Fire safety program for older adults
4. Frequency of fire inspection of larger facilities

1. The Association urges government to put into place a means to collect accurate statistical data on the instances of emergency response in the province. Development of an online fire reporting system where, fire departments can log in real time and report fires, losses, and other relevant statistics to the provincial fire commissioner.

Last year, we advised that there is currently no accurate statistical collection of data on fire loss and frequency of fire responses in our province. Quite simply, since "Y2K" (the year 2000) the statistical collection and reporting of data has been inadequate. The fire commissioner receives paper copies of fire reports from fire departments but does not have the resources or a computer system that tracks this data in real time, as it is labour intensive to enter. Timely and accurate fire loss statistics are impossible to access in this province.

In today's computer age, the filling out of online forms is relatively simple and there are many services government currently uses to do this in other departments. The present system is under the "Amanda" system and that does not allow for outside input by fire departments for security reasons. Key statistical fact gathering can be accomplished by a standalone web system that can allow for direct entry by fire departments into one provincial database for fire statistics and related information.

Accurate and timely statistical information is critical for both government and fire departments to have accurate knowledge of the instance of fire and other emergencies. Accurate information will enable all to make accurate decisions in deployment in everything from fire trucks, equipment and resources, targeting public fire education, fire cause, to training programs for firefighters.

2. Cost Sharing Program for Fire Trucks

The Association once again, strongly urges and recommends that government increase the funding for the cost shared program for fire trucks to allow for the replacement of a minimum 30 primary fire apparatus. An increase to 5 million dollars is needed in this program immediately.

2010-11 – 2.5 million allocated for fire trucks, 500,000 for equipment

2011-12 – 3.9 million allocated, 1 million for equipment

2012-13 – reduced to core funding of 1.7 years, 500,000 in equipment

2013-14 – core maintained to 1.7 million, equipment cut to 380,000 to equipment funding.

We repeat requests to have funding increased for an inadequate program for the replacement of fire trucks in the province. Funding levels do not meet the current demand. This was especially disappointing in that the previous years had seen a slight rise over core funding to 2.5 million dollars and in one year 3.9 million.

While we certainly realize the position government is in with limited revenue, it still does not erase our current challenges; in fact our challenges will certainly increase exponentially as time goes by if funding continues to be inadequate. An across the board percentage cut in government departments deeply hurts a program that is underfunded to begin with.

Returning to core funding levels over the past 2 years was a disappointing and potentially will continue to compound the problem for the provision of fire services in our province. The core funding should be increased to meet current demand.

We further ask that small equipment special assistance fund be returned to core funding at 500,000 dollars and that emphasis be put on the truck replacement program.

3. Fire Safety Education and prevention for aging populations

The association asked government to channel new resources to provide for a comprehensive fire safety program for Seniors Citizens.

Newfoundland and Labrador has enjoyed a successful program with the risk group of young children in our partnerships with the Learn Not to Burn curriculum in schools since 2002. The fire injury and death toll of children plummeted in the years starting that program.

The second highest risk group determined by age is our aging population of senior citizens. Fire safety education has to be delivered to our seniors on a comprehensive scale and will be a much greater challenge than the Learn Not To Burn curriculum has been in our schools.

Senior citizen fire safety awareness has to increase as our entire population ages. The interest of fire safety spans across several government departments and we encourage government to develop an interdepartmental program for fire and burn safety education. We offer an opportunity to partner with our association, or other agencies to deliver comprehensive public fire education to all seniors in our province in the same manner as was deliver the Learn Not to Burn Program.

4. Fire Inspection of High Risk Structures

The association recommends that government to review and implement a comprehensive policy and direct resources to ensure annual fire inspection of high risk/ high occupancy buildings such as schools, hospitals, personal care homes, hotels, and places of public assembly.

Fire and Life Safety inspection services outside of some larger communities are on the decline. Service NL provides inspections under the fire commissioner authority, and also FES staff are tasked with the duty as well. The frequency of inspections around large higher risk structures is not adequate, especially in smaller communities that lack resources of inspectors.

It is recommended that a policy and resources be put in place to strengthen the instance of fire and life safety inspection of major facilities of critical infrastructure, and high life hazard, to ensure all safety and code requirements are in place.

These facilities include schools, hospitals, personal care facilities, assembly halls, arenas, and licensed nightclubs.

Significant Challenges That Lie Ahead

The fire services of our province have other significant challenges that either exist today or lie directly ahead.

Regionalization: Our association strongly agrees that efficiencies can be realized if all work together, we encourage cooperation and further suggest to government to make incentives for communities to explore and regionalize fire services where it can be effective.

Hazardous Materials Emergency Response: The province has been attempting to provide hazardous materials response initiative for the provinces highways and communities. This program has been met with very limited success and there are significant challenges. We continue to work with Fire and Emergency Services to provide solutions but the program will have to be adequately funded and will require ongoing funding from government in order to meet the obligations of response on our provinces highways.

Critical Incident Stress Management and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness: This is a topic that is also making it was through the fire services and deserves more attention, especially in the area of recognition and prevention of these afflictions before they manifest into the health care system and social problems.

Cell Phone Coverage: Cell phone coverage is still limited in some areas of our province. It is an important part of our emergency response system and stakeholders in the province need to be encouraged to provide coverage for all of our provinces roadways. Cell phones proved to be an extremely valuable resource in situations such as the recent blackouts, so therefore it is imperative that there be better province wide coverage.

Our Association stands ready to consult with government and stakeholders on the above issues, with limited time we briefly mention them in this presentation.

Summary

We sincerely thank the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for allowing us this annual opportunity to brief government. It is truly appreciated by our membership that you take the time to hear our concerns for the betterment of safety to all Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans. As mostly volunteer firefighters, we provide very basic and essential services to our citizen's social safety net. As volunteers for the most part, we provide this as cost effectively as a humanly possible to Newfoundland and Labrador. Therefore, we feel that we contribute significantly to the protection of the economy of our province and we require further assistance from our government.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services stands ready to partner and consult with government to provide a top quality fire service to all Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vince Mackenzie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "V".

Vince Mackenzie
President
NLAFS