



Newfoundland and Labrador Association
Of Fire Services



BRIEF

Presented to

The Premier

And

**Government of
Newfoundland and Labrador**

February 16, 2010

By

**Newfoundland and Labrador Association
Of Fire Services**

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

Honorable Ministers of the Social Policy Committee:

On behalf of the firefighters of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services wishes to thank you for providing us this opportunity to present our Annual Brief.

We truly appreciate the interest shown by past Social Policy Committees of Cabinet to the concerns of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services. In the interest of being brief, we will just like to generally state that all support to the provinces fire services and to our association is greatly appreciated and it is anticipated that this partnership will continue.

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. It is the only all-inclusive voice for the Fire Services in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Honorable Ministers, while there have been significant improvements in funding for municipal fire departments and we have made moderate progress, there is still in this day and age some lacking issues.

While we recognize that many fire departments owe their existence to volunteer fundraising it still begs the question as to why this is the case. As with any other department of a municipal council, should the workers of a public works department be asked to fundraise for the new town loader or heat the town depot? Why is it that it becomes expected by municipal governments that a volunteer firefighters must spend valuable hours raising funds?

Our entire collective focus is formed on the very basic need to provide a very essential service to our population to ensure live securely and safely.

In providing our services, we are confident that you agree that there are basic priorities that any firefighter in this province (career or volunteer) should have the right to from an Occupational Health and Safety perspective. We believe these priorities are:

- 1. Be personally protected from injury and have appropriate protective clothing and breathing apparatus.**
- 2. The right to respond to emergencies in safe and reliable vehicles with appropriate tools to do the job.**
- 3. The right to avail of the appropriate and sufficient amount of training necessary to successfully and safely respond to and mitigate fires and other emergencies.**

All Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans are entitled to receive a basic level of protection from fire and other perils. Firefighters in turn deserve to be provided with the tools to do their jobs safely and effectively.

The tradition of they are only volunteers, or they do the best they can simply does not cut it when it comes the fundamental priority of basic firefighting.

The provincial fire service has many challenges that we will not indulge or burden you with today. We do wish however, to endeavor to create an understanding that all levels of government must bear responsibility to its citizen's safety in a more pro-active roll.

Through the establishment of some very basic attention to the 3 fundamental rights above, this government will do much to positively influence all our other underlying challenges. Therefore, we present the following primary issues facing the Newfoundland and Labrador Fire service in 2010.

1. Cost Sharing Program for Fire Trucks

The Association recommends that government increase the funding for the cost shared program for fire trucks to allow for the replacement of a minimum 30 to 35 primary fire apparatus. An increase from 1.7 million of 5 million dollars is needed in this program immediately.

Over 45 % of the fleet of fire pumper trucks in fire departments the province of Newfoundland and Labrador are over 20 years old. Approximately 15% more poised to reach that age in the next 3 to 4 years.

In Newfoundland and Labrador we have not adopted any formal standard of

the age of fire trucks. Most North American standards do suggest that the primary first response vehicle in any fire district should be not over 15 years old. It is assumed by these standards that most fire trucks operate and perform as they were designed up until that point before wear and tear and age start to have effect on their performance. Also at 20 years fire trucks are considered obsolete, and at 30 years vehicles are considered antique.

With over 150 vehicles that should be replaced this year due to age, it is simple case of mathematics, at the present rate, funding allows for the purchase of only 7 to 10 fire pumpers per year. If this funding is maintain at this low level, it will be another 15 years before all municipalities can be able to replace the back log of vehicles that are over 20 years old as of today.

Aerial ladder trucks in Carbonear, Gander, and Grand Falls- Windsor are nearing 30 years of age and these communities require an aerial ladder replacement now. Other municipalities may soon to require aerial devices to augment their basic fire protection. Aerial ladder trucks are over triple the cost of a pumper truck.

The province's communities are against a difficult situation at present funding levels. Government must consider a replacement program with appropriate levels and funding with studied foresight into the future.

To that end, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services requests that the provincial government increase funding levels. We recommend the program for the replacement of the province's fire trucks be increased from 1.7 million to a minimum of 5 million dollars annually or about 30 to 35 fire trucks a year.

2. Fire Protection Officer for Labrador

This Association recommends that a fire protection officer position be established in Labrador in 2010.

A Fire Protection Officer position was created last year to expand Fire and Emergency Services personnel into Labrador. This position was allocated last year but has not been funded to date. This association would urges your government to proceed with this position as soon as possible to better address the issues on fire protection in Labrador. Filling this position will lay the framework to better serve fire departments and the public in Labrador and also relieve some of the unrelenting workload on the existing offices and personnel on the island.

3. Occupational Health and Safety:

A Personal Protective Equipment Replacement/Procurement Program

The Association recommends that the Government of Newfoundland

and Labrador establish new grant funding specifically targeting the issue of firefighter protective equipment and breathing apparatus replacement.

Coupled with training, the basis of any firefighter's ability to perform their work is contingent on personal protective equipment (PPE) and self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA). In Newfoundland and Labrador, the condition of this basic protective equipment continues to deteriorate with use. Fire departments struggle to keep pace with the cost of keeping and maintaining this equipment. As a result, many fire departments in this province have inadequate and improper fitting protective clothing.

Furthermore, many of the breathing apparatus in service in our fire departments do not meet current safety standards for this type of apparatus, and some don't meet these standards dating back 2 to 3 standard editions due to age.

With cost being a major factor why fire departments can't replace old equipment, a specific grant or subsidy system is needed to help enable and encourage municipal fire departments to provide up-to-date personal protective equipment and self contained breathing apparatus.

The province has just recently introduced new occupational Health and Safety Legislation. This will have significant impact on our fire services as most volunteer firefighters do fall under the definition of a worker under these regulations.

Very few, if any, firefighters have been fit tested for respirator usage to date. Any worker who wears respiratory protection requires a facial respirator fit test. This is a requirement of the province's new Occupational Health and Safety regulations as legislated last fall. The fit testing of all the province's firefighters will bear a cost into the tens of thousands of dollars for the equipment necessary and training. We are presently consulting with Fire and Emergency Services on the issue of fit testing.

NLAFS is suggesting that government provide a specific personal protective equipment (PPE) replacement grant program which will see all firefighters in our province receive basic PPE meeting current standards in the past 10 years as a basic minimum. This program should be separated from the special assistance grants for firefighting equipment and specific to personnel protection.

The Association would gladly act in consultation with Fire and Emergency Services NL to establish fair, equitable, and productive criteria to administer to such a program.

Firefighter Training Funding – A Thank you

In 2008, Fire and Emergency Services, Newfoundland and Labrador, introduced a new and unique training program by way of establishing a provincial Fire Training

Schools in alternating select regions in our province. In 2009 government responded to our Brief request that funding to assist training at the training schools through a new program through MTDC. We respectfully ask that this initiative continue.

Summary:

We thank you for your interest in the issues surrounding the provinces fire services. We provide very basic and essential services to our citizen's social safety net. The issues presented in this brief are large but please bear in mind that the fire services needs would be greater if they were not provided by a 95% volunteer force throughout our province. Government's at all levels have recognized the growing importance of the volunteer sector, as the fire service volunteers we have been caught in the ping pong effect of provincial to municipal responsibility sharing. Our own challenges of recruitment and retention are only compounded when appropriate and up to date equipment is not available.

We need to have the fire service supported adequately to at least adequately address our very basic safety needs.

While this brief covers our fundamental priorities as seen from this association, other issues presented in previous briefs are still being pursued such as the 911 service have still yet to be fully addressed.

We trust you will endeavor to see your way through to meet our requests, and 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,

Vince J. Mackenzie

Vince Mackenzie
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NLAFS