



Canadian Volunteer Fire Services Association Annual Report 2009/2010

Presented on September 11th 2010 at the AGM, Ottawa

The National President & Director for Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador

Presented by: Martin E. Bell, CMG, EMD-Q
Firefighter/Paramedic

This report has been released in Inuktitut to reflect the language of our northern membership, French and English to meet the needs of our remaining membership. Firefighting is one of the "essential services" provided by governments to protect people from danger. Naturally, firefighters carry out firefighting and fire prevention activities (as their name suggests), but they also assist in other emergencies. When I suggest that the service may be provided by governments, that does not mean that governments always pay the costs to provide the service, but only over see its operation in some manner. **In most cases in Canada, volunteers respond to fire and rescue calls, whenever required, at any time of day or night.** Volunteers meet on a regular basis to train and practice for fires and emergencies. The members of a fire station form a closely knit family; training, learning together, socializing on many occasions and keeping each other safe during an emergency. They also hold regular jobs in various segments of the community. Often, the local community is unaware how the service is provided or who provides it. I have experienced first-hand the passion of the people involved in the fire service and have come to admire their commitment and determination.

The **Canadian Volunteer Fire Services Association (CVFSA)** has been the national voice of the volunteer fire service since 1999. With more than one thousand active members, CVFSA represents the interests of volunteer firefighting units on future program matters that fall within federal jurisdiction and educational opportunities. The 84,314 members come from Canada's smallest rural villages, including small island communities, to large and small towns, and even some of the larger cities that use both career and volunteer firefighters to provide their needs. By joining or renewing membership in the CVFSA, volunteer firefighters are ensuring that a strong and credible national voice will continue advocating on their behalf. Our membership fees cost an individual less than a cup of coffee per month.

This is a critical time for Canada's volunteer fire services, and both the choices we do make and those that we may fail to make soon could affect the fire service delivery in Canada for decades to come. **If we continue to speak with one voice, we can maintain and even expand the understanding of how fire service is delivered in Canada.** The CVFSA does not align themselves with any political parties but does wish to speak as a united voice to all politicians to ensure the true facts are known about our most pressing needs or issues. We were pleased that on May 3rd of this year the Hon. Michael Ignatieff, pledged support for volunteer firefighters through their Rural Canada Matters platform. A future Liberal government would introduce a three thousand dollar refundable tax credit in recognition of the costs Canada's volunteer firefighters incur for their emergency public service.

Malcolm X, once said, "*The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.*" This is exactly what we in the CVFSA are doing, planning today for tomorrow and offering discussion, debate, and solutions and trying to bring top fire service educational opportunities to the smallest communities in this great nation.

This past year with the support of Commercial Solutions Inc. and their partners the CVFSA were able to offer the, "**CVFSA Lifetime Achievement Award**"®. The nominations came from all parts of Canada and we are sorry that we can only recognize one individual, but it clearly shows that there are a lot of very dedicated individuals who make up the Canadian volunteer fire service. It is a sincere pleasure that the Hon. Peter G. MacKay, Federal Minister of National Defence, will present this prestigious award here later today.

The CVFSA will continue to act as the national voice of the volunteer fire service, but we need the support of all volunteers so that we can do the best job possible. I ask volunteer firefighters to become involved with the CVFSA, it's your voice. Help make it loud and uniform so that only the best ideas go forward.

Again this year on September 11th the CVFSA will host our Annual Roundtable Discussions. The purpose of the Roundtable is to bring together the general membership of Canada's Fire Service in an open, inclusive, equitable forum. The Roundtable serves as a venue for Canada's Fire Service to have national dialogue on national fire service issues and gives the opportunity for deliberative dialogue among all stakeholders. As a result we hope to establish the annual priorities and work plan for the Association. We also hope to actively disseminate information and knowledge on fire service issues.

One of the issues that many fire service companies with MFR Teams, EMS Teams, or Fire Paramedic units had to deal with during 2009 was the H1N1 threat. In the end we had one tenth the cases that were predicted by the Canada Department of Health. There were about 421 related deaths in Canada and many were younger persons. Canada and Sweden were the most vaccinated populations of the world. This H1N1 event highlighted some problems in the Canadian health care system and we can now attempt to fix these issues before they arise again in the future.

Every day, fire officers, and firefighters make choices that affect their current and future well-being. The Canadian fire service is tragically losing about ten firefighters each and every year in both medical fatalities and horrific line-of-duty deaths. (LODD) We must all work together to achieve a stronger, healthier fire service. Let us collectively work to provide and require proper education and training for all firefighters and address important health issues. About half of all on-duty firefighter deaths are attributed to heart attacks. So not only do we need to be better educated, and trained, but we need to be healthier.

I want to reflect on this year's line-of-duty deaths. **At this year's National Firefighter's Memorial Service there will be a total of nine firefighters being honoured in the ceremony.** Two were volunteer firefighters, one was a wildland pilot, one was a military firefighter, and five were career firefighters. There has also been two additional volunteer firefighters die in Ontario but as these were quite recent, they will be honoured at next year's ceremony. Fire does not distinguish between taking the life of a career firefighter or a volunteer firefighter. A death which has occurred while fighting fires is most certainly one which we always strive to prevent with up-to-date training, technology and safety precautions. We have worked with the CFFF throughout the year to assist them in their goals and I thank their president Robert Kirkpatrick for his very professional work in leading their Association as they grow closer to their goals.

Another area that the CVFSA is planning to take a greater role in is participating in the continued development of the Canadian Communications Interoperability Plan, or CCIP. Our Association participated in the 3rd Canadian Voice Interoperability Workshop and will have several members present at the First Responder Vendor Outreach Forum. It is expected that the CVFSA will have a Standing Committee on Interoperability in place following our AGM. That committee can work directly with the CITIG defining interoperability requirements and agreements to insure the volunteer fire services' considerations are addressed in a meaningful way. That same committee will also work with Industry Canada to address

license fees and the concerns around the 150 MHz VHF band.

During this past year many national associations have felt the crunch of the global financial troubles and have noted changes in donations and financial support. Our association was no different and noted some difficulty in fund raising during this past year. This caused us to make some changes in the delivery of service and how we conducted business. **These changes resulted in insuring for a second consecutive year of incurring zero debt and a balanced budget.** Long term debts were reduced and we finished the year in a better position than previous years. Fund raising events were carried out in British Columbia and Nova Scotia. We thank all those who supported these events. We also thank our corporate sponsors for their continued support.

This year we want to establish a closer working relationship with the CATAAlliance and the CITIG as we work with those groups that support the move towards Interoperability. This year we brought in three of the top leaders in Interoperability to share their knowledge with our Round Table Discussions. Later today you will hear from Jan Wandek, all the way from Melbourne, Australia. You will also hear from Inspector Lance Valcour, R'et and Ted Harris, Ontario Ministry of Health, two of Canada's top presenters on this topic. The CVFSA will put in place a Communications Committee that will work on the Interoperability vision on behalf of the volunteer firefighters and support the CAFC in their efforts in this matter. Change is needed, change is coming, and we want to be part of it.

In the villages and communities of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, the region of Canada that I represent on the CVFSA Board, ninety percent of the fire protection is provided by volunteers. In Nova Scotia there are 278 fire departments, down from 319 last year. The fire departments that were in Halifax County are now combined into one regional department known as the Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency Services. This was a result of municipal amalgamation. Further, some fire departments in other areas of the province have combined to form one department where previously there were two or three fire districts. There are approximately 7900 volunteer firefighters. 236 of those departments are registered to provide medical first response in addition to fire related services, which is up from 187 just a year ago. This clearly shows that the services of fire departments are changing. There are also three non-traditional MFR groups that provide medical first response services but do not provide fire related activities.

This year the responsibilities at the provincial level for fire services changed. The duties of the NS Fire Marshal are now under the new, "Department of Labour and Workforce Development". Other changes included the retirement of Robert Cormier after more than 16 years as the Fire Marshal. That office is now filled by former CVFSA member, Harold Pothier, in an Acting position.

Records show two Nova Scotia firefighters received serious injuries during the past year. However, there were no line-of-duty deaths.

The biggest issue in the Nova Scotia fire service appears to be the increasing number of fire department members who may live in rural areas, but work in the towns and cities, making them unavailable to answer calls during the day. This, combined with the fact that recruitment of new members is harder to do and the higher funding requirements needed to run a fire department all adds challenges for the fire officers.

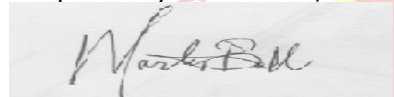
In Newfoundland and Labrador there are approximately 6200 volunteer firefighters. This year over 1.3 million dollars of new funding has been allocated by the province to enhance fire services. The funding to the matched training financial assistance for firefighters to attend training that was piloted last fiscal year will be continued in 2010-11. Issues in Newfoundland and Labrador include recruitment and retention of new volunteer firefighters. So recruitment would appear to be a common problem across this nation.

I would like to recognize James Hayter, our longstanding Board Member from Alviston, Ontario. Jim has remained steadfast in his contribution to this organization over many years and I wish to sincerely thank him for his commitment to our Board and the Canadian Volunteer Fire Services Association. Good luck in your new interests as a municipal Councillor.

This year you will notice a single candle burning in the center of the room during the Round Table Discussions. This candle has been lit in honour of Darlene Goodfellow who died in a vehicle crash. Darlene was the wife of Napanee volunteer firefighter Dave Goodfellow who was returning home from a FireFit competition in Windsor, ON. A bus carrying some of the town's volunteer firefighters and their family members rolled into a ditch along Hwy. 401 near Woodstock. Eleven other people were hospitalized following the crash in August. Our prayers and thoughts are with the Goodfellow Family and members of the Napanee Volunteer Fire Department.

While this year my term comes to a close, I feel honoured to have served as the national president of this association representing volunteers across this nation. If you choose to elect a new president I will be pleased to work with that individual in any way I can to ensure this Association continues to grow. If you see fit to elect me to another term, I will continue to provide the best leadership that I can as we continue to be a strong voice for nearly eighty five thousand men and women who serve as volunteer firefighters in Canada.

Respectfully submitted,



Martin E. Bell (National President)

Canadian Volunteer Fire Services Association

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