



Review of B.C.'s response to wildfires, floods recommends new disaster management approach

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Trees burned by wildfires are seen in this aerial view from a Canadian Forces Chinook helicopter near Williams Lake, B.C., on July 31, 2017.

DARRYL DYCK/THE CANADIAN PRESS

An independent review of British Columbia's response to last year's wildfires and flooding makes 108 recommendations and calls for an overhaul of disaster response practices.

Wildfires and floods last year displaced 65,000 people, while the unprecedented fire season scorched more than 1.2 million hectares, costing more than \$630-million. There were no fatalities in the 1,342 fires.

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Former Liberal cabinet minister George Abbott and hereditary chief Maureen Chapman, who is from the Chilliwack-area, were appointed last December to undertake the first major examination of fire response programs since 2003, when about 2,500 fires destroyed more than 300 homes and businesses.

The report titled "Addressing the New Normal: 21st Century Disaster Management in B.C." does not include an estimate of how much it would cost to implement its recommendations.

Abbott made a reference to the report's title in addressing the future of disaster response.

"We do have a new normal to address," he told a news conference, adding that last year "was not a one-off that happened and will go away. I do hope what we've offered government today is a kind of constructive road map."

The report says last year's experience "demonstrated the consequences of ignoring the growing gap" between spending on response versus mitigating the impact of disasters through planning, preparedness and prevention.

"The time to invest is now," it says.

A report done by former Manitoba premier Gary Filmon's on the 2003 situation called on the government and municipalities to fireproof forests around communities and suggested the province had an opportunity to implement strict fire reduction initiatives through policies and legislation.

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Forests Minister Doug Donaldson said the government has internal reports gauging its response last summer, but wanted an independent review that included

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Most of the central Interior city of Williams Lake was evacuated for nearly two weeks in July when a fire threatened.

Evacuation orders were issued Thursday for about 1,500 properties facing floods in the southern Interior area along the Granby, Kettle and West Kettle areas.

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