



The Conference Board  
of Canada



## Forewarned and Forearmed

The Calgary Emergency Management Agency and the  
2013 Flood

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## Origins and Scope

- In late 2013, the City of Calgary, through the Calgary Emergency Management Agency (CEMA), asked the Conference Board of Canada to conduct an independent review of its performance during the 2013 flood.
- Our report limits itself primarily to the two-week State of Local Emergency (SOLE) that was announced on 20 June 2013 and ended 4 July 2013.
- This report covers best practices which need to be maintained and recommendations for improvement, based on our research.



## Methodology

### 1. Literature Review

- Review performance against the challenges and lessons learned from previous large-scale emergencies;

### 2. Analysis of 2005 Recommendations

- Review the City of Calgary's 2005 flood report and compare its recommendations with internal CEMA documentation and media coverage of the 2013 flood;



## Methodology

### 3. Interviews

- 40 officials from NGOs and the public and private sectors, many of whom were present at the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) during the flood or held critical positions.
- Interview questions focused on a variety of topics, including:
  - ✓ The role of the new Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)
  - ✓ The CEMA Model and the Incident Command System (ICS)
  - ✓ Crisis communications and social media
  - ✓ The role of volunteers
  - ✓ Challenges and opportunities



## Best Practices – The EOC and the Media

1. Having a strong EOC capacity is crucial for enhancing strategic coordination, developing a common operating picture, and facilitating line-of-sight communications among stakeholders.
2. The success of tying the media into the EOC underlines the media's indispensable role in crisis management. It enabled the City to leverage strong leadership, speak with one voice, and reassure the public.



## Best Practices – Recovery and Repatriation

3. Starting recovery immediately and matching its intensity to response efforts forms part of the CEMA emergency management model. This outcome-focused approach was vital in getting Calgary back on its feet.
4. Working towards the quick repatriation of evacuees and enabling their self-recovery fosters a positive mindset, builds civic pride, and turns them into responders.



## Best Practices – Innovation and Leadership

5. Crisis is the mother of innovation and grassroots organizations, such as YYCHelps, were instrumental during the flood in building on-the-fly tools that empowered citizens to clean up their communities.
6. The unity of effort during the 2013 flood was facilitated by working towards a common objective and strong leadership that championed outcomes, transparency, and the public's immediate needs over bureaucratic process.



## Best Practices – Training and Investing

7. CEMA's successful response to the 2013 flood was enabled by a commitment to continuous training and exercising. Although an emergency never unfolds by the book, preparedness lets you be two steps ahead once a real emergency scenario starts to unfold.
8. Considering Calgary's geographic vulnerabilities and the financial damage incurred during the 2013 flood, continuing investments in preparedness would make for sound risk management.





## Recommendations – Mandates and Resources

1. The EOC should enhance communications in a crisis on why agencies are brought in, what their mandate is, what they bring to the table, and what they can and cannot do.
2. Information flows with the province need to be further calibrated in terms of municipal versus provincial crisis responsibilities. A better information-sharing conduit with the private sector on available resources is also recommended.



## Recommendations – Preparedness and Volunteers

3. The City of Calgary should continue to advance private sector preparedness through business education and the formalizing of business continuity plans (BCPs) and emergency response plans (ERPs).
4. The City of Calgary should move to develop a comprehensive volunteer framework that can build a skill inventory to match people's skill sets with the right jobs.



## Recommendations – Mental Health

5. The City of Calgary should prioritize the mental and physical health of EOC officials and first responders. During the flood, frayed nerves, “tired personalities,” and extreme stress had a negative impact on the overall work environment.



## Concluding Thoughts

1. The future is uncertain. We cannot and should not expect similar outcomes without continuing investment in emergency preparedness.
2. There is a need to ensure that best practices are maintained and so that they remain top of mind in an emergency.
3. Calgary's flood response was facilitated by well-trained professionals, outcome-focused leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and the overall resilience of its citizens.

## Concluding Thoughts





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