

February 2, 2009

To: Local Authority Emergency Program Coordinators  
ESS Directors, Co-Directors and Alternates  
Mobile Support Team Members  
ESS Volunteer Regional Trainers  
pc: ESS Support Organizations  
PEP Regional Offices  
Provincial/Territorial ESS Directors

**Re: Emergency Social Services Update**

*Written/compiled by Bob Kennedy*

*This edition of the ESS Update letter leads off with a special section devoted to a summary of the findings from the ESS Review.*

This issue of the ESS Update includes the following topics:

- a) **ESS Review**
- b) **Highlights of Other Initiatives**
- c) **Completion of the Emergency Social Services Director (ESSD) Course Revisions**
- d) **Clarification of Supplier Consent**
- e) **Mandatory vs Optional Use of ESS Forms**
- f) **Urban vs Rural**
- g) **Training**
- h) **Training Advisory Committee**
- i) **Level One ESS**

a) **ESS Review**

- The Provincial Emergency Program (PEP) would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate in the recent Emergency Social Services (ESS) Survey. Results of the review have now been compiled and evaluated and an action plan will be developed. The review will prove to be a valuable tool to enhance the success of Emergency Social Services.
- We were impressed by the many suggestions that we received and we commit to working co-operatively with local authorities and ESS Support Organizations to ensure all changes to the program are agreed upon, understood and aimed at providing the support and motivation the ESS Program needs and deserves.
- From the feedback we received through the ESS Review, we were able to identify some common themes or suggestions for enhancing ESS. Opportunities to enhance ESS are summarized as follows:

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- **Communication** – ideas for enhancing communication included a more standardized approach to keeping everyone up-to-date and informed on PEP’s initiatives, policies, and general information about ESS. The ESS Update Letter is PEP’s current means of communicating topics of interest — this document is distributed electronically to Emergency Program Coordinators on approximately a quarterly basis (i.e., March, June, September, December) and is available at <http://www.ess.bc.ca>
  - **Training** – a number of ideas were presented for enhancing or modifying the ESS Training program including:
    - developing shorter modules and drills to develop/maintain skills at team meetings
    - develop more practical and less theory based courses
    - consider variety of course delivery methods – on line and local training modules delivered in house.
    - targeting training to different levels – front line, supervisory and management
    - address special training needs for smaller rural communities and First Nations
  - **Public Awareness and Recognition** – suggestions included:
    - developing a province wide media campaign to heighten awareness of ESS
    - educate local authority elected officials
    - target young people to volunteer – possibly through links to schools
  - **Partnerships and Relationship Building** – suggestions included;
    - regional ESS meetings
    - opportunities to meet regularly with other agencies supporting community emergency preparedness - NGO and government and first responders
    - more opportunities to socialize and network with other ESS volunteers
  - **Roles and Responsibilities** –  
The results of the ESS Review point to an opportunity to clarify roles and responsibilities for ESS, particularly between PEP and local government. While ESS is a local authority responsibility, PEP provides funding for ESS Training, tools, templates and other resources to assist local ESS Teams develop plans and build response capacity. PEP also pays response costs (costs of activations and evacuee costs) – and funds ESS Mobile Support Teams and other provincial level initiatives that support to local government emergency programs.
- ESS Review findings will continue to guide PEP planning in consultation with ESS stakeholders throughout the province. We look forward to working with you to evolve ESS in British Columbia to the next level of maturity. Please do not hesitate to contact ESS staff at PEP Headquarters if you have any comments or questions.

## b) Highlights of Other Initiatives

- A number of the suggestions above actually touched on projects that are currently underway in PEP. This provides a good opportunity to summarize the status of some of our initiatives, as follows:

**c) Completion of the Emergency Social Services Director (ESSD) Course Revisions**

- Highlights of revisions include: inclusion of EOC training for ESSDs within the course content; and redefining the ESSD role in Regional Districts (e.g., Directors are more likely to be working at the site level [Reception Centre] instead of acting in the role of ESS Branch Coordinator within the EOC of the community).

**d) Clarification of Supplier Consent**

- The rate of frequency of updating the Supplier Consent Form is at the discretion of the local authority. For example, a business may experience high staff turn-over or a relocation of stores, which may necessitate an update. Where information is known to be accurate, a new consent form is not necessary, but it may be sound business practice to make an annual courtesy call to the supplier. It is important to remember that the Supplier Consent Form is not a binding contract—we merely rely on the good will of the supplier and their ability to provide services. Maintaining a solid relationship with suppliers can pay off when needed but the frequency of contact remains the decision of the local authority.

**e) Mandatory vs Optional Use of ESS Forms**

- Several ESS forms currently in use by ESS Teams are optional and are provided by PEP for convenience. There are, however, three forms that must be used in order for PEP to meet regulatory requirements. Mandatory use forms are: the ESS File Form, ESS Referral Form and ESS Change of Information Form which must be retained, once completed, for a period of 6 months at PEP Regional Offices (and a further 3 years at off-site secure storage). Specific PEP forms such as the Volunteer Registration, Task Registration and Expense Reimbursement are standardized and are the only approved forms for those purposes. More simplistically, if the form is to be submitted to PEP, use the form provided. Other forms used at the local level, such as the Local Volunteer Registration, various tracking forms, call out forms, and the myriad of other forms developed specific to a community's needs are open for modification as required. Templates for many of these forms for local use have been provided for convenience but are offered as suggestions only. If you are not certain whether or not any particular form is open for editing please contact PEP Regional staff or staff at ESS Headquarters.

**f) Urban vs Rural**

- One of the most common themes that we have identified has been an acknowledgement of the difference between rural and urban needs in providing ESS. In previous Update Letters the suggestion was offered to establish a tiered system of identifying training requirements. This concept lends itself to establishing the level to which a community should develop its ESS capacity. In some areas, it is unlikely that a response would ever go beyond Level 1 so there should be no need to develop a capability to staff a fully expanded Reception Centre organization chart and all of its inherent recruitment and retention challenges. Such communities may be better served by focusing on local organizations that can provide services as required. As an example, representatives from service or church organizations could be recruited ad hoc as part of a planning strategy but not necessarily remain active with ESS on an ongoing basis. These representatives could be called in as required for training updates, planning sessions, and to participate in exercises or other events.

- The starting point in developing an ESS strategy is to conduct a Hazards, Risk and Vulnerability Analysis (HRVA) Community Assessment Tool found on the PEP web site: <http://www.pep.gov.bc.ca/hrva/toolkit.html>. This tool will provide a realistic snapshot of what level of capacity is required to provide for the community's needs. If it is determined that a Level 2 (10 or more evacuees with a possible Reception Centre and EOC activated) is appropriate, then recruitment and training should be targeted at that level. By extension, Level 3 communities which could foresee activation of multiple ESS facilities would plan for full scale capabilities.

## **g) Training**

- Many ESS teams have expressed an interest in understanding the rationale behind the number and location of training courses offered by PEP through its training providers. The entire process works in a cycle that begins on April 1 and ends on March 31, coinciding with the fiscal year. For the 2008/2009 year, there are 176 PEP sponsored courses scheduled for the 6 regions around the province. The allocation of those courses involves considerable consultation with the PEP Regional Offices who directly receive input from individual communities regarding their training needs. Contract discussions with the training providers must occur before the compiled training "wish lists" can be reviewed to determine how many of the courses can be offered within the terms of the contracts. Once the total number of courses has been determined, allocation will depend on such variables as availability of instructors and specific needs within regions. All of this must occur in a timely fashion so that teams can plan their training needs in advance as well as allowing for communities to include any costs they might incur in their budgeting considerations for the upcoming fiscal year. For example, development of the 2009/2010 budget begins many months before April 1, often as much as a full year ahead, picking up urgency and refinement in the fall. By January 1 many budgets are well into the stages of being finalized for submission.
- Contracts with training providers are negotiated well in advance of April 1 each year and final figures on the requested number of courses are crucial for those discussions in order to match the courses offered with the funding available. After the schedule of courses has been finalized there is still often the challenge of identifying instructors for each of the approved courses. This is one of the reasons why it is so important to provide a date, along with two alternate dates, and locations for the requested courses. Most of the instructors are volunteers and identifying times that fit into their busy schedules adds to the complexity of coordinating training to meet the needs of as many teams as possible.
- A suggested practice in determining training requirements for ESS teams begins with an initial assessment of the team's needs based on the level of response the community might anticipate. Once this is taken in to account, the most appropriate courses can be identified and requested. The sequence of courses can also be set by knowing the annual cycle of a team's activities. For instance, most teams do not meet over the summer months so September is like the beginning of a new year and courses can be requested that establish a foundation for other courses to be held in subsequent months. If there is a known period when new volunteers are likely to be recruited, that is the time to schedule a Reception Centre course, followed closely by other courses in a sequence relevant to the team's needs.

**h) Training Advisory Committee**

- ESS training was identified as an area which required constant update and modification even prior to the ESS Review. Accordingly, an ESS Training Advisory Committee was struck to ensure the training was relevant, effective and up to date. The committee had a preliminary meeting in September, 2008 to determine what, if any, role they could play and it was recognized that such a forum would be the most effective method of refining ESS training. While no specific decisions or recommendations were made, it was agreed that a future meeting would take place following the much anticipated results of the ESS Review. The committee, which was comprised of JIBC, Canadian Red Cross Society, The Salvation Army, Canadian Disaster Child Care and ESSA, will meet again in February to determine the next steps in addressing the training observations included in the Review. While course development and/or modification cannot occur overnight there is a commitment to implement whatever refinements are achievable in a consultative process that will take into consideration the input from the broader ESS community.

**i) Level One ESS**

- As a result of feedback on the new Level 1 ESS training package an improvement is being implemented on the reporting requirements. In addition to the Action Checklist, which is maintained locally, a PEP Task Report is to be submitted to the PEP Regional Office. Forms can be found on the PEP web site at: <http://www.pep.gov.bc.ca/policy/forms.html> . This allows the Regional Office to stay informed of response activities and provides a record of events to match with expense claims.
- Another development in the training package will be a new audio CD that has been produced by JIBC and will be available with the new training packages. ***Please also note that Level One ESS training packages will now be distributed by JIBC. Packages can be ordered by calling 604-528-5591, toll free 1-888-251-5230 or e-mail [ess@jibc.ca](mailto:ess@jibc.ca) .***

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY

Carol McClintock  
Manager of Training, Exercise and Volunteer Programs