Community Planning Guide for Re-Entry after an Evacuation

Government of the Northwest Territories

NWT Emergency Management Organization

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Introduction

Background

One of the key principles of the Northwest Territories (NWT) Emergency Management Plan is that it is based on the principle of *escalating responsibilities from the "bottom up" with the intent of resolving the emergency at the lowest possible level."* This is because communities know their needs best.

However, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), through the NWT Emergency Management Organization, provides coordination and support to local authorities. This guide is intended to assist local authorities as they prepare for residents to re-enter their community after a disaster event.

Purpose

The purpose of this Re-entry Guide is to provide local authorities with a series of planning considerations to

assist communities in developing their own re-entry plans to facilitate the safe return of residents to their homes once it is deemed safe to do so. It is not intended as a substitute for a community specific plan.

Re-entry plans should be addressed as part of a community's Emergency Plan. However, each community and every disaster will present its own specific set of circumstances and pre-written plans must be adjusted to an actual emergency situation.

Legislation

The authorities and responsibilities for local, and territorial government in emergencies is established by the *Emergency Management Act.*

- **Download the legislation:** https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/emergency-management/emergency-management.a.pdf

Planning context

These best practices are in-line with the GNWT NWT Emergency Plan.

- **View the plan:** https://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/sites/maca/files/resources/nwt_emergency_plan.pdf

Updates

These checklists may be updated from time-to-time to reflect best practices.

Trigger for Re-Entry to Community After an Evacuation

While the trigger for re-entry will be different for each community and each type of disaster, re-entry should only occur when the Local Emergency Management Organization determines that it is safe to return. Generic plans for re-entry should be in place for review prior to an evacuation.

The decision to re-enter may be based on information provided by a number of agencies including:

- Elected Officials
- Senior Administrative Officer/Band Manager
- Emergency Management Staff
- Local Emergency Social Services Staff
- Community and Regional Planners
- Law Enforcement, Fire/Rescue and Emergency Medical Services, Public Health and Safety Personnel
- Public Information Officer / Communications
- Public works
- Transportation providers
- Supporting social service agencies and volunteer organizations

- Neighbouring jurisdictions
- First Nations
- School Board(s)
- Industry
- Utilities / Critical Infrastructure Stakeholders
- Health Authorities
- Environmental Authorities
- Special Interest Groups (eg corrections facilities, livestock producers)
- Regulatory bodies (eg Transport Canada)
- Provincial and Federal Partners

Communications

Throughout the re-entry process, timely, accurate and consistent communication to residents is crucial. Local authorities should provide regular updates that are accurate, thorough and coordinated to ensure residents are informed and to dispel rumours.

If available, use of TV, radio, social media, message boards and briefings at evacuation centres can all play a part in keeping all affected parties informed.

Printed literature in the form of brochures or handouts can also be produced to provide residents and businesses with information.

The appointment of an information officer dedicated solely to this task will greatly assist in this process.

Information to be communicated to communities should include:

- How and when re-entry will begin

- If a staged re-entry is required, and when will different groups be allowed to enter the evacuated area and reasons why others are excluded

- Transportation restrictions

- What the re-entry routes are and if control of these routes has been established

- Location of any Welcome Centres

- Safety considerations, such as how to access disaster assistance and the use ofpersonal protective equipment

- Any services unavailable or changed

- If homes have been destroyed or damaged, the impacted homeowners should be notified prior to any announcement of re-entry

- Guidance on re-entering homes, including specific information should be available about restoring of utilities, disposal of spoiled food, etc.

Re-entry Planning

Planning for and re-entry into a disaster area is likely to occur in three main stages:

Pre re-entry (Conditions Setting)

- Stage 1 - Scan of Damages
- Stage 2 - Restoration of ServicesRe-entry
- Stage 3 - Community Re-entry

The timescale between stages will vary depending on a number of factors including:

- The size of the community,
- The type and complexity of the emergency
- Location of the community

Stage 1 – Scan of Damages

Find the checklist for this stage: Appendix A

Stage 1 of Re-entry planning is scanning damages to the community. During this stage access should be restricted to agencies and private service providers with key roles in scanning the damage. It is the responsibility of each local authority to determine the minimum level of service required prior to permitting re-entry to the community.

To assist with the recovery phase of an emergency or disaster, it is important to accurately document any damage at all stages of the re-entry procedures.

Initially, resources should be dedicated to providing a scan of the damages and safety planning. Areas for consideration may include:

- **Structures -** An approach should be introduced to assess all structures for safe access and a system implemented for easy identification of condition (For example - red card for uninhabitable, green cards for habitable).

- **Water and Wastewater Services -** All water and wastewater services should be inspected for damage and connectivity to structures. All source water intakes, water treatment plants, reservoirs, water distribution lines, sanitary lines, wastewater treatment plants, as well as storm water collection and outfall must all be inspected, repaired and certified to safe conditions. The availability of water and whether it is potable must be known and shared with service providers entering the area at this stage

- **Air Quality Conditions -** Information about outdoor air quality, particularly when an active fire may still be present in the region, may be provided by the NWT Office of the Chief Public Health Officer (Health and Social Services) or Environment and Climate Change Canada.

  - **For public health advisories:** https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/advisories
  - **For air quality advisories:** https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/pages/provincial_summary/nt_e.html

Smoke and other contaminants (e.g., oil and gas release) that may have impacted or caused a poor or hazardous outdoor air quality condition may also penetrate into buildings. Service providers returning to buildings which may have been subjected to poor air quality events should enter buildings with caution, or considerhaving them pre-inspected before re-entry depending on the reason for evacuation.

- **Gas and Electric -** All gas and electric lines and facilities should be inspected by responsible utilities service providers and status established

- **Access Routes -** A hazard assessment of all transportation routes and associated infrastructure must take place

- **Telecommunications -** Voice and data lines, towers and stations should be restored

- **Accommodation / Food -** Consideration should also be given to the availability of accommodation and food for contractors, if required

- **Solid waste -** Consideration of where and how debris (solid or liquid) will be stored, transported and disposed of. ***Secondary hazards (i.e., intrusion of wildlife, infectious disease, proliferation of rodents, flies or other insects) are more likely if wastes are not considered and controlled early in planning***

Stage 2 – Restoration of Services

Find the checklist for this stage: Appendix B

Stage 2 of Re-entry is the restoration of services required in a community in order to enable safe, sustainable living to an acceptable level. This new level of service is not likely to be at the same level that services were BEFORE the evacuation.

These necessities represent the bare minimum; full restoration will begin as soon as practicable. This list is not prioritized.

- Medical Facilities – the minimum level of health services required will need to be definedby the health authority

- Emergency Services (Fire, Police, Ambulance, 911)

- Water system - functional and able to deliver water; under a boil water advisory if necessary

- Sewage - collection and treatment system is functioning

- Garbage - collection and treatment system is functioning

- Storm water collection and discharge

- Gas and Electric - Restoration of gas and electric facilities

- Communications - Restoration of communications (voice and data)

- Lighting and traffic signals

- Public Works - Restoration of the public works operations centres, landfill, and waste collection program. The waste collection program should include a specific plan for disposal of decaying garbage, electronics, large amounts of construction and vegetation debris and household hazardous waste.

- Critical Retail - In this context, critical retail consists of a minimum number and types of grocery stores, pharmacies and gas stations that are required to support re-entry. Restoration of these businesses will be done under the control of their owners/managers and will include disposal of any spoiled products, debris, or damage.

- Banking - Facilities should be available for all residents to have access to banking and cash services

- Daycare/education facilities

Stage 3 - Community Re-entry
Find the checklist for this stage: Appendix E

During Stage 3, considerations should be given to the size and demographics of the evacuated population.

With larger scale re-entry plans it is considered a best practice to establish Welcome Centres – a central meeting or arrival space for individuals to get information and support they need from government authorities to safely re-enter the community.

Welcome Centres can also act as a centralized facility for non-government organizations and faith communities.

Information available at the Welcome Centre should include:

- Status of water systems, including quantity and safety of drinking water, ability to use wastewater and storm water systems, the location and access to waste disposal services

- Clean-up procedures and the resources available to assist.

- 'Clean-up Kits' can be made available for individuals or businesses returning to their property.es.

- Psychosocial assistance that is available

- Health and Safety advice

- Insurance advice

- Communications access (Voice, data, internet)

- Where to get updates on weather conditions, outdoor air quality conditions, or flood/forecast information (if applicable)

Not everyone will visit Welcome Centres; therefore, it is key to ensure that all available information is provided via as many communications modes as available – i.e., websites, radio, social media, etc.

Appendix A: Considerations for Stage 1 – Scan of Damages and Safety Assessment

Service	Point of Contact and telephone #/email	Additional Information
Structural assessments		
Assessment of Hazardous Material		
Utilities - Gas		
Utilities - Electric		
Utilities - Water		
Utilities - Sewage		
Access to all transportation modes		
Cellular / landline Communications infrastructure		
Air Quality Condition		
Communications Plan		
Control of entry identified		
Storm Water Management Systems		

Appendix B: Considerations for Stage 2 – Restoration of Services

Service	Point of Contact and telephone #/email	Additional Information
Health Services		
Emergency Services		
Utilities - gas		
Utilities - electric		
Utilities - water		
Utilities - sewage		
Public Health inspectors		
Critical retail (eg. grocery stores, pharmacies, etc)		
Banking		
Daycare/educational facilities		
Other		

Appendix C: Considerations for Stage 3 – Community Re-entry

Service	Point of Contact and telephone #/email	Additional Information
Welcome Centre or muster point established		
Information Packs available		
Key NGO's available		
Information on condition of homes available		
Insurance Information/personnel available		
Available communications (computer internet access)		
Faith communities available		
Mental Health Services available		
Information on weather, air or water conditions as applicable		
Other		

Appendix D: Suggested Contents for "Clean-up Kit'

- 5 Litre Bucket

- Mop

- Long handled broomHand brush

- Cleaning fluid/detergent

- Sponges

- Heavy duty garbage bags

- Disposable Gloves

- Work gloves

- Dust particulate masks

- Safety Glasses

- Any other equipment deemed necessary or useful to the specific incident

Appendix E: Contact Information

Health centres
https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/hospitals-and-health-centres

Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority
Website: https://www.nthssa.ca/en

**Hay River Health and Social
Services Authority**
Website: https://www.hrhssa.org/

Northwest Territories Power Corporation

Website: https://www.ntpc.com/

Outages: https://www.ntpc.com/safety-outages/outages

Phone: 1-(800) 661-0855 | (867) 874-5200

Northland utilities

Website: https://www.northlandutilities.com/

Outages: https://www.northlandutilities.com/en-ca/outages-emergencies.html

Phone: 1-800-264-5313