

Performance Audit of the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency: Resource Planning for Wildfire Response

Why It Matters

In recent years, the size, frequency, and impact of wildfires has grown significantly. Robust resource planning helps maintain readiness even during high wildfire activity seasons.



Why We Did This Audit

Effective wildfire response depends on having the right equipment, personnel, and supplies available at the right time and in the right location.

The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency relies on key resources such as firefighters and aircraft but has not determined optimal resources ahead of each wildfire season, increasing costs, delays, and reliance on contracted resources.

What We Found



We found the **Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency needs to analyze the effectiveness of its wildfire resource use, including timeliness and cost-benefit of contracted resources.**

It neither assesses costs nor consistently tracks when contracted resources are requested and received—we found it took an average of **15 days for contracted personnel like firefighters to arrive and deploy to fires in 2025.**

Key Facts and Figures

- Actual variable wildfire costs exceeded the Agency's initial budget by more than \$70 million in each of the last three years.
- In 2025, the Agency spent approximately \$26.3 million (2024: \$1.9 million) on contracted resources obtained through mutual aid agreements.
- An additional 916 wildfire personnel and 12 aircraft contracted through mutual aid agreements in 2025 (2024: 112 personnel; 3 aircraft). Those contracted personnel cost two to five times more than Agency firefighters.
- In 2025, short-term helicopter contracts averaged \$3,400/hour—costing about 35% higher than its eight long-term contracts—suggesting a potential savings of around \$500,000 by securing an additional long-term helicopter contract.
- 37 aircraft maintenance engineers required, with 31 positions filled in 2025.
- Two air tankers grounded in November 2024 due to major deficiencies and unavailable for the 2025 wildfire season (with return expected by July 2026). One additional air tanker unavailable for the start of 2026 season—maintenance delay affected by aircraft maintenance engineer vacancies.

We Made 11 Recommendations

The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency needs to:

- **Develop robust resource plans (i.e., optimal resources, staff recruitment and retention, capital asset renewal and replacement) for wildfire response.** For example, by strategically managing capital assets like aircraft and IT systems, the Agency can minimize downtime, reduce maintenance costs, and extend its assets' service life.
- **Prepare its annual budget based on resource plans** and include all expected wildfire response costs.
- **Set and monitor an initial-attack success measure** showing the extent of wildfires kept below 10 hectares in size, a key indicator of effective wildfire suppression.
- **Work with communities identified as having higher wildfire risk to make sure community wildfire preparedness plans exist.**
- The Agency also needs to work with the Ministry of Finance to revisit the funding model for wildfire operations, monitor and report to its Board on the implementation of recommendations from formal wildfire season reviews, and centrally track firefighter training completion.