



May 3, 2004

To: ESS Directors, Co-Directors and Alternates  
Mobile Support Team Members  
MHR Regional Executive Directors  
MHR Regional ESS Coordinators  
ESS Support Organizations  
ESSA Regional Representatives  
Volunteer ESS Regional Trainers  
PEP Regional Managers  
Inter-Provincial ESS Directors

**Re: ESS Program Office Update**

*Written/compiled by Maggie Grant*

In honour of Emergency Preparedness Week, the Emergency Social Services (ESS) Program Office Update letter is being reinstated following a brief hiatus. The primary purpose of the Update letter is to ensure the ESS community is kept current in regards to ESS procedures and processes, as well as relaying important messages and providing a vehicle for feedback to the Program Office. You are encouraged to share this letter with others in your organization, and particularly with ESS teams.

This edition of the ESS Program Office Update includes the following topics:

- a) **Program Office Initiatives**
- b) **Planning for Out-of-Area ESS Volunteer Resources**
- c) **Requesting ESS Mobile Support Team Assistance**
- d) **Media Relations Guide**
- e) **ESS Website Update**
- f) **Indian and Northern Affairs Canada**

a) **Program Office Initiatives**

The aftermath of Firestorm 2003 created a flurry of activity for emergency management organizations in British Columbia, and the ESS Program Office has been no exception. In addition to conducting and participating in many debriefs, including a submission to the 2003 Firestorm Provincial Review, commonly referred to as the Filmon Review, we immediately started work on a number of enhancements that were identified during the response.

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The following are some of the larger initiatives that came out of the lessons learned from last summer.

1. ***Technological alternatives*** –

A contractor has been working with ESS and PEP for several months exploring technological options for the way ESS does business, with priority given to the Registration/Referral process. Our goal is to have a product that is ready to be piloted by this summer.

2. ***ESS Reception Centre Operational Guidelines*** –

David Tomaz of the ESS Program Office and Colleen Vaughan of the Justice Institute of BC have been working together for the past several months to incorporate feedback from the ESS community into a new BCERMS-based Reception Centre model, and it will be ready for distribution in May. A two-hour orientation to the new BCERMS model will be available to BC communities on request, and directions for accessing this training will be included with your copy of the guidelines.

3. ***BCERMS Vests*** –

As part of our promotion of the new ESS Reception Centre Guidelines, a limited number of BCERMS vests will be offered to ESS Teams who demonstrate a commitment to adopting a BCERMS model for their local team. These vests will be in sets of six (one each of red, blue, orange, grey, yellow and green) with a limit of one set per team. For more information, please contact David Tomaz at 1-800-585-9559.

4. ***New ESS Policy Manual*** –

Updates to the former ESS Policy Manual are underway and will include a new, more descriptive title for the document.

5. ***ESS Support Organizations Roles and Responsibilities*** –

A document clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the ESS Support Organizations is also the final phases, and will be widely distributed when complete.

6. ***Reception Centre Banners*** –

New banners have been created to identify ESS Reception Centres, and are being distributed over the next few weeks to every ESS team in BC. The banners are yellow and blue, in the shape of the broken house, with a space to identify the community or Reception Centre name, as well as recognizing all the Support Organizations working within the Reception Centre. To see a picture of the new banner, check out our page in the Spring 2004 issue of mESSAges.

**b) Planning for Out-of-Area ESS Volunteer Resources**

ESS teams across the province have been taking a closer look at their plans since the events of last summer. In preparation for the coming fire season, we would like to encourage ESS teams to incorporate into their plans a procedure to address the possibility of receiving not only convergent volunteers, but also experienced and trained ESS responders.

Even the strongest ESS team can find their resources seriously strained in the face of a major catastrophe. Knowing when and how to request assistance can be crucial to an effective response, and a plan to manage these resources is equally important.

During the summer, ESS Mobile Support Teams and trained personnel from several other ESS Support Organizations were deployed, at the request of the affected communities, to support their responses. As the request for additional resources grew, the ESS Program Office arranged for ESS members from unaffected teams outside the area to provide supplemental support. In addition to these out of area resources, many neighbouring communities also provided volunteers, and a number of ESS volunteers arrived on their own initiative, as convergent volunteers, to offer their assistance as well.

Because of their ESS experience, these volunteers do not need the same level of support as required for untrained convergent volunteers, so can prove invaluable to the team when there is little time for training. However, in order to use their skills to the best benefit of your community ESS response, it is important to develop a volunteer management process that will ensure a smooth integration into your team's response. For instance, you will want to know what training they have had, whether they are qualified ESS/ Red Cross trainers, what position they hold on their own team, etc, so be sure to include in your planning a means of identifying specific skills.

From observations and feedback following last year's response, the ESS Program Office plans to support communities in the integration of MST members by assigning an MST Liaison whenever a significant number of members are deployed. This position will act as a single point of contact for both the local ESS management team and the MST members, and will be available to address any issues or questions relating to the MST.

On arrival at the Reception Centre, the MST Liaison will need to meet with the ESS Director or their designate to confirm the assistance being requested. The attached form "Mobile Support Team Initial ESS Needs Assessment and Assignment of Duties" has been designed to accomplish two goals. First, as a tool to help communities, with or without an active ESS team, determine their ESS capacity and identify any need for additional ESS personnel; and secondly, as written confirmation of the type of assistance being requested by the community.

Based on the new BCERMS Reception Centre model, it is recommended that the Liaison Officer for the local ESS management team, and/or the Volunteer/Staff Management Unit under Logistics, work with the MST Liaison to ensure the best use of this volunteer resource. A similar concept may also be useful in working with other organizations who are providing volunteer or staff resources.

**c) Requesting ESS Mobile Support Team Assistance**

The Mission Statement for Mobile Support Team members is:

*“When requested, a Mobile Support Team provides short- term ESS assistance and support to a community overwhelmed by an emergency, until the community can effectively manage the response on its own again.”*

Mobile Support Teams are activated through the ESS Program Office, at the request of the community ESS Director, and are there to assist in whatever tasks are identified by the community – whether to meet and greet, fill out forms, or cover shifts for senior managers. The local ESSD and their management team remain in control of the response at all times.

To achieve the goals of their Mission Statement, MST members who are requested by the ESSD or their designate to temporarily fill ESS management roles will ask to be partnered with a local volunteer wherever possible. If no local team member is available to train in the position, consider recruiting a reliable local convergent volunteer with the necessary skill set. In this way, MST members are able to assist in building local capacity, and ensure the community is able to maintain the necessary level of staffing before leaving the community.

In determining when, and why, you might want to utilize MST's, keep the following advantages in mind:

- Relief workers from outside affected community are not personally impacted by the disaster
- Trained MST members are available to partner with, or provide relief to, local volunteers in supervisory or management positions
- If not required as supervisors, they can perform other ESS roles immediately without requiring the training necessary for convergent volunteers
- MSTs are available to respond anywhere in BC during large scale regional or provincial emergencies
- MST members can provide one-on-one support, which may increase the confidence of new or inexperienced local ESS responders
- As an affected community, you can help build the provincial ESS capacity by providing an opportunity for trained volunteers to acquire disaster response experience

**How to Request Assistance from MST:**

- The community Emergency Program Coordinator (EPC), or the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), if activated, may request additional ESS resources through the Provincial Emergency Program (PEP) Regional Manager, or the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre (PREOC), if activated.
- When authorization is granted, the ESS Program Office manages deployment arrangements for MST members, and on-site coordination or liaison, as required.

**d) Media Relations Guide**

Please see the attached document that will provide some guidelines for dealing with media at the Reception Centre. Updates to the Public Relations Toolkit are planned for the future, but in the meantime this document should provide a good basis for discussion and planning within your team. This guide will also be included in the function aids for the new ESS Reception Centre Operational Guidelines.

**e) ESS Website Update**

If you have been to the ESS website recently you will have noticed some changes. The previous site has been suspended pending the re-development in-house of the ESS website. The target is for it to be up and running with all of the familiar pages and useful information available to you before the summer is over.

**f) Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)**

In April, David Tomaz and Jeff Cornell met with the staff from INAC in Vancouver to discuss some issues that arose from Firestorm 2003. Clarification regarding the ESS rates and access to the provincial ESS training was provided. INAC uses the same rates as ESS for food, clothing and lodging for First Nation residents forced to evacuate from their homes in BC. Also, the staff at INAC will be promoting the ESS training program to residents of First Nations communities to increase their readiness to respond to a disaster or to act as a host community.

On behalf of the staff of the ESS Program Office I would like to thank everyone for their commitment and efforts over the past year to prepare for what is likely to be another incredibly challenging fire season. The dedication of the volunteers, municipal and regional district and ministry staff to further strengthen their community's capacity to respond is impressive.

Sincerely,

Jeff Cornell  
Director  
Emergency Social Services

Attachments

pc: Rob Fraser, Executive Director

## **MEDIA RELATIONS GUIDE**

The media people have a job to do. They serve the community by telling the story, and may be immensely helpful to the local ESS Team and to evacuees. Here are some simple guidelines to follow in your work with the media.

**1. Remember there is no such things as “off the record”!**

**2. Resist the temptation to “be candid” with the media!**

**3. Remember that you represent the local authority**

What you say can influence people’s perception about the ESS organization. Project the organization positively. Inexperienced or untrained personnel should not be assigned to work with the media.

**4. Welcome the interest of reporters**

Make sure an appropriate person helps them get correct information. Usually the best approach is to introduce yourself and express your willingness to help them get what they need. Offer to give them a short tour, before the centre is open and any evacuees arrive. Explain briefly what your role is and be sure to clearly identify yourself (or another assigned person) as the best source of information about this part of the operation.

If you can, give out a phone number. This builds rapport with the media and helps to encourage positive coverage. If you do not have all the answers just call the reporters back with the facts. Do not make promises for follow-up that you cannot keep.

**5. Be positive as you establish the ground rules**

Here is an example statement you might make to set those ground rules: “You are welcome to speak with the evacuees, but only outside of the Reception Centre; please ask the evacuee first if they feel like talking. We consider most areas of the Reception Centre to be private, so please do not attempt to go into these areas.”

**6. Establish a Designated Media Area outside of the Reception Centre**

Establish a designated media area outside of the Reception Centre and direct all media to conduct their interviews at that location only. Use the information board to post the location of the Designated Media area for all evacuees.

**7. Give an overview of what ESS does and give lots of accurate information**

Try to give reporters a good overview of the ESS role in disaster so they can report accurately. Give as much accurate information as you can, discuss only what you are personally involved with such as: how many we have received at the Reception Centre, how many meals have been served, how many personnel are involved. You might also give examples of local community organizations or businesses that have been especially helpful.

**8. Do not report information inappropriate to the ESS role**

For example, do not discuss the number of deaths, or where a fire will probably burn next, or whether dams will hold. Instead help reporters with other questions by referring them to the proper information source.

**9. Write down any commitments you make**

Pass commitments along if you are reassigned before you can complete them. Ask reporters to leave you a business card, check to see when is the best time to reach them.

**10. Respect the confidentiality of the evacuees – but...**

Allow them to talk to the media. Some of the very best media coverage comes from evacuees who share their stories. If you see an opportunity for such a story, make sure the evacuee wants to talk. Never give out confidential information without obtaining permission.

**11. Too much information is usually better than not enough**

**12. Never ask the public for food or clothing donations**

Such requests may only be made by local authority Emergency Operations Centre (EOC).

**13. Obtain the latest ESS press release**

Have copies ready for members of the media when they come to your Reception Centre.



## MOBILE SUPPORT TEAM INITIAL ESS NEEDS ASSESSMENT & ASSIGNMENT OF DUTIES

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Community: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

MST Representative: \_\_\_\_\_

Local ESS Authority (i.e. ESS Director, assigned Municipal Councilor/staff):

Name	Title

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**Note to Local ESS Authority: The purpose of this document is to assist in assessing the need for additional ESS resources, and to provide confirmation of the assistance requested from the provincial ESS Mobile Support Teams (MST).**

**Ask for help early – it will take time for responders to get to your community.**

Local ESS resources:

- ESS Director       Active ESS team       Inactive ESS team  
 No ESS team       PDA       Neighbourhood Program  
 Mutual Aid (confirmed) from \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Community(ies)

At this time, what is your opinion of your ESS capability?

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How long do you estimate it will take to exhaust local ESS resources, based on expected duration and shift requirements?

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What is the current status of the disaster (i.e., improving or deteriorating)?

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What are your current challenges? (i.e., special needs – pets, medications, stranded travelers, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

In consultation with the Mobile Support Team, it is agreed that the MST will assist the community in the following ways (mark all applicable boxes):

- No assistance required at this time
- General assistance to local ESS team, as directed by the ESS Director or designate
- Provide training for walk-in disaster volunteers
- Provide support or back-fill for Reception Centre management team.

Positions required: \_\_\_\_\_

- Manage a Reception Centre  Set up required
- Manage a Group Lodging facility  Set up required
- Manage a Volunteer Intake Centre  Set up required
- Work in the community EOC as the ESS Branch Coordinator
- Other – Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Local ESS Authority

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Provincial MST Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date                      Time

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date                      Time

Next scheduled meeting to review this assignment and reassess needs:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Who should attend: \_\_\_\_\_