

**DATE:** November 10, 2017

**TO:** Chair and Directors  
Committee of the Whole

**FROM:** Russell Dyson  
Chief Administrative Officer

**FILE:** 7130-03

Supported by Russell Dyson  
Chief Administrative Officer

**R. DYSON**

**RE: 2017 Wildfire/Interface Functional Exercise: Findings & Observations**

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### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide the committee information on the June 25<sup>th</sup> 2017 wildfire/interface functional exercise findings and observations.

### **Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer**

This report is for information purposes only.

### **Executive Summary**

On June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017 a wildfire / interface functional exercise was executed in the Oyster River/Macaulay areas.

The main objectives established and achieved were:

- mutual aid training opportunity for fire departments and BC Wildfire Services crews;
- set up structural sprinkler protection units;
- RCMP and Comox Valley Ground Search and Rescue (SAR) performing door to door evaluation;
- BC Ambulance Services establish mass triage centre;
- Salvation Army mass feeding of responders and support groups;
- Emergency Support Services (ESS) setup and operated mutual assistance reception centre for evacuees;
- orientation for Emergency Radio Communications Team (ERCT) to Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)/site command post;
- testing radio communication plan, equipment and message handling.

Some of the key findings and observations created by exercise design committee, evaluators and observers are as follows and are further detailed in Appendix A.

Communications:

- reoccurring issue of no cell service and poor radio connectivity between inter-agency and sites (to and/or from field to command post, command post to EOC, EOC to reception centre);
- communication plan overall worked well, but testing PEPCOORD radio frequency for first responder check-in with site command post experienced mechanical issues that prevented accomplishing this injection;
- refine radio station set up regionally to ensure human and technology capacity for managing both voice and data traffic messaging effectively;
- ensure site command post has capability to adapter all agencies hand-held radios to roof-top antenna system;

- consider set up for large events a separate communication unit vehicle at site to handle/record what will be a higher volume of radio transmissions.

Command and control:

- increase incident command system training for all ECRT and EOC members;
- define ‘unified command’ better for all Comox Valley Emergency Program (CVEP) agencies and support groups awareness (BC Wildfire Services taking the lead);
- provide EOC essentials course to key radio operator supporting the EOC.

Evacuation:

- area of coverage was large and very time consuming for SAR teams to cover;
- SAR utilized utility task vehicles to speed up the deployment and cover more area effectively;
- evacuation flagging and tracking of evacuees system worked well;
- during tactical evacuation command to determine temporary evacuee assembly area until an appropriate reception centre location can be determined.

Other

- update Oyster River evacuation plan with zones to address fire evacuations;
- do more shorter timeframe tabletops and drills with EOC and site support team members to improve learning retention and less big scale exercises;
- update ESS guidelines to provide steps on how to request ‘mutual assistance’ from other neighbouring teams.

In November 2016 a wildfire/\*interface (\*is a wildland fire that puts communities and people at risk.) functional exercise design team was established with the project purpose to perform and evaluate operational emergency procedures and guidelines addressing an interface fire scenario. The design team consisted of the following agencies and organizations staff and volunteers:

BC Wildfire Service / Oyster River Fire / RCMP / BC Ambulance Services / SAR / ERCT / ESS / Salvation Army / St John Ambulance / Strathcona Regional Emergency Program / CVEP and many volunteer evaluators and observers.

The exercise took over six months of the above groups’ dedication collaborating on the design scope, objectives, exercise injections/challenges and cost-sharing

The exercise was successful in providing both training and testing while addressing a large scale interface fire. Each agency and support group valued the opportunity of being involved and shared that they now have an enhance perspective of some of the challenges that will occur and are now better positioned to address these challenges.

The emergency program wishes to express its utmost appreciation to the exercise design committee, evaluators / observers, participants and delegates who toured, for their support of the 2017 wildfire / interface function exercise.

Prepared by:

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Concurrence:

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Attachments: Appendix A “Key Findings”

## 2017 WILDFIRE/INTERFACE FUNCTIONAL EXERCISE

June 17

## SUMMATION

Created by: Exercise Design Contractor- Mike Fournier

Adopted by: CVEP Planning Committee

<b>PROBLEMS</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>FOLLOW-UP</b>
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>		
Weak VHF reception	Better antenna and a higher mast	Comox Valley Ground Search and Rescue (CVSAR)
No HAM radio	To repair it	Scott G
No PEP CORD at first	To make tag for mobile command post (MCP) dummy load	Mike
HAM operator lack of incident command system (ICS)	To put on an ICS-100 course	Scott/Howie
No antenna for some portables in the MCP	To install more deferent types	Scott G
No proper message form	To adopt a commercial one	Scott G
<b>COMMAND</b>		
Staff had no experience in 'Unified Command'	<i>To schedule an ICS-400 course (abbreviated version)</i> Or Ask BC Wildfire Services to lead follow up on this discussion (will approach this route)	Howie  Assigned to Mark Petrovic to take lead on further learnings
911 Manager used for Fire Dispatch	To use proper dispatch	911/Howie
Lack of MCP staff	To assign Command staff as soon as possible	All
No Task Safety Officer	Should be part of Command Staff	All
<b>EVACUATION</b>		
Lack of fire behavior knowledge	Better briefing by team leader	Scott L
Lack of assembly point and Reception Centre (RC) locations knowledge	“ “ “ “	Scott L
Many questions from residents	To write a questions & answers sheet (like used for Rapid Damage Assessment)	Howie
No Evacuation Zones for fire	To design them for Oyster River area	Howie
<b>SUPPORT SERVICES</b>		
Lack of task objectives	Better briefing	(Liaison Officer)
Problem getting Task #	Better Communication with Emergency Operations Centre	Howie
No transport team for evacuees	Make it part of evacuation pre-plan	Howie

## 2017 WILDFIRE/INTERFACE FUNCTIONAL EXERCISE

June 17

## SIMULATORS &amp; EVALUATORS EXERCISE REPORT

Created by all participating agencies and groups

<b>PROBLEMS</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>FOLLOW-UP</b>
<b>Emergency Health Services</b>		
Location of Triage	Access/Egress should be one way	Adrian
Communication	Need HAM operator on site	Scott G
Hydration	Water out early	
Not enough patients through triage area	Back to Communication	Adrian
Missing equipment	Need better and more consistent check up	Adrian
<b>Communication</b>		
No activation notice procedures for Radio team	Create procedures	Howie/Scott G.
PEPCORD1 frequency not use at first	Better incident command post (ICP) antenna connection procedures	Hector/Scott G.
Poor reception between Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) / ICP and Reception Centre	Permanent antenna mount at those locations recommended	Scott G./Howie
No HAM (Amateur radio) kit	To make up such kits- go kits	Scott G./Howie
No Message Runner	To implement process	Scott G.
No Message forms	To adopt a commercial version	Scott/Howie
Loud environment around radios	To supply headphones with booms	Scott G./Howie
Use of acronyms	Need a glossary in kits and post on wall	Howie
HAM not use in all exercise	To include in all exercise	Howie/Scott G.
<b>Controller</b>		
No use of PEPCORD1 frequency due to mechanical switch not changed over	Write an antenna connection procedure for the ICP	Hector
Unified Command not use	Need to teach it or not use it	Mark P. BCWS
911 simulation not realistic	To use normal 911 & Emergency Management BC (EMBC) call out	Howie/Designer
Fire called Coord directly	Should use normal procedures (call Fire Dispatch or EMBC)	Chris M.
Not sure who in charge of Drone	Fire at first then Forestry (Drone use was to introduce usefulness in a site awareness- during real event will need to work closely with Wildfire branch –ground when aerial tank occurring	Chris M.
No action plan or Safety Officer	To use interface fire preplan	Chris M.
<b>EOC/CVRD</b>		
Issue with road traffic		
Handling Media inquiries to EOC and at site	Utilize Information Officer at site next time	Howie

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<b>PROBLEMS</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>FOLLOW-UP</b>
Is there an animal evacuation plan	Oyster River are has evacuation plan- more work with local residents to become better prepared with animals- Livestock work with Associations; Cattleman/Horse	Comox Valley Emergency Program (CVEP)
No hardcopy file management	Work with CVEP admin to set up structure	CVEP
<b>EOC/Strathcona Regional District</b>		
Staff should know the phonetic alphabet	Make a laminated posted for the EOC	Shaun
Evacuation tracking form needs to have a special comments section	Shaun to discuss with Howie and Mid Island Emergency Coordinators and Managers	Shaun
No EOC setup/layout posted	Make a laminated posted for the EOC	Shaun
More frequent all staff emergency planning meetings	Address this at least once annually during our monthly staff meeting.	Shaun
Folders need to be better organized on the G:Drive	Work on IT with this	Shaun
<b>Oyster River Fire Department</b>		
No official evac zones	To implement zones as per others	Howie
Bad radio communication when using portables	To use mobile radio in vehicle	All Agencies
Weak cell reception at site		
No emergency health service transport to triage	To prearrange	Adrian
No heads up re Search and Rescue door to door evacuation	To add to duty of ICP in evac plan	Howie/Fire Dispatch
Wrong antenna hookup for portable in ICP	To supply ICP with multi adapters	Scott G/Chris M.
Bag lunches too small	To advise people to take 2	
Fire Disp. did not call EMBC	Need to use fire dispatch properly and not supervisor as simulator	911-Fire Dispatch
Fire vehicles driving too fast	Advise speed limit during any exercise	Chris M.
Input messages too far apart	Controller needs to ensure learning pace is supportive	
Confusion between Site and Unified command	Follow up with BC Wildfire Service for further discussion	Mark P. BCWS
No site fire safety officer	Appoint one for each unit	Chris M.

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PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS	FOLLOW-UP
<b>ICP</b>		
<u>Fire Dispatch:</u> It did not seem that Fire Dispatch was able to play throughout the exercise or that they had not been fully briefed on the requirements that might be posed to them.	Fire Dispatch was brief on exercise development by Exercise designer and EPC, but uncertain why messaging was not played out. Follow up	Chris M.
<u>Opening Mobile Command Post (MCP):</u> There is no set of detailed set-up instructions.	Recommend creating a detailed set of instructions for setting up the MCP and radios.	Scott L
<u>Message #7:</u> At 1000, advised over the radio (PEPCORD1) that the MCP was open. Received no response from any of the players. At 1005, contacted Fire Evaluator by mobile phone to advise Fire Command to join PEPCORD1 Got through to Fire Command at 1010 when he decided to move to the MCP.	Should the command person from each agency be monitoring PEPCORD1 as a rule?	
Fire Command arrived at the MCP alone—no a scribe or runner. He quickly realized that he should have brought help, but did not call any of his team to send someone to the MCP.	When electing to move to the MCP, it should be the norm to bring a scribe/runner. It would have been completely acceptable to call for a scribe/runner from the field.	Chris
Fire Command arrived at the MCP without a list of his team (contact numbers, accountability numbers, etc..	When electing to move to the MCP, it should be the norm to bring nominal roles or team lists.	Chris
Radio carried by Fire Command did not fit the antenna connection installed in the MCP.	Communications member is aware and is working on the issue.	Scott G
Fire Command discussed the appropriateness of moving to Unified Command and elected to do so. RCMP, Fire Services, BC Ambulance Service, and Search and Rescue were all represented in or near the MCP. They did not set up a reporting-in routine or establish a schedule for routine updates/briefings		All

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PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS	FOLLOW-UP
<p><u>Message #8:</u> Delayed to 10:25 am due to initial issues with communications. Fire Command was overloaded trying to coordinate too much activity without a scribe/runner.</p>	<p>Scribe/runner should be a member of the agency who has considerable experience and understanding of the agency's role and responsibilities. Fire Command could have called one of his units to send a scribe/runner. <i>MCP Evaluator assisted by taking on some of the roles associated with a scribe/runner.</i></p>	Chris M.
<p><u>Message #12:</u> Used PEPCORD1 to alert all agencies that all landline and cell coverage had been lost. Only one response: ORFR.</p>	Should the command person from each agency be monitoring PEPCORD1 as a rule?	All
<p><u>Message #13:</u> At 1115, Fire Command was asked where to send evacuees. Several attempts were made to contact CVRD (EOC) without success. At 1145, Fire Command was advised of location.</p>	Communications links were an issue and the Communications member is aware and is working to resolve problems.	Howie
<p><u>Message #21:</u> Sent directly to Fire Services rep in the MCP 20 minutes early by Forest Service exercise writer. After clarification with Fire Command, catch-up was completed and appropriate action was taken.</p>	<p>Need to be sure that all players/observers know who's who in the zoo and where responsibilities lie. The players in the MCP were all very sharp and able to catch up.</p>	
<p><u>Message #24:</u> Likelihood that evacuation area was expanding. After some discussion and coaching, the command group decided that it would be appropriate to request an order covering as large an area as possible in order to preclude the need to ask again.</p>	All players need to know the process for obtaining a "declaration of local emergency": timeliness, scope/area (remember to think big in order to preclude having to go back for more, etc.), communications chain and who needs to be in the loop, what to do if/when communications failed.	All



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<b>PROBLEMS</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>FOLLOW-UP</b>
<u>Communications:</u> While their desire to help was obvious, it did not seem as though HAM volunteers had been adequately prepared for field operations or the nature of the forms/questions they were likely to be asked to discuss over the radio.	Communications could conduct some exercises based on various scenarios to familiarized members with the pace and likely requirements of an emergency situation.	Scott G.
<u>Unified Command:</u> Not all the leaders had experience in working under unified command.	Each agency should practice working in a unified command scenario on their own with “notional” other agencies; then, get together to run some table-top exercises.	All
<b>RCMP</b>		
Issues calling MCP on PEP Cord	To promote the use of SAR phone line	Scott
Start of exercise not clearly defined	Need trigger call to detachment	911
Time line of messages not followed	Evaluator to follow time line sheet	All
<b>CVGSAR</b>		
Some SAR members did not know the fire direction	Better briefing for SAR	Scott L
Most SAR members did not know the R/C location or assembly point	Better briefing for SAR	Scott L
Some SAR members carrying large packs	Small pack should be part of the briefing	Scott L
Evacuees wanting a lot of answers to their questions	Need to prepare a list of questions & answers	Howie
Could use more SAR members	Used team of 2 not 3 SAR members	Scott L
<b>Forestry</b>		
Did not receive input as of report submission		