

Chapter 40

Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency—Coordinating Provincial Emergency Preparedness

1.0 MAIN POINTS

By July 2020, the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency improved its processes to coordinate preparedness for provincial emergencies. It implemented two recommendations and has partially implemented the third of the three recommendations we first made in 2015.

The Agency gave key stakeholders sufficient guidance to help them determine infrastructure critical to the province. It also works with key stakeholders annually to formally update the province-wide risk assessment, and confirm stakeholder emergency preparedness plans align with the Provincial Emergency Management Plan. As of July 2020, it was in the process of updating the Provincial Emergency Management Plan.

Having effective processes to coordinate emergency preparedness helps the Provincial Government respond to emergencies in the province in a timely, efficient, and coordinated manner. This can help reduce the human and financial impact of emergencies and support the recovery process.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency is a Treasury Board Crown corporation created in November 2017 to streamline public safety services in Saskatchewan. The Agency operates under *The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Act, 2019*, which came into effect on July 7, 2019.¹

The Agency is responsible for province-wide emergency plans and co-ordinating preparedness for provincial emergencies.² In accordance with legislation, the Agency maintains the Provincial Emergency Management Plan intended to direct cross-government emergency planning, response, and recovery.³ The Minister of Government Relations was responsible for these matters until March 2020.⁴

2.1 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our second follow-up audit of management's actions on three recommendations we first made in 2015 about the processes to coordinate emergency

¹ *Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Annual Report for 2019-20*, p. 5.

² Emergencies in the province can include those that are widespread (i.e., affect multiple communities), cause significant disruption or delay in services, have a definite and potential widespread threat to life, or cause significant damage to infrastructure. Examples include floods, forest fires, health epidemics, infrastructure failure, or transportation incidents. These emergencies may require support from the provincial government. (i.e., one or more of its agencies).

³ *The Emergency Planning Act*, S.5(a).

⁴ On March 18, 2020, the responsibilities of *The Emergency Planning Act* transferred from the Minister of Government Relations to the President of the Executive Council. (Order in Council 101/2020)



preparedness for provincial emergencies.⁵ As reported in our *2018 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 21, the Ministry of Government Relations implemented one recommendation.

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Agency's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. The Ministry of Government Relations agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To carry out our follow-up audit, we discussed actions taken with Agency management and reviewed key documents provided by management (e.g., plans, meeting minutes, reports).

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at July 31, 2020, and the Agency's actions up to that date.

3.1 Risk Assessments Updated Annually

We recommended the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (formerly responsibility of Ministry of Government Relations) follow its established process to work with key stakeholders on identifying and updating, each year, assessments of risk of emergencies requiring provincial assistance.

(2015 Report – Volume 1; p. 129, Recommendation 2 Public Accounts Committee agreement September 15, 2016)

Status—Implemented

Since January 2018, the Agency meets with key stakeholders each spring to identify and update assessments of risks of emergencies requiring provincial assistance.

The April 2018 and 2019 meetings included key stakeholders (e.g., Environment Canada, Water Security Agency, SaskPower, SaskEnergy, Saskatchewan Health Authority), and resulted in updates to the province-wide risk assessment.⁶ The Ministry expects to hold these meetings annually.

In addition, since 2019, the Agency communicates bi-weekly risk outlooks including weather, wildfire, drinking water, highway, and infrastructure risks to key stakeholders.

Systematically keeping its risk assessment up-to-date helps the Agency be aware of all emerging risks or significant changes in risk exposure that are then communicated to key stakeholders as they arise.

⁵ *2015 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 12. At the time of the audit, the Ministry of Government Relations was responsible for processes to coordinate emergency preparedness for provincial emergencies. We made four recommendations.

⁶ Representatives from approximately 20 different key stakeholders attended these meetings.

3.2 Guidance for Identifying Critical Infrastructure Provided

We recommended the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (formerly responsibility of Ministry of Government Relations) provide key stakeholders responsible for key infrastructure in Saskatchewan with guidance to help them determine which infrastructure is critical to emergency preparedness for the province overall. (2015 Report – Volume 1; p. 131, Recommendation 3, Public Accounts Committee agreement September 15, 2016)

Status—Intent of Recommendation Met

The Agency routinely educates key stakeholders to help them determine infrastructure critical to emergency preparedness for the province as a whole. Critical infrastructure refers to the processes, systems, facilities, technologies, networks, assets and services essential to the health, safety, security or economic well-being of citizens and the effective functioning of society.⁷

We found the Agency continues to utilize the Critical Infrastructure Advisory Network.⁸ The Agency co-chairs the Network with Public Safety Canada. The Network enables stakeholders and industry partners to be aware of their responsibility for critical infrastructure and have plans in place to address any issues.

In May 2019, the Agency hosted tabletop exercises with key stakeholders. It plans to host tabletop exercises annually. These exercises allowed key stakeholders to evaluate mock scenarios (i.e., emergencies), and discuss what they would do based on their existing emergency plans. The exercises focus on identifying potential gaps in existing emergency plans, and giving key stakeholders tools to determine their own critical infrastructure.

We noted all key stakeholders from different sectors later re-addressed the scenario as a group. This allowed them to share lessons learned and provide key information as to how their existing plans and critical infrastructure tie into the overall provincial emergency plan.

Providing ongoing educational opportunities to stakeholders helps the Agency and stakeholders better understand the infrastructure which is critical to the province as a whole. Furthermore, if a provincial emergency occurs, the Agency and stakeholders can use this knowledge to utilize resources in an effective and efficient manner.

3.3 Alignment of Stakeholder Plans with Provincial Plan Not Yet Confirmed

We recommended the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (formerly responsibility of Ministry of Government Relations) periodically and formally confirm that emergency plans of all key stakeholders align with the Provincial Emergency Management Plan. (2015 Report – Volume 1; p. 132, Recommendation 4, Public Accounts Committee agreement September 15, 2016)

Status—Partially Implemented

⁷ *Critical Infrastructure Advisory Network Strategic Plan 2019-2023.*

⁸ The Saskatchewan network is administered by the Government of Saskatchewan, Ministry of Government Relations, Emergency and Fire Safety Branch, Public Safety Canada, and the RCMP F Division (Saskatchewan Headquarters) (*Critical Infrastructure Advisory Network Strategic Plan 2019-2023*).



Since our 2018 follow-up, the Agency updated the Provincial Emergency Management Plan. At July 2020, the Plan was not finalized.

The draft Provincial Emergency Management Plan requires that the emergency plans of each key stakeholder:

- Align with the Provincial Emergency Management Plan to help ensure consistency in the Government's overall approach to emergency management and response
- Outline the manner and means by which the stakeholder will minimize the impact of an emergency or disaster on provision of its essential services

We found the Agency reviewed the 2019 emergency plans of key stakeholders. It utilized the May 2019 tabletop exercises with stakeholders as a mechanism to evaluate stakeholder plans and assess whether they aligned with the provincial plan.

The Deputy Ministers' Committee on Emergency Management is responsible for reviewing the Provincial Emergency Management Plan, and recommending it for approval by the Minister responsible. By July 2020, the Agency has submitted the updated Plan to the Deputy Ministers' Committee on Emergency Management. It expects the updated Plan to be approved in late 2020-21.

Periodically and formally confirming key stakeholder emergency plans align with the Provincial Emergency Management Plan provides some assurance there will be a consistent overall approach. It also affirms key stakeholders are prepared to deliver on the roles which they have been assigned in the event of a provincial emergency.