



FIRE SERVICE OUTSIDE OF MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES

**INFORMATION FOR
RESIDENTS**

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INTRODUCTION

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is engaging residents on Highway 3 and Highway 4 (Ingraham trail) to develop an appropriate approach in response to the City of Yellowknife's recent decision to reduce fire services in these locations. MACA intends to engage area residents and seek input on a desired and appropriate level of service, and how that service could be established and funded. Once completed, the GNWT will update area residents on findings and outcomes.

OBJECTIVES

1. To provide clarity on the current level of service, risk and financial implications of service delivery, fire prevention and protection options for residents, and accurate information surrounding GNWT taxes, lease fees, insurance coverage, and mortgages.
2. To seek input on an appropriate level of fire safety and what level of service residents along Highways 3 and 4 would support.

BACKGROUND

Fire safety is everyone's responsibility. All residents are expected to take necessary precautions to prevent fires and protect their property, including ensuring adequate insurance coverage, understanding what hazards are present, and taking action(s) necessary to reduce risks to their personal safety, property and belongings.

Fire services are under the authority of community governments and it is their decision as to whether they extend fire (or any other) services outside of their boundaries.

In the fall of 2020, the City of Yellowknife defined their level of service for fire protection and decided to limit structural fire protection services on Highway 3 and Highway 4 (Ingraham Trail) beginning April 1, 2021.

The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs' (MACA) role is to work with community governments to build local fire service capacity. Similar to other jurisdictions, the GNWT does not provide structural fire protection services anywhere in the NWT.

In working with the City of Yellowknife, it has become clear that the current level of risk and the financial impact of extending fire service outside of municipal boundaries make the current level of service unsustainable. The City of Yellowknife's decision to limit service is a direct reflection of that reality. The City has indicated that providing these services along Highways 3 and 4 stretches available resources too thin, ultimately leaving citizens less protected. Barriers also exist surrounding authority to recover costs for delivering fire service along Highways 3 and 4.

Opinions vary as to what fire service on the Ingraham Trail means in terms of fire protection outcomes. With the time it takes to travel from the fire department in Yellowknife to properties outside of the municipal boundaries, there is no reasonable expectation of saving structures. Due to the structural risks, it is not possible for fire fighters to enter burning structures to save lives after a certain amount of time has passed. The fire service takes a defensive approach after arrival to prevent further spread of fire. The current fire response only applies to those properties with road access adequate for emergency vehicles.

The reduction in fire service will alter the City of Yellowknife's response to reported structural fires. The MOU with ENR calls for a fire response to structural fires at discretion of the City and only if there is a risk of spread to the wildland. In essence, there will be no firefighting response during specific environmental conditions, such as winter and times of increased precipitation, because the risk of the fire spreading to the wildland is reduced. During times of increased wildfire risk, a response would be discretionary. There is no impact to the delivery of other highway emergency services currently being provided by the City's Fire Division.

The establishment or expansion of fire services come with a significant financial commitment as well as taking time to implement. No GNWT funding source is available to support the necessary infrastructure, apparatus, equipment and manpower associated with continuing or establishing fire response services for properties outside of community boundaries. Available options for funding services outside community boundaries that the GNWT could pursue include taxation and/or a fee for service arrangement. In addition, a plebiscite for affected residents along Highways 3 and 4 may need to be facilitated to come to an agreement on the best course of action.

We have heard many differing points of view and suggestions on this topic. MACA wants to hear what area residents want and expect regarding fire prevention and protection, and how it should be managed. Understanding area resident concerns, MACA intends to engage area residents and seek input on a desired and appropriate level of service, and how that service could be established and funded. MACA also intends to ensure good information about best practices is available to keep properties safe, including providing advice and guidance on actions residents can take to reduce the risk of fire and to prevent loss.

Role of Municipal and Community Affairs

MACA's role is to work with communities to build local fire service capacity in response to reported fires. MACA does not provide fire services anywhere in the NWT.

Role of Community Governments

Community governments have the ability under existing GNWT legislation, bylaws, and policies to determine surrounding the delivery of fire services outside of their community boundaries including determining how to provide and charge for providing those services outside.

Cross Jurisdictional Research

From an administrative standpoint, regionalization in conjunction with MOUs appears to be the most common trend developing to support fire protection services in unincorporated areas.

Provincial and Territorial governments are assisting by ensuring mechanisms such as legislation capture the means for community governments to establish agreements to extending services and recover costs. Provincial and Territorial Governments also provide oversight to ensure that those forming agreements have the response capacity to assist neighboring communities responsibly and safely and are providing other forms of support.

Service Agreements or MOUs are established between residential entities (hamlets/villages/areas) and community governments that possess the capacity to extend fire services. Residents receiving services bear the costs associated with the service provided. These fees may be contained in agreements, MOUs, bylaws, or taxes that provide the mechanism for collecting the funds.

Where a tax or other means of collection to pay for services has been refused by residents, structural fire response services are not in place and associated losses are borne by area residents and/or the insurance industry.

Consultation

Consultation with the Yellowknife's Dene First Nations (YKDFN) may be required prior to any legislative solutions or establishment of any agreements on traditional lands being considered. MACA will keep residents informed of necessary actions as we continue to move forward.

CONCERNS AND OTHER FACTORS

Insurance

MACA has reviewed concerns expressed by residents related to their insurance coverage. The Department understands that insurance coverage already considers structures in rural locations as not receiving fire protection service and applicable insurance rates apply (regardless of a City response). It is strongly recommended that residents review their individual insurance policy with their provider, so they fully understand their policy's limitations and to ensure they have adequate coverage for their property and belongings.

Mortgages

MACA's understanding is that the absence of fire protection services outside of community boundaries has no impact of resident property mortgages. However, it is strongly recommended that owners discuss their individual circumstances with their respective financial institution to validate this view.

GNWT Taxes

Structural fire response services have not been considered. Residents of Highways 3 and 4 fall under the General Tax Area (GTA); property taxes in the GTA help pay for items such as roads and maintenance. Property taxes currently do not cover fire services. A plebiscite for residents receiving fire services may be necessary if taxes are considered a means of collecting fees.

Property Lease Payments

Leases in rural areas are contracts with residents where the Department of Lands provides an exclusive right to a parcel of land in exchange for an annual fee. Terms and conditions apply to leases, but there is no service function associated with them. MACA understands, therefore, that the lack of fire services for structures will not impact leasing agreements.

LEVEL OF SERVICE

MACA has developed levels of service for fire protection that communities may choose to adopt depending on local risk and capacity. Fire service levels range from prevention based involving scene safety and security to higher risk professional level which may involve actions such as interior firefighting and rescue operations. All fire ground related decisions and activities are based on response time, incident risk assessment, member training, available resources, and other circumstantial factors that are considered by fire department officials.

Each level of service has progressively higher levels of complexity relating to safety requirements, responsibility, risks, along with increased costs.

The Yellowknife Fire Division is currently operating at a level 4 – Professional Firefighting Service. In regards to structural fire responses along highways 3 & 4, Yellowknife applies a defensive operation (level 2) due to safety factors related to fire growth associated with response times and unknown building construction. This prevents exposing firefighters to unnecessary risk.

A description of the levels of service available to communities is provided below. In addition to these levels, it is recommended that every community adopt a local public fire safety education program.

Level 1: Basic (Prevention Based)

This level of service provides responders with the necessary training and skills to keep residents safe during fire events that have progressed beyond small manageable fire incidents. Scene safety and security is applied where no firefighting level of service exists.

- Basic scene safety & security training to conduct hazard assessments, incident scene management, and personnel accountability.
- Note: fire suppression activities are not conducted at this level.

Level 2: Standard (Defensive - Level I,II,III)

This level of service involves a necessity for the appointment of key administrative positions, a bylaw that outlines authority and responsibilities, infrastructure, equipment, personnel, firefighter training, standard operating procedures, preventative maintenance program, and an appropriate budget to develop and maintain the service in alignment with the NWT Safety Act and Regulations and the Workers Safety and Compensation Commission Firefighters Code of Practice.

- Basic training to conduct fire suppression activities from a defensive posture only.
- Duties are performed from the exterior of the structure and away from areas that may be immediately dangerous to life & health (IDLH).
- Defensive Level II training includes safe response, scene security and exposure protection activities.
- Defensive Level III training is required prior to engaging in proximity structural firefighting activities.

Defensive Operations: Actions that are intended to control a fire by limiting its spread to a defined area, avoiding the commitment of personnel and equipment to dangerous areas.

Level 3: Advanced (Offensive)

This level of service incorporates all the elements of Level 2 with increased safety requirements in each of the critical areas established under the defensive level of service.

- Training to conduct fire suppression activities from a defensive or offensive posture.
- Advanced firefighter training is required prior to engaging in offensive / interior operations.

Offensive Operations: Involves the assignment of a team of firefighters to enter a structure and attempt rescue and fire suppression activities.

Level 4: Professional (NFPA 1001 certification)

This level of service includes all structural firefighting skills and knowledge. It also incorporates certification in other specialized areas such as hazardous materials and vehicle extrication.

- Training to conduct fire suppression activities from a defensive or offensive posture.
- Training may include additional/specialty service.
- All NFPA 1001 training modules must be completed for professional firefighter certification.

PROPOSALS CONSIDERED

Extending City of Yellowknife Fire Service

Any extension of City services outside its community boundaries must be authorized by the City Council. Reducing the City of Yellowknife's risk and liability associated with continuing the current level of fire service would involve new infrastructure, equipment, apparatus, personnel, and a means to recover the costs associated with the delivery of services provided.

Preliminary estimates associated with continuing the current level of service are \$1.7 million start-up costs plus an additional \$1.2 million annually. These fees would be divided amongst residents that have properties located along Highways 3 and 4 where service could be provided. Not all properties on Highways 3 and 4 can be accessed by fire service vehicles. The City would need to determine which roadways it is willing to respond along. Travel distance restrictions may also be applied, thereby eliminating some accessible properties.

MACA has estimated that fees associated with delivering fire services to these areas would apply to approximately 300 residents along the Ingraham Trail and Highway 3. Based on 300 properties being able to receive service, these fees would be approximately \$5,666 in the first year and \$4,000 in each subsequent year. These figures are subject to change depending on the number of accessible properties as well as any changes that the City makes to the estimate.

The annual fee per property would not cover the costs related to a specific incident response. Response fees charged to residents for specific incidents are tied directly to the resources demands of the incident. In addition to capital purchases and personnel costs are response costs associated with the delivery of services outside of the community. Fees for fire responses outside Yellowknife municipal boundaries are applied in accordance with the City's Fees & Charges By-law:

- \$1500 + \$2.00/km + \$500 first 2 hours + \$200 each additional 2 hours + applicable overtime costs for off duty firefighters to be called back into work to maintain City emergency services and assist with the response.

These fees would be much higher if the City pursued full cost recovery. The Yellowknife Fire Department does not charge back a prorated amount for equipment, vehicle, or materials replacement. No charges are applied for use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and firefighting equipment, or damage to apparatus. The current \$2.00 per km charge is the prorated fuel cost for travel. Firefighting foam usage depends on the size of the fire and/or exposures. The cost per pail is over \$250; the historical application is an average of 2 - 4 pails per fire event.

Extending Dettah Fire Services

The Dettah Fire Department has not yet progressed to a stage where the fire department can safely respond to active fires. The Dettah Fire Department is currently at a fire prevention level of service; fire response activities are carried out by the Yellowknife Fire Department. MACA continues its efforts in the provision of support and guidance to build fire service response capacity within the community. Although this option may be considered in the longer term, it is not recommended at this time.

Extending GNWT Airport Firefighting Services

The principal objective of the Yellowknife Airport (YZF) Fire Division is to provide emergency response services to address the safety of persons on board an aircraft or on the ground if they are endangered for any reason in the event of an aircraft emergency at the airport. The airport's existing resources are required and designed to meet the minimum requirements of the Canadian Aviation Regulations (CARS). YZF is not mandated nor resourced to provide structural fire coverage outside of its facilities. Considering such a change would have significant operational and cost implications.

Extending Wildland Firefighters Services

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) has neither the mandate nor trained resources to do structural firefighting. ENR's wildfire firefighting positions are generally staffed for 13 weeks of the year, leaving 39 weeks of the year without coverage as threats of wildland fires is diminished.

Creating a Fire Department on the Ingraham Trail

Delivery of fire services to remote areas is complex and positive outcomes are challenging to achieve. All NWT communities are challenged with the delivery of fire services. Numerous considerations are involved in establishing any fire protection service including 24-7 access to trained volunteers, equipment, and a storage facility for all equipment. There would also need to be a structure put in place to manage many aspects including; the hiring, supervision and training of personnel as well as the operation and maintenance of the facility and equipment. A fire department on the Ingraham Trail would not adequately address concerns for structures along Highway 3 or other remote areas in the NWT, and as such it is viewed ineffective and cost prohibitive.

The development and expansion of fire protection services is complex and comes with a significant financial commitment as well as taking time to implement. No GNWT funding source is available to support the necessary infrastructure, apparatus, equipment and manpower associated with continuing or establishing fire response services for properties outside of community boundaries. Available options for funding services outside community boundaries include taxation and/or a fee for service arrangement.

Roles and Responsibilities

Community Governments have an integral role in providing programs and services which are essential to good community life and protecting residents from the threat of fire. An important first step in the process is to assess the community's fire protection needs and based on local risk and capacity. An action plan can then be developed which outlines priority initiatives and a clear path towards meeting the community's fire protection goals. The department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) supports communities with evaluating programs and services, action planning, and establishing critical components for a safe, effective, and sustainable fire service.

FIRE SAFETY MEASURES

Fire protection includes all measures taken to reduce the burden of fire on the quality of life, such as fire prevention, fire detection, fire suppression, built-in fire protection systems, planning, and applying building codes.

Safety on our roads and outside of our established communities has long been a concern for residents. In order to make NWT safer, the GNWT and community governments must continue in their collaboration to finding solutions to the unique challenges of living and travelling outside of municipalities in the NWT. Residents also have a role to play in understanding fire risks and how to mitigate them.

There are many remote locations across the NWT and Canada where structural fire response is not possible as it is viewed as being cost prohibitive. In these cases, residents are encouraged to take action(s) in preventing fires by putting measures in place that that prevent fires, provide early notification and evacuation in the event of a fire, and protect property where safe to do so.

MACA intends to offer additional information and support to area residents regarding fire prevention and protection efforts they can take. Working together to understand fire risks and how to implement critical fire safety measures will help limit losses and protect NWT residents from the threat of fire.

FIRE SAFETY RESOURCES

Below are links to some fire safety and prevention resources that are relevant to many rural property owners.

1. [FIRE SMART RESOURCES](#)
2. [NFPA FIRE SAFETY TIP SHEETS](#)

Safety Systems & Planning

- [Smoke Alarms](#)
- [Carbon Monoxide Safety](#)
- [Escape Planning](#)
- [Home Safety Survey](#)

Appliance Safety

- [Generator Safety](#)
- [Propane Safety](#)
- [Portable Heaters](#)
- [Wood Pellet Stoves](#)

Seasonal Safety

- [Winter Safety Tips](#)
- [Wildfire Risk Reduction](#)
- [Campfire Safety](#)

Common Hazard Safety

- [Heating Safety](#)
- [Smoking Safety](#)
- [Cooking Safety](#)
- [Grilling Safety](#)
- [Electrical Safety](#)
- [Candle Safety](#)
- [Oily Rags Safety](#)
- [Outdoor Electrical Safety](#)

DEFINITIONS

Engagement

A two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit. In the context of this document, it refers to the GNWT seeking feedback from Highway 3 and 4 residents regarding fire services outside of Yellowknife municipal boundaries.

Plebiscite

The direct vote of all the members of an electorate on an important public question. In the context of this document, it refers to a vote from the affected residents of Highways 3 and 4 on whether or not to accept tax implications associated with the delivery of fire services.