



Emergency Program Executive Committee Meeting
Wednesday, November 5, 2025

Zoom/Board Room (Hybrid) – 3008 Fifth Avenue, Port Alberni, BC
1:00 pm

Regular Agenda

Watch the meeting live at: <https://www.acrd.bc.ca/events/5-11-2025/7672/?catid=0>

Register to participate via Zoom Webinar at:

https://acrd-bc-ca.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_A9zdbv3fSvyMOVybrzMw-A#/registration

PAGE #

1. CALL TO ORDER

Recognition of Territories.

Notice to attendees and delegates that this meeting is being recorded and livestreamed to YouTube on the Regional District Website.

Introductions - Committee Members and Staff present in the Boardroom and via Zoom.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

(motion to approve, including late items requires 2/3 majority vote)

3. DECLARATIONS

(conflict of interest)

4. MINUTES

- a. **Emergency Program Executive Committee Meeting held May 15, 2025** 3-6

THAT the minutes of the Emergency Program Executive Committee meeting held on May 15, 2025 be adopted.

5. PRESENTATION

- a. **John Reynolds, Principal, Wynna Adriane Brown, Managing Director, Adriane Brown Group, Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan**

6. **CORRESPONDENCE FOR ACTION/INFORMATION**

7. **REQUEST FOR DECISIONS**

a. **REQUEST FOR DECISION**

7-75

Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan

THAT the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Emergency Executive Committee recommend that the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Board of Directors support the receipt and implementation of the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan as presented.

8. **REPORTS**

9. **LATE BUSINESS**

(requires 2/3 majority vote)

10. **QUESTION PERIOD**

Questions/Comments from the public:

- **Participating in Person in the Board Room**
- **Participating in the Zoom meeting**
- **Emailed to the ACRD at responses@acrd.bc.ca**

11. **ADJOURN**



Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District

MINUTES OF THE EMERGENCY PROGRAM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, MAY 15, 10:00 AM

Hybrid - Zoom/Board Room, 3008 Fifth Avenue, Port Alberni, BC

MEMBERS Mike Sparrow, Director, Electoral Area "F" (Cherry Creek)

PRESENT: Bob Beckett, Director, Electoral Area "A" (Bamfield)
Fred Boyko, Director, Electoral Area "B" (Beaufort)
Penny Cote, Director, Electoral Area "D" (Sproat Lake)
Susan Roth, Director, Electoral Area "E" (Beaver Creek)
Vaida Siga, Director, Electoral Area "C" (Long Beach)
Charles Mealey, Councilor, City of Port Alberni
Dustin Dame, Councilor, City of Port Alberni

REGRETS: Sharie Minions, Mayor, City of Port Alberni
Cindy Solda, Councilor, City of Port Alberni

STAFF PRESENT: Charlie Starratt, Regional Fire Services Manager
Karen Freethy, Protective Service Manager
Daniel Sailland, Chief Administrative Officer
Rich Taliunas, Manager of Information Technology
Kristin Kerr-Donohue, Administrative Assistant
Mike Fox, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Port Alberni

OTHERS PRESENT: Wynna Brown, Adriane Brown Group
John Reynolds, Adriane Brown Group

The meeting can be viewed on the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District website at:
<https://www.acrd.bc.ca/events/15-5-2025/>

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Administrative Assistant (AA) called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

The AA recognized this meeting is being held throughout the Nuuchahnulth territories.

The AA reported this meeting is being recorded and livestreamed to YouTube on the Regional District website.

Introductions- Committee Members and Staff present in the Boardroom and via Zoom.

2. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON/VICE-CHAIRPERSON FOR 2025

The AA conducted the election for Chairperson of the Emergency Program Executive Committee for 2025.

The AA declared Mike Sparrow to the position of Chairperson for the Emergency Program Executive Committee for 2025.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRPERSON

The AA conducted the election of Vice-Chairperson of the Emergency Program Executive Committee for 2025.

The AA declared Bob Beckett to the position of Vice-Chairperson for the Emergency Program Executive Committee for 2025.

Mike Sparrow assumed the Chair.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOVED: C. Mealey

SECONDED: P. Cote

THAT the agenda be approved as circulated.

CARRIED

4. DECLARATIONS

5. MINUTES

- a. **Emergency Program Executive Committee Meeting held on November 6, 2024**

MOVED: P. Cote

SECONDED: C. Mealey

THAT the minutes of the Emergency Program Executive Committee Meeting held on November 6, 2024 be adopted.

CARRIED

6. PRESENTATIONS

- a. **Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan Update – Adriane Brown Group**
- b. **Emergency Program Update – K. Freethy, Protective Services Manager, D. Sailland, Chief Administrative Officer, & Rich Taliunas, Manager of Information Technology**

7. CORRESPONDENCE FOR INFORMATION

a. Letter from the City of Port Alberni regarding Starlink Satellite Systems

MOVED: C. Mealey

SECONDED: F. Boyko

THAT the Emergency Program Executive Committee receive this item for information.

CARRIED

8. REQUEST FOR DECISIONS

9. REPORTS

a. Licence Agreement with Mosaic Forest Management

MOVED: C. Mealey

SECONDED: F. Boyko

THAT the Emergency Program Executive Committee receives the staff report for information.

CARRIED

10. LATE BUSINESS

11. QUESTION PERIOD

Questions/Comments from the public. The Administrative Assistant advised there were no questions or comments respecting an agenda topic from public:

- Participating in Person in the ACRD Board Room
- Participating in the Zoom webinar
- Submissions received by email at responses@acrd.bc.ca.

12. ADJOURN

MOVED: C. Mealey

SECONDED: B. Beckett

THAT this meeting be adjourned at 11:57 am.

CARRIED

Certified Correct:

Mike Sparrow,
Chairperson

Kristin Kerr-Donohue,
Administrative Assistant



To: ACRD Emergency Executive Committee

From: Karen Freethy, Protective Services Manager

Meeting Date: November 5, 2025

Subject: Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan

Recommendation:

THAT the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Emergency Executive Committee recommend that the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Board of Directors support the receipt and implementation of the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan as presented.

Desired Outcome:

For the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) to have an approved *ACRD Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan* that will provide guidance and a clear, coordinated approach to how information will be shared during emergencies across the Alberni Valley, Bamfield, and Long Beach Electoral Areas.

Summary:

The ACRD, in partnership with the City of Port Alberni, Tseshaht First Nation and Hupacasath First Nation, developed a comprehensive emergency communication strategy that provides clear direction for internal processes and fosters cross-jurisdictional and inter-agency information sharing to ensure timely, consistent, and coordinated messaging for the public across our region.

Communication is often cited as a key challenge during emergency response. The development of this plan responds to that need by providing:

- A harmonized framework for public notifications across the region;
- Guidance and clear direction for internal communication processes and coordination through the Emergency Operations Centre;
- Pre-developed key messages, graphics and templates for emergency declarations, alerts, and media updates to expedite information dissemination;
- Guidance for coordination across local governments, First Nations, provincial agencies, and emergency response organizations.

Adoption of the plan enhances our regional readiness and resilience by establishing clear, coordinated and effective communication protocols for public notification, internal operations and inter-agency collaboration.

Background:

In 2024, the ACRD partnered with the City of Port Alberni, Tseshaht First Nation, and Hupacasath First Nation on a regional application for a grant through the Community Emergency Preparedness Fund (CEPF). Following the approval of our grant application, the ACRD engaged the Adriane Brown Group to develop a comprehensive emergency communication and public notification plan and strengthen the region's emergency management capacity. This initiative aimed to enhance the timeliness, consistency, and effectiveness of information during disasters by developing communication protocols, templates, resource guides, and standard operating procedures.

In collaboration with project partners, an approach was developed to create three independent but harmonized plans that would reflect the unique needs of each government and individual emergency plan, while contributing to a unified, coordinated, regional communication and public notification strategy. As a result, the Adriane Brown Group developed three unique but aligned communication plans, resource guides and standard operating procedures for Tseshaht First Nation, Hupacasath First Nation and one that supports the emergency plan of the ACRD and City of Port Alberni.

Time Requirements – Staff & Elected Officials:

Staff will need to review this plan annually (including discussion with the Alberni Valley partners), update templates as required, and incorporate it into ongoing emergency training. Time requirements are estimated to be 30 hours per year. This time will be included within existing annual work plans.

Financial:

There is no financial impact to the work associated with adopting this plan. The development of this plan was funded entirely through the CEPF grant. Any future updates and related training will be incorporated into existing budgets.

Strategic Plan Implications:

This request supports ACRD 2024-2027 Strategic Plan with focuses on strategy 3.3: Optimize communication platforms and practices, strategy 1.4: Supporting volunteers, and strategy 2.4: Emergency management and climate adaptation.

Policy or Legislation:

The *Emergency and Disaster Management Act* stipulates that local governments are responsible for emergency management, including mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery measures and requires that local authorities consult and collaborate with First Nations on emergency management practices. The *Local Government Act* requires that services bear the cost of delivering those services. ACRD *Bylaw No. PS1012* establishes that the ACRD operates three emergency services across the region, including the Alberni Valley Emergency Service, the Bamfield Emergency Service and the Long Beach Emergency Service.

Submitted by: *Karen Freethy*
Karen Freethy, Protective Services Manager

Reviewed by: *Cynthia Dick*
Cynthia Dick, General Manager of Administrative Services

Approved by: *Daniel Sailland*
Daniel Sailland, MBA, Chief Administrative Officer



ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT
REGIONAL DISTRICT



CITY OF
PORT ALBERNI



Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District **Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan**

June 2025

A photograph of a rugged, rocky coastline. In the foreground, a narrow path winds through dark, jagged rocks. The middle ground shows a calm body of water, likely a bay or fjord, with a forested shoreline in the distance. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. A large, semi-transparent watermark reading 'DRAFT' is oriented diagonally across the center of the image.

Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge with respect and gratitude that we live and work on the traditional territory of the Nuu-chah-nulth People, who have cared for these lands and waters since time immemorial.

We honour their ongoing leadership and are committed to collaboration that respects sovereignty, builds trust, and supports culturally safe emergency communications across the region.

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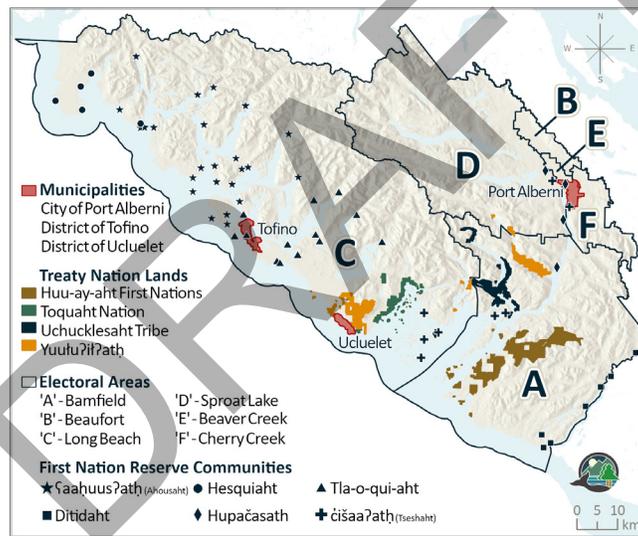
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Disclaimer

This emergency communications plan has been developed by Adriane Brown Group Inc. (ABG) in collaboration with ACRD staff. It is based on information available at the time of writing, including consultation with stakeholders and applicable standards and frameworks. The recommendations and materials are intended to support the ACRD's emergency communications readiness and are not a substitute for legal advice, operational judgment, or statutory obligations.

ABG makes no representation or warranty as to the suitability of this plan for any specific incident or context. The implementation and use of this plan, including any associated tools or templates, remain the sole responsibility of the ACRD. ABG accepts no liability for any loss, damage, or consequence resulting directly or indirectly from the use or reliance on this plan or any related documents.

Users of this plan are encouraged to seek appropriate legal, operational, and policy guidance when applying its content in practice.

Images

Photographs and maps in this plan were provided by the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, with additional images from the [Ministry of Transportation and Transit](#). All images are used for illustrative purposes. Thank you to both organizations.

Section 1: Context and program overview

Context and introduction

The Alberni-Clayoquot region faces a growing range of emergency risks, including wildfires, tsunamis, severe storms, and extended infrastructure disruptions such as highway closures and power outages. These events can impact multiple jurisdictions simultaneously, challenge local capacity, and create significant demands for clear, timely, and coordinated public information.

In this environment, effective emergency communications are critical — not only to protect public safety, but to maintain trust, reinforce leadership, and support operational response. Increasing public expectations, social media dynamics, and jurisdictional overlaps require communications systems that are proactive, inclusive, and scalable.

The *ACRD Emergency Communication Plan (ECP)*¹ provides a structured framework to guide how information is shared before, during, and after emergencies. It is rooted in the principles of the British Columbia Emergency Management System (BCEMS) and aligned with the expectations of the *Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA)*. The plan also reflects the recommendations and feedback surfaced through extensive engagement with regional stakeholders, First Nations, and emergency management partners as part of this communications project.

This plan is not intended to duplicate operational protocols or replace Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) procedures. Instead, it complements the ACRD's *Disaster and Emergency Management Plan (DEMP)* by defining the communications-specific roles, responsibilities, tools, and coordination structures that support the overall emergency response effort.

About the emergency program

The emergency program is a joint service delivered through a partnership between the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District and the City of Port Alberni. It is responsible for regional coordination of emergency preparedness, response, and recovery across:

- The City of Port Alberni
- Electoral Area "A" (Bamfield)
- Electoral Area "B" (Beaufort)
- Electoral Area "C" (Long Beach)
- Electoral Area "D" (Sproat Lake)
- Electoral Area "E" (Beaver Creek)
- Electoral Area "F" (Cherry Creek)

The program operates under the leadership of the ACRD's Emergency Program Coordinator² and reports through a regional structure that includes an Emergency Program Executive Committee and Emergency Program Leadership Group. It works closely with ACRD and City of Port Alberni leadership, elected officials, local and First Nations governments, fire departments, provincial agencies, and other partners to ensure coordinated planning, shared readiness, and unified response.

1 The "Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan," is referred to throughout as the Emergency Communication Plan (ECP) for ease of use.

2 The ACRD designates the Protective Services Manager to carry out day-to-day emergency management duties under B.C.'s Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA). In this plan, "Emergency Program Coordinator" or "EPC" is used to refer to that function.

During day-to-day operations, the program leads public education, preparedness campaigns, partner coordination, and seasonal risk communication. During emergencies, it activates an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) structure that supports site-level incident response through resource coordination, strategic planning, and public information functions — including the activation of the Information Officer (IO) role.

A core goal of the emergency program is to build resilience across the region by strengthening communications systems, reinforcing operational clarity, and ensuring that all communities — including vulnerable populations — are informed, prepared, and supported when emergencies occur.

In parallel with this plan, emergency communication plans are also being developed in collaboration with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation. While these Nations operate their own emergency programs and governance systems, they work closely alongside the ACRD emergency program during region-wide events. These plans are intentionally designed to support **mutual coordination, message alignment, and respectful information sharing** when emergencies affect shared jurisdictions or require unified public communication. This approach honours the sovereignty of each Nation while strengthening our collective ability to keep communities informed and safe.



Section 2: Purpose, scope, and guiding principles

Purpose of the Emergency Communication Plan

The *ACRD Emergency Communication Plan (ECP)* provides a clear, coordinated approach to how information will be shared with the public, elected officials, stakeholders, and partners during emergencies that affect the Alberni-Clayoquot region. It outlines how communications will be planned, authorized, delivered, and supported across multiple jurisdictions and agencies.

The plan is intended to:

- Support the health, safety, and wellbeing of residents and visitors by ensuring they receive accurate, timely, and accessible information during emergencies.
- Strengthen public confidence by reinforcing visible leadership and demonstrating preparedness.
- Support operational response by aligning communications with incident objectives, minimizing misinformation, and maintaining situational awareness across partners.
- Enhance consistent, coordinated messaging across all participating jurisdictions and partners.
- Reinforce transparency, inclusivity, and cultural safety in all emergency communications.

This plan is supported by a series of **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** and **Resource Guides** that provide operational tools, checklists, templates, and examples to assist with implementation. Together, these documents form an integrated framework to support public information coordination, message development, and emergency communications execution across the region.

This plan complements, but does not replace, operational response plans, evacuation protocols, or EOC procedures. It is one component of the ACRD's broader emergency management framework.

The importance of regional coordination

Emergencies in the Alberni-Clayoquot region often cross jurisdictional lines — affecting multiple Electoral Areas, municipalities, and First Nations at once. Effective emergency communication must reflect this reality. The emergency program's role is not only to provide information, but to help **coordinate, align, and amplify** messaging across all partners. Whether the incident is localized or region-wide, this plan ensures that residents, visitors and collaborating agencies receive consistent, timely, and credible information.

Scope

This plan applies to all communications activities undertaken by the emergency program during emergency incidents, events, or situations that:

- require activation of the ACRD Emergency Operations Centre (EOC),
- involve regional coordination of public communications by the emergency program, even when the EOC is not formally activated (i.e., monitoring mode), or
- affect multiple jurisdictions, agencies, or vulnerable populations, and necessitate joint messaging or information-sharing.

It covers emergency communications across the full cycle of response:

- **Before** (preparedness and risk messaging)
- **During** (alerting, response, and coordination)
- **After** (demobilization, recovery communications, and after-action messaging)

The plan does not apply to routine corporate communications outside of emergencies, although alignment and readiness planning are encouraged.

This plan serves the City of Port Alberni and all six Electoral Areas of the ACRD. It works collaboratively with:

- First Nations governments
- collaborating municipalities and regional districts
- provincial partners, federal agencies, and private landowners operating within or adjacent to the region

First Nations are independent jurisdictions with their own emergency management authorities. This plan recognizes their leadership, and outlines opportunities for partnership and coordination, while respecting autonomy and self-determination.

Authorities and alignment

This plan is developed under the authority of:

- the *Emergency and Disaster Management Act* (EDMA), including the requirement to support public communication, coordination, and culturally safe practices
- the *BC Emergency Management System (BCEMS)* and the Incident Command System (ICS), which provide the structural framework for the EOC and communications roles
- ACRD bylaws and agreements that establish the regional emergency program and define roles across Electoral Areas and municipal partners

The plan also aligns with:

- Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) guidance
- related ACRD plans such as the *Disaster and Emergency Management Plan*, *Emergency Support Services Plan*, and hazard-specific annexes

Guiding principles

The emergency program's approach to communications is grounded in the following principles:

- **Timeliness:** Rapid, proactive communication reduces confusion and supports public safety.
- **Accuracy and clarity:** All messaging is verified, fact-based, and written in plain language.
- **Coordination:** Communications are consistent across jurisdictions, agencies, and partners.
- **Transparency:** The emergency program communicates honestly about risks, actions taken, and what is known or unknown at each stage.
- **Inclusivity:** All communications consider the needs of First Nations, vulnerable populations, and those facing systemic barriers.
- **Cultural safety:** Communications respect and reflect the rights, identities, and sovereignty of First Nations.
- **Two-way responsiveness:** The emergency program monitors public concerns, addresses misinformation, and listens to trusted community voices.
- **Scalability:** The plan applies across a wide range of events from localized disruptions to region-wide emergencies with clear roles for each level of activation.
- **Trauma-informed approach:** Messaging avoids graphic detail, blame, or speculation, and emphasizes safety, support, and empathy.

Timely, clear, and consistent communication is essential to protecting public trust and safety.



Section 3: Communications goals, approach, and structure

Communications goals

The overarching goals of the ACRD emergency program are to:

- **Enhance regional resilience** by coordinating emergency preparedness, response, and recovery across municipal and regional jurisdictions, in collaboration with First Nations.
- **Protect public safety** by enabling consistent, well-coordinated emergency planning and incident response.
- **Support collaborative leadership** by aligning the efforts of local governments, First Nations, emergency partners, and provincial agencies during emergencies.
- **Ensure public awareness and trust** through accurate, timely, and inclusive emergency communications.
- **Comply with provincial legislation** under EDMA by developing plans, protocols, and structures that reflect risk reduction, cultural safety, and community inclusion.

The ECP is designed to align with these goals and the response priorities set out in BCEMS.

The goals of this plan are to:

- ensure the public, elected officials, and partner organizations receive accurate, timely, and actionable information before, during, and after emergencies
- reinforce public trust by providing visible, credible, and coordinated messaging that reflects leadership and readiness
- support operational response by aligning information-sharing with incident objectives and ICS structures
- minimize misinformation, confusion, and conflicting narratives through proactive communication and consistent coordination
- prioritize inclusion, accessibility, and cultural safety in all public messaging
- establish clear roles and pathways for message development, approval, and dissemination based on EOC activation levels and jurisdictional leadership

Strategic approach

The ACRD emergency program's communications approach is grounded in practical coordination, community trust-building, and operational discipline. It emphasizes:

Proactive communication

- communicate early and often — even when information is limited
- acknowledge uncertainty when necessary and commit to updates
- use plain language, visual cues, and layered messaging to improve understanding and retention

Multichannel delivery

- use a range of tools — digital, traditional, and interpersonal — to reach people where they are
- recognize the importance of redundancy and cross-channel reinforcement, especially in rural and remote areas where connectivity may be limited
- refer all communications back to a consistent source of truth: the emergency program website

Scalable coordination

- align messaging responsibilities with EOC activation levels (Monitoring Mode, Partial, and Full Activation)
- activate the Information Officer (IO) function in parallel with any EOC activation (Partial or Full)
- coordinate through Joint Information Systems (JIS) or Joint Information Centres (JIC) when multiple jurisdictions or agencies are involved

Inclusive, trauma-informed communication

- apply trauma-informed principles — avoid speculation, blame, or graphic detail
- use culturally safe language and recognize the rights and leadership of First Nations governments
- consider the needs of vulnerable populations in message formats, timing, and tone



Communications structure and audiences

Emergency communications in the ACRD operate within a multi-jurisdictional environment. Roles, responsibilities, and message flow may vary depending on the nature of the incident and which agencies are activated.

Audience type	Category	Description	Examples
Primary	Public audiences	Individuals who require clear, timely, and accessible public information before, during, and after emergencies	Residents, tourists, visitors, business owners, vulnerable populations, seasonal workers
	Media	Journalists, reporters, and broadcasters who relay information to the public and shape the public narrative	Local radio (e.g., 93.3 The Peak), AV News, CTV Vancouver Island, CBC Victoria, digital news outlets
	Elected officials	Local officials who represent the public, influence public confidence, and may be asked to speak or share information	Board chair, Mayor, Chief, councillors, elected officials, MLA, MP
Secondary	Operational audiences	Municipal staff, personnel directly involved in response, coordination, or continuity of services	EOC staff, municipal communicators, first responders, ESS volunteers
	Stakeholders	Organizations that require updates to inform their members, adjust operations, or assist in amplification	Island Health, School District 70, BC Hydro, NGOs, service clubs, large employers, post-secondary institutions
Tertiary	Partners	Jurisdictions and agencies with formal emergency roles or governance responsibilities	ACRD, City of Port Alberni, First Nations governments, EMCR, neighbouring municipalities and regional districts
	External collaborators	Individuals or groups that support outreach, provide cultural or community insight, or help amplify messaging informally	Cultural advisors, community influencers, local amateur radio groups, chambers of commerce, tourism organizations, social media admins, moderators of local Facebook or online groups

Audience categories reflect the flow of public information — from essential recipients to operational actors to informal amplifiers. Each plays a role in building trust, reaching communities, and reducing harm.

Section 4: EOC activation levels and the information function

Overview

The emergency program's communications activities are structured to align with the **BC Emergency Management System (BCEMS)** and the **Incident Command System (ICS)**. As emergencies evolve in scale and complexity, communications must also scale — from monitoring and coordination to full public information management.

During Partial Activation or Full Activation, if an incident affects shared territory or crosses jurisdictional boundaries, the Information Officer (IO) should initiate coordination with communicators from First Nations, provincial agencies, and private landowners, where appropriate. While these Nations have their own emergency communication plans, efforts should always be made to align messages, share updates, and respect parallel communication efforts through a Joint Information System (JIS) or coordinated media release process.

This section defines when and how IO function is activated, and how the emergency program adapts its communications roles, responsibilities, and outputs across three clearly defined **EOC activation levels**.

These levels are:

- Monitoring Mode
- Partial Activation
- Full Activation

Note: These levels are consistent with ICS Type 5 to Type 1 incident classifications and the EMCR response level framework. Activation decisions should consider both operational needs and public communication demands.

Monitoring Mode

Definition:

No formal EOC activation. The emergency program monitors emerging risks and maintains situational awareness.

Key characteristics:

- **Situational awareness only**
 - » the EOC is not activated
 - » emergency management staff are monitoring the situation
 - » continuous collection and assessment of information from reliable sources (e.g., BC Wildfire Service, Environment Canada, police, or utilities)
- **EOC staffing**
 - » only key emergency management personnel are involved

- » no additional departments or support staff are called in unless needed
- **Preparedness measures**
 - » plans, checklists, and contact lists are reviewed in case activation becomes necessary
 - » initial coordination with partner agencies may begin informally (e.g., heads-up calls or emails)
- **Response structure**
 - » Incident Command is currently handling routine operations and does not require additional support
 - » no immediate need for cross-agency coordination
- **Public communication**
 - » may involve monitoring public inquiries, posting updates and providing preparedness messages (e.g., social media updates or website notices)
 - » no formal emergency information releases are required
- **Policy Group notification**
 - » elected officials or senior decision-makers may be notified
- **Readiness to escalate**
 - » the situation is reviewed regularly to determine whether a partial or full activation is warranted
 - » staff may be placed on standby or pre-alerted to the possibility of activation

Communications approach

- communications is led by the jurisdiction managing the incident
- the emergency program may **amplify messaging**, offer **guidance**, or signal public awareness
- the IO function is **not formally activated** but remains on standby
- the EPC may issue an internal *monitoring notice* to elected officials, staff, key partners and First Nations
- the emergency program may also post a public “monitoring message” to acknowledge the incident and reassure the public that it is aware and tracking developments
- all public messaging in Monitoring Mode must clearly attribute the lead agency and avoid language suggesting the emergency program is coordinating the response unless that role has been formally assumed
- messaging should refer audiences to the official source of information (e.g., municipal website, BC Wildfire Service, DriveBC), and avoid rewording or rebranding content in ways that could misrepresent the emergency program’s role

Example:

Localized boil water advisory in one community with limited scope and clear operational lead.

Partial Activation

Definition:

Limited activation of the EOC to support early coordination or situational complexity. This enables information sharing, resource coordination, and interagency communication.

Key characteristics:

- **EOC is activated**
 - » the EOC is opened to support an incident that requires coordination beyond regular operations
 - » the EOC will provide resources that exceed the capacity of responding agencies
- **EOC staffing**
 - » key functions are activated, depending on the nature and scale of the incident
 - » additional municipal or regional district staff will be required to support the EOC
- **Interagency coordination begins**
 - » coordination begins between local governments, First Nations, first responders, and external agencies (e.g., BC Wildfire Service, utility providers, health authority)
- **Information management**
 - » the EOC maintains regular updates on the situation to inform leadership and collaborating agencies
- **Public information and alerts**
 - » the EOC will issue public information, advisories, or warnings through its Information Officer
 - » communication supports public awareness and preparedness
- **Policy Group notification**
 - » elected officials or senior decision-makers are notified and may be provided with regular briefings depending on the severity or potential escalation

Communications approach

- IO function is **automatically activated**
- IO assumes responsibility for regional messaging, coordination with local communicators
- formal *activation notice* is issued to partners, elected officials, and the public
- pre-established content (e.g., holding statements, update intervals) may be deployed
- briefings and situational updates initiated

Example:

Storm-caused road closure with impacts to multiple jurisdictions and public demand for timely updates.

Full Activation

Definition:

Comprehensive, multi-agency activation of the EOC with regional coordination across jurisdictions and partners.

- **EOC fully activated**
 - » the EOC is fully staffed and operational
 - » this activation level is used for emergencies that require centralized coordination across multiple agencies, jurisdictions, and sectors
 - » the EOC provides sustained support to Incident Command
 - » all requests for resources, equipment, personnel, and mutual aid are coordinated through the EOC

- » designate spokesperson(s)
- **EOC staffing**
 - » all standard EOC roles are activated and assigned
- **Multi-agency and cross-jurisdictional coordination**
 - » complex coordination is required across multiple organizations
 - » Unified Command may be established if multiple Incident Commanders are involved
- **Comprehensive information management**
 - » information flow is structured through the EOC organizational chart
- **Public information**
 - » the IO leads a proactive communication strategy
 - » media briefings, social media updates, public safety alerts, evacuation orders, and recovery messaging are regularly issued
- **Policy group engagement**
 - » regular briefings and engagement with the Policy Group
 - » strategic decisions, declarations of local emergency, and public orders may be issued in consultation with the Policy Group

Communications approach

- the full IO team deployed and co-located at the EOC
- a Joint Information System (JIS) or Joint Information Centre (JIC) may be activated
- scheduled updates, live briefings, social media monitoring, and media engagement are initiated
- consistent messaging is maintained across jurisdictions
- the EOC Director retains final message approval; IC verifies operational accuracy

Example:

Highway 4 wildfire closure or major tsunami warning where coordination and unified messaging are critical.

Information Officer (IO) function

The IO is the designated lead for public information, media relations, and stakeholder messaging during emergency incidents that involve the emergency program. The IO operates under the EOC Director and works closely with:

- Incident Commanders (ICs)
- Liaison Officers
- Operations Section Chiefs
- local government communicators
- First Nations representatives

In **Partial Activation or Full Activation**, the IO:

- is **co-located at the EOC** to maintain direct situational awareness, collaboration, and access to Command

- **leads the development and coordination** of public messaging and ensures alignment with operational objectives and partner agencies
- **advises the EOC Director** and Incident Commander on communication strategy, stakeholder considerations, message timing, and reputational risks — consistent with BCEMS principles, recognizing the IO as a key advisor within the EOC Management Team
- coordinates **approval workflows** and ensures messages reflect verified, operationally accurate information
- **monitors media pick-up, public sentiment, and online discussion**, including detecting and addressing misinformation, disinformation, or harmful rumours
- **manages media relations** and public inquiry processes, including planning interviews, preparing spokespeople, and maintaining consistency across all platforms
- **oversees notification and updates to elected officials**, working with the EOC Director to ensure timely, embargoed updates and appropriate political visibility
- **supervises Assistant Information Officers (AIOs)** assigned to locations such as Reception Centres or the Incident Command Post. These AIOs report to the IO and carry out tasks under the strategic direction of the IO
- coordinates the **logistics of message dissemination**, including use of social media, websites, public alerting tools (e.g., Voyent Alert), signage, and direct outreach

The IO function plays a strategic leadership role within the EOC Management Team. Under ICS and BCEMS, the IO is a trusted advisor — responsible for shaping communication approaches, providing insight on public information needs, and ensuring that messaging aligns with the overall objectives of the response.



Section 5: Roles, responsibilities, and reporting lines

Overview

Effective emergency communications depend on clearly defined roles, consistent reporting lines, and strong relationships within the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) structure. This section outlines the formal responsibilities of the Information Officer (IO), Assistant Information Officers (AIOs), and their working relationships with key positions in the Incident Command System (ICS).

These roles and structures align with:

- the BC Emergency Management System (BCEMS)
- the ACRD Disaster and Emergency Management Plan (DEMP)
- ICS principles governing public information
- the emergency program's operational practices and regional context

Information Officer (IO)

The IO is a member of the EOC Management Team and is responsible for leading the emergency communications function at the EOC. The IO reports directly to the **EOC Director** and works in close collaboration with the **Incident Commander (IC)** to ensure accuracy and operational alignment.

Core responsibilities:

- facilitate media relations
- develop, coordinate, and disseminate public information in support of the incident objectives
- advise the EOC Director and IC on messaging strategy, communications risks, and public engagement needs
- maintain situational awareness and recommend communications approaches appropriate to the incident level and phase
- lead message development and coordination with jurisdictions, stakeholders, and partner agencies
- manage the message approval processes in collaboration with the IC and EOC Director
- supervise AIOs and assign roles to cover operational needs (e.g., Reception Centres, Joint Information Centre, social media monitoring)
- monitor public and media sentiment; respond to rumours, misinformation, and disinformation
- coordinate internal and external communications including stakeholder briefings and elected official updates
- maintain records of messages issued, media contacts, public feedback, and key decisions for After Action Reviews

Assistant Information Officers (AIOs)

AIOs support the IO by carrying out specific communications tasks during Partial and Full EOC activation. They may be drawn from municipal or partner communications teams and should be trained in advance.

Core responsibilities:

- draft public messages or social media updates under the direction of the IO
- provide updates to stakeholders, community organizations, or elected officials
- monitor media coverage and social media channels for relevant developments and public sentiment
- support media engagement by coordinating interview logistics or technical support
- assist with updates to the emergency program website or digital platforms
- support communications coordination at Reception Centres, Joint Information Centres, or field sites
- report directly to the IO and maintain consistent messaging practices

Relationship with the Emergency Program Coordinator (EPC)

In most incidents, the ACRD's Emergency Program Coordinator (EPC) will be assigned to the **Liaison Officer** role within the EOC structure. However, due to their institutional knowledge and leadership responsibilities, the EPC may take on **enhanced coordination or advisory roles** — particularly during smaller-scale activations or when the EOC is in **Monitoring Mode**.

The Information Officer (IO) should coordinate closely with the EPC in the following ways:

- **During Monitoring Mode**, the EPC may manage early communications decisions, such as posting reassurance messages or amplifying verified updates from partner jurisdictions. In this phase, the IO is typically not yet activated but may support or advise the EPC as needed.
- In **Partial Activation or Full Activation**, when the EPC is serving as Liaison Officer or in another Command role, the IO should maintain regular coordination — especially on matters involving First Nations engagement, partner messaging, or public trust.
- The IO should also consult the EPC on communication strategies that may have reputational, political, or intergovernmental implications.

While the EPC role is not formally defined within ICS as part of the communications function, the ACRD emergency program recognizes the EPC as a key partner in shaping communications strategy — particularly during early-stage activations and in complex, multi-jurisdictional events.

Photo credit: Tareen Rayburn

Reporting relationships within the ICS structure

Role	Reports to	Coordinates with
Information Officer	EOC Director	IC, Liaison Officer, Planning Chief, Risk Management Officer, elected officials (via EOC Director)
Assistant Information Officer	Information Officer	Other AIOs, technical staff (GIS, digital media), municipal communicators

The Information Officer (IO) is a member of the EOC Management Team and does not report to any section (e.g., Planning or Operations). The IO provides communications advice and services across the EOC while maintaining independence to ensure clear, consistent public messaging and media engagement.

Relationship to other key roles

- **EOC Director:** Approves all official public messaging. Provides strategic direction to the IO and ensures alignment with overall response goals.
- **Incident Commander (IC):** Provides operational accuracy of messaging related to site-level response and approves field-specific content before IO finalizes messaging with the EOC Director.
- **Liaison Officer:** Coordinates with external agencies and First Nations governments and works with the IO to align communications with partner expectations and agreements.
- **Policy Group Liaison** (optional Command Staff role): During Partial Activation or Full Activation, the EOC Director may designate a Liaison to manage direct communication and engagement with elected officials. This role is distinct from the Information function and operates outside the IO/AIO structure.
- **Planning Section Chief:** Provides updated situational reports and anticipates upcoming developments. The IO uses this intelligence to plan messaging.
- **Elected officials:** Receive confidential updates through the IO and EOC Director. May serve as spokespersons when appropriate, with the IO providing briefing and preparation support.

Role of the Policy Group Liaison:

reports directly to the EOC Director

provides confidential situational updates and coordinates briefings for elected officials (mayors, councillors, directors, chiefs, or their designates)

*acts as a **point of contact** to manage inquiries, political sensitivities, and information requests from elected officials*

coordinates with the Information Officer to ensure elected officials are aligned with approved messaging and understand their role as spokespersons, if designated

supports embargoed releases, confidential updates, and manages access to technical experts or the EOC Director as appropriate

Best practice recommendation: This role is best filled by a senior staff member from the Clerk's Office or equivalent. In many jurisdictions, Clerks are well-positioned to support elected officials and navigate council protocols. Their involvement preserves political neutrality and allows the Information Officer to focus on media, public messaging, and operational communications.

Section 6: Communications workflows and approvals

Overview

Clear and timely information flow is essential during any emergency. This section outlines how public communications are developed, reviewed, and approved across the three EOC activation levels — Monitoring Mode, Partial Activation, and Full Activation. It clarifies who is responsible for message content, how coordination occurs across jurisdictions, and how the emergency program ensures consistency while avoiding duplication or confusion.

Information flow by activation level

EOC level	Message development	Message approval	Dissemination
Monitoring Mode	EPC may draft public monitoring message or amplify updates from the lead agency	EPC reviews and posts the message	EPC may post to emergency program website or social media; always refers audience to lead agency
Partial Activation	IO drafts messaging with input from IC and EOC sections	EOC Director approves public messaging; IC reviews for operational accuracy	IO posts and coordinates dissemination across channels and partners
Full Activation	IO team (with AIOs) drafts content; integrates inputs from sections and partners	EOC Director approves; IC verifies technical accuracy; JIC/JIS may coordinate joint approval	Coordinated roll-out via all channels; partner jurisdictions and agencies amplify

In all cases, emergency program messaging should clearly reflect who is leading the response and avoid implying a coordination role unless that responsibility has been formally assigned.

Who approves what?

ICS and BCEMS guidance place final approval of public messaging with the EOC Director. However, the Incident Commander (IC) must verify operational content — such as site conditions, tactical actions, or evacuation logistics — before messages are finalized.

Roles:

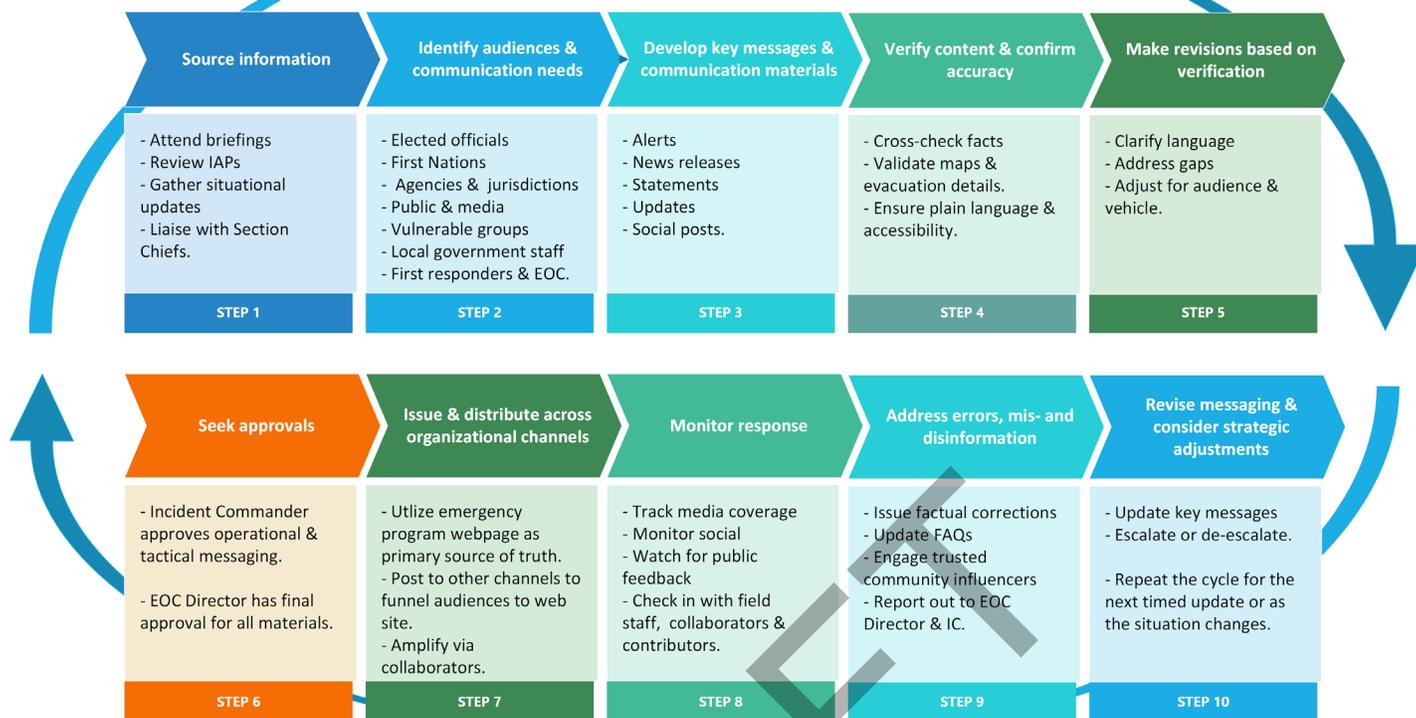
- **Incident Commander (IC):** Provides all operational content to ensure accuracy and input on timing, risks, and terminology.
- **Information Officer (IO):** Integrates input from IC and EOC sections; manages drafting and partner coordination.
- **EOC Director:** Holds final approval authority for public messaging; ensures alignment with strategic response goals and jurisdictional responsibilities.

If a message contains sensitive political or reputational implications, the IO should flag it early with the EOC Director — who may consult with other senior leaders, prior to approval.



Communication flow

Steps to source & disseminate information during an EOC activation



Joint messaging and cross-jurisdiction coordination

When emergencies affect multiple jurisdictions, consistency of messaging becomes critical — especially when different agencies are issuing updates across different platforms.

In these cases:

- The IO should initiate a **Joint Information System (JIS)** or **Joint Information Centre (JIC)**, depending on the scale and complexity of the event.
- All partners — including local governments, First Nations, and provincial agencies should be invited to participate in developing joint messages.
- Lead jurisdictions must be **named clearly** in the messaging. For example:
"The City of Port Alberni, in coordination with the ACRD emergency program, advises residents..."
- Avoid rewording another jurisdiction's content. Use quote posts or clear attribution when amplifying.

For detailed guidance on activating a JIS or JIC — including notification templates and coordination protocols — refer to the **Joint Information System SOP**.

Coordination with **First Nations communicators** is a critical part of the regional messaging structure. First Nations have their own emergency plans and communications procedures, with independent governance over their messaging. The emergency program IO should engage early, collaboratively, and respectfully when emergencies affect shared territory. Joint messaging should reflect shared leadership and honour each jurisdiction's autonomy.

Handling sensitive or high-risk messaging

Certain messages require additional care and coordination. These include:

- fatalities or serious injuries
- property loss
- allegations of delay or failure
- messaging related to evacuees hosted from outside the region
- coordination with private sector, utilities, or First Nations governments

In these situations:

- the IO must **consult the EOC Director** before drafting any public messaging
- the EOC Director may seek input from other senior leaders
- the IO should prepare a holding statement in advance, and flag potential media sensitivity

For incidents involving fatalities, serious injuries, private property loss, or evacuees from outside jurisdictions, messaging must be developed with heightened sensitivity and coordinated approval. Refer to the **SOP for high-impact events and sensitive situations** for detailed guidance on drafting, approval processes, and media engagement.

Timeliness and version control

- All messages should be logged, time-stamped, and version-controlled using technology such as an IO SharePoint or designated Teams channel.
- Messages should be issued **within 60 minutes** of confirmed incident escalation, even if it is only a “We are aware and monitoring” update.
- During extended events, aim for **twice-daily updates** or as needed to maintain public confidence.

Section 7: Communication tools and dissemination channels

Overview

Effective emergency communications rely on the coordinated use of multiple tools, platforms, and methods to reach diverse audiences across the ACRD's geographic, demographic, and jurisdictional landscape. This section outlines the core channels used by the emergency program and its partners, along with strategic guidance on when and how each should be used. This plan is supported by a suite of companion resource guides that provide practical tools and templates to implement these strategies during an emergency. These guides include:

- media relations and spokesperson guides (interviews, messaging, escalation protocols)
- social media guidance (posting formats, tone, monitoring, and governance)
- inclusive and trauma-informed communications guidance
- an Emergency Support Services (ESS) Guide (reception centre messaging, evacuee communications, community liaison)
- templates, checklists, and visual assets for rapid deployment

Together, the emergency communication plan, standard operating procedures, and companion resource guides form an integrated framework for effective public communication across all phases of an emergency.

A multichannel approach is critical for:

- **Redundancy** — reaching people through more than one method increases likelihood of message delivery.
- **Accessibility** — different audiences rely on different tools.
- **Credibility** — timely, consistent updates across platforms build trust and reduce confusion
- **Operational adaptability** — ensuring communication continuity even when internet or power access is disrupted.

All channels should be linked back to a central source of truth — the **emergency program website** — where the most current and complete information is posted.

1. Media relations

Purpose:

To reach large audiences quickly — especially during high-profile or fast-evolving incidents.

Tools and tactics:

- news releases, media advisories, and briefings
- designated spokesperson interviews (e.g., board chair, mayor, IC, EOC director — typically one of the two CAOs)
- pre-packaged content such as b-roll, maps, photos, and video clips
- embargoed briefings for trusted journalists in high-sensitivity scenarios
- media contact lists maintained by the IO

Best practices:

- issue an initial release within 60 minutes of confirmed incident escalation
- schedule updates at consistent intervals (e.g., morning and afternoon)
- prioritize local and regional media (e.g., 93.3 The Peak FM, AV News)
- use side-by-side interviews (e.g., elected official + operational lead) to build public trust
- coordinate messaging across jurisdictions; avoid conflicting interviews or off-the-cuff commentary

2. Digital media: Website and social platforms

Website

Purpose:

To serve as the central, authoritative source of public information.

Requirements:

- prominently display current activation status and key alerts
- use landing page banners and incident-specific hubs for clarity
- include update timestamps, contact details, and FAQ-style explanations
- incorporate GIS maps and evacuation routes and links, where possible

Social media

Purpose:

To provide rapid updates, public reassurance, rumour control, and content amplification.

Platforms to be used:

- Facebook (owned account)
- Instagram (for image- and story-based content)
- X (formerly Twitter) for live updates and tagging partners
- YouTube (for recorded or livestreamed updates)
- Bluesky or other emerging platforms (optional)

Social media strategies:

- use platform-specific graphics with alt text for accessibility
- tag partner accounts to extend reach and signal coordination
- use emojis and plain language for clarity, without undermining seriousness
- schedule planned posts through Hootsuite or similar tools, but review during activations to ensure relevance
- monitor public sentiment and engagement in real time

3. Public alerting systems

Voyent Alert

Purpose:

Hyperlocal alerts, evacuation notices, advisories, and emergency updates to subscribers.

Usage guidelines:

- use geo-targeted alerts to reach only affected areas
- include links to the emergency program website for additional details
- keep messages short, clear, and time-stamped
- utilize pre-written templates for consistency and speed

Provincial Emergency Notification System (PENS) / Alert Ready

Purpose:

Amplification of provincial or federal alerts for region-wide risk events.

ACRD responsibilities:

- The emergency program does not directly issue PENS or Alert Ready alerts but can request that EMCR do so — this option may not be used in every case due to timing or logistics, yet it remains available for region-wide or high-consequence events.
- Whether issued provincially or by EMCR, alerts should be locally contextualized and clearly attributed (e.g., “Environment Canada has issued...”) during amplification.

Tsunami warning sirens

Purpose:

To provide immediate, location-specific audible alerts for tsunami threats in designated high-risk coastal areas.

Usage guidelines:

- Tsunami sirens are maintained and tested by local authorities in coordination with Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) and the National Tsunami Warning Center.
- In the event of a tsunami alert or warning, sirens may be activated to prompt urgent action, such as moving to higher ground.
- Sirens should be accompanied by coordinated messaging through Voyent Alert, social media, local media outlets, and door-to-door notification where necessary.
- Public education about what to do when a tsunami siren sounds should be reinforced regularly through seasonal preparedness campaigns.

4. Direct outreach

Purpose:

To ensure important information reaches people who may not be following media or online updates.

Tools include:

- automated phone lines or community call trees
- town halls (virtual or in-person)
- flyers and door-to-door outreach with responders
- posters and notices at key community hubs (e.g., grocery stores, library, local government and First Nation administrative buildings)
- roadside signage or changeable message boards (especially for Highway 4 disruptions)

Best practices:

- partner with community organizations to distribute printed content
- use plain language and translated materials where needed
- avoid overly technical or government-centric framing
- provide contact details for further assistance (e.g., ESS number, local government info lines)

5. Partner amplification and trusted voices

Purpose:

To extend the reach of official messaging through high-trust intermediaries.

Amplifiers may include:

- local First Nations governments and communications staff
- community radio stations
- school districts
- Chamber of Commerce, travel and business associations
- health care providers and social service organizations
- cultural advisors and community leaders
- ACRD Emergency Network members

Strategies:

- provide partner-ready message packages with social media text, graphics, and talking points
- engage amplifiers before emergencies as part of preparedness outreach
- establish and maintain relationships during non-crisis periods to support rapid mobilization when needed

6. Supplemental communication tools

These tools can be used to support public understanding, especially for high-risk topics or hard-to-reach audiences:

- paid social media promotion (boosted posts) to overcome algorithmic suppression (with financial approval)
- online town halls or livestreamed updates
- pre-scripted video explainers about evacuation alerts, tsunami risks, etc.
- FAQ documents
- infographics and pictograms for non-English speakers or low-literacy audiences

All tools and strategies are supported by companion SOPs and resource guides, with templates, examples, and step-by-step guidance for implementation.



Section 8: Communications issues and challenges

Overview

The ACRD emergency program operates in a complex environment shaped by regional geography, jurisdictional diversity, infrastructure limitations, and heightened public expectations. Emergency communications must be clear, culturally safe, and coordinated — even when the response environment is dynamic, politically sensitive, or technologically disrupted.

These communication challenges are closely linked to the **hazard and risk profile identified in the ACRD's Disaster and Emergency Management Plan (DEMP)**. Wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis, flooding, windstorms, hazardous materials incidents, and transportation disruptions are among the top regional risks. Each presents distinct communication demands — from real-time alerts to coordinated evacuation instructions to long-term recovery updates.

This section identifies key considerations that shape how public communication must be delivered in the ACRD and reinforces why the emergency program's multichannel, inclusive, and scalable approach is essential to maintain public trust and operational coordination.

1. Geographic complexity and isolation

The ACRD region spans remote communities, dispersed populations, and limited transportation infrastructure — including areas with single points of access, such as the Highway 4 corridor. This presents challenges for:

- message dissemination (especially when internet or cellular service is disrupted)
- evacuation-related messaging and signage
- coordination across disconnected jurisdictions.

Implications:

Use layered communications (digital + physical), plan for road closures and detour signage in advance, and ensure that printed and in-person outreach tools are part of every emergency response plan.

2. Jurisdictional fragmentation and coordination pressures

The region includes:

- six Electoral Areas
- the City of Port Alberni
- First Nations
- adjacent municipalities and regional districts

Implications:

The emergency program must coordinate with partners who have their own EOCs, communications staff, and alerting systems. Messaging must respect each jurisdiction's role while promoting alignment. Joint Information Systems (JIS) and shared content packages are essential in cross-boundary events.

3. Connectivity gaps and digital vulnerabilities

Significant portions of the region experience:

- cellular dead zones
- inconsistent access to high-speed internet
- power outages during extreme weather or wildfire events

Implications:

All communication strategies must include redundancy planning — such as mesh networks, ham radio operators, portable signage, call-down trees, satellite communications, and pre-positioned printed materials. The emergency program website should also be designed for low-bandwidth accessibility.

4. Public expectations for real-time, transparent information

The public expects immediate answers, credible spokespersons, and consistent updates — even during fast-developing or uncertain situations.

Implications:

The IO must be activated early. Holding statements, update intervals, and “no change” messaging help meet expectations. Delayed or inconsistent updates erode trust. Political spokespersons must be prepared and coordinated.

5. Risk of misinformation, disinformation, and rumours

Social media, chat groups, and informal community networks can quickly spread inaccurate or misleading information — sometimes unintentionally, sometimes deliberately.

Implications:

The IO function must monitor social media and local media in real time. AIOs may be assigned to dedicated monitoring and response tasks. Coordination with trusted voices (e.g., First Nations, schools, health authorities) is critical to counter misinformation with accurate amplification.

6. Political sensitivity and stakeholder dynamics

Emergencies often involve:

- elected officials under pressure to respond visibly
- service disruptions that affect public confidence
- inter-agency tensions over roles, resources, or recognition

Implications:

Establish clear spokesperson protocols early. Activate the Elected Officials’ Liaison role when needed. Communications must remain focused on public safety and operational clarity, avoiding political framing or speculation.

7. Resource constraints and staff capacity

The emergency program has a small core team and must rely on shared staffing models across jurisdictions. The IO function may be filled by municipal or regional district staff with other duties or activated during off-hours or extended incidents.

Implications:

The IO function must follow the staffing continuity protocols outlined in the resource guides. A trained roster of IOs and AIOs should be maintained across participating agencies to ensure depth and redundancy. Templates, checklists, and pre-approved messages should be developed in advance to reduce burnout and enable a faster, more coordinated response.

8. Perception vs. complexity: When to activate — and why it matters

Not all emergencies meet formal thresholds for high complexity or provincial coordination — but they can still create major disruption, demand cross-jurisdictional coordination, or raise significant public concern. In these cases, a timely, visible, and structured communications response is critical.

Examples include:

- **Highway 4 closures**
- **boil water advisories** that affect multiple electoral areas
- **extreme weather events**

These types of events:

- may not trigger provincial task numbers or meet ICS Type 3–1 thresholds³
- still require a coordinated response to reassure the public, support partners, and reduce reputational risk
- can **erode public trust** if the emergency program is not visibly present, even if operationally active behind the scenes

Implications:

The emergency program should not rely solely on incident complexity when deciding whether to activate the EOC or IO function. Clear internal protocols (e.g., Monitoring Mode, Partial Activation) allow the program to demonstrate leadership and provide public reassurance, even when formal activation thresholds are not met. Communications plans must be designed to scale based on impact and public perception, not just hazard type or resource demand.

The decision to activate the EOC is about impact and perception — not just complexity.

3 In circumstances where a task number has not been provided but emergency coordination is needed, any associated expenditures must be approved by the Policy Group.

Section 9: Messaging guidance

Overview

Emergency communications are not just about transmitting information — they are about building trust, reducing harm, and helping people take action. The messages issued by the emergency program must be clear, credible, inclusive, and compassionate, especially during moments of high stress or uncertainty.

This section provides foundational guidance for message development, including tone, language, cultural safety, trauma-informed principles, and recommended phrases that reflect the emergency program's role. It also outlines where to find specific message templates and examples in the resource guides.

Core messaging principles

All messaging issued by the emergency program or its IO team should reflect the following principles:

- **Accuracy** – Base messages on verified facts and the most current understanding of the situation. Avoid speculation, conflicting details, or unconfirmed reports.
- **Timeliness** – Share information as quickly as possible, even if full details are not yet known. Early updates build trust and reduce misinformation.
- **Clarity** – Use plain language and avoid jargon. Clearly explain what is happening, what actions are being taken, and what people should do.
- **Empathy** – Acknowledge uncertainty, fear, or loss. People want to know their concerns are being heard and taken seriously.
- **Consistency** – Align messaging with other jurisdictions and partner agencies, particularly during cross-boundary events.
- **Cultural safety** – Respect the identities, governance, and rights of First Nations; include land acknowledgments when appropriate.
- **Trauma-informed language** – Avoid graphic detail, blame, or overly authoritative tones. Emphasize safety, support, and next steps.

Foundational program messaging

These core messages reflect the ACRD emergency program's purpose, tone, and commitment to the region. They may be used in media updates, social posts, public statements, websites, or as building blocks for situational messaging.

Purpose and leadership

"The ACRD emergency program exists to help keep our region safe — by coordinating preparedness, response, and recovery when emergencies happen."

"The emergency program is coordinating this response in partnership with [jurisdiction(s)] to ensure residents and visitors receive timely, accurate, and trusted information."

"We are working closely with local governments, First Nations, and emergency agencies to keep the community informed and safe."

Transparency and trust

“We take a transparent approach — we share what we know, explain what we don’t, and commit to providing timely updates as situations evolve.”

“We know people are looking for answers. While details are still developing, we are committed to providing regular updates as information becomes available.”

Inclusivity and cultural safety

“We recognize that people experience emergencies differently. That’s why we’re committed to inclusive, trauma-informed, and culturally safe communication that meets people where they are.”

Tone during crisis

“We recognize that this situation is stressful. Please know that we are coordinating efforts across the region and will continue to share updates here.”

Cross-jurisdictional coordination

“Our approach is grounded in transparency, respect, and coordination. We communicate early, clearly, and often — because public trust and safety depend on it.”

“We work in partnership — across jurisdictions, across governments, and across communities. Emergencies don’t stop at boundaries, and neither do we.”

Culturally safe messaging guidance

In all public communications:

- acknowledge First Nations leadership and territory where appropriate
- use the names of Nations respectfully and accurately (e.g., Tseshahst First Nation, not just “local First Nation”)
- avoid language that implies a single authority or speaks for First Nations
- seek input or direct language from First Nations governments when messages concern shared territories or community impacts

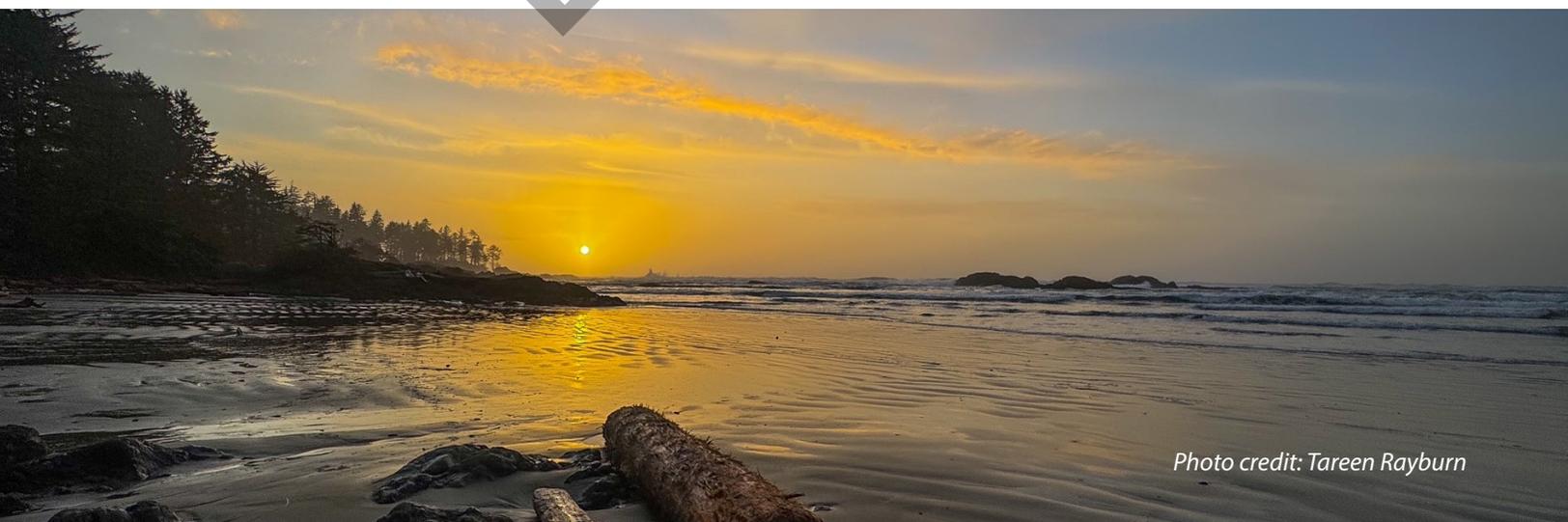


Photo credit: Tareen Rayburn

Trauma-informed tone and wording

Avoid this	Use this instead
"Victims of the fire..."	"People affected by the fire..."
"The body was found..."	"Tragically, a person has died..."
"We are in control of the situation."	"We are coordinating with partners to respond effectively."
"There's no need to panic."	"We understand this is concerning. Here's what we know, and what you can do."
"Stay tuned for updates."	"We'll continue to provide updates here at [time/frequency/platform]."

Message templates and examples

Specific templates and message structures — including holding statements, evacuation messages, public alerts, media updates, and spokesperson scripts — can be found in the companion **Resource Guides**, including:

- **Information Officer Resource Guide and social media guidance**
- **media relations and spokesperson guides**
- **Emergency Support Services Communications Guide**

Each guide includes customizable templates tailored to common regional hazards (e.g., wildfire, tsunami, severe weather) and communication scenarios (e.g., reception centre activation, shelter-in-place advisory, fatality notification).



Section 10: Plan maintenance and review

Overview

The Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan (ECPNP) is a living document. To remain effective, it must evolve with organizational structure, legislation, communication technologies, and the needs of the communities it serves. Regular review ensures that the plan continues to reflect current risks, tools, staff capacity, and public expectations.

Responsibility for updates

The **Emergency Program Coordinator (EPC)** is responsible for ensuring the plan remains current, accurate, and operationally useful. The EPC will coordinate updates in consultation with:

- the EOC Director and Incident Command staff
- participating jurisdictions and First Nations partners
- ACRD Communications and Protective Services staff
- Emergency Program Leadership Group
- partner agencies as needed

Proposed changes may also arise from After Action Reviews (AARs), new provincial guidance, or technology shifts affecting public communications.

Review cycle

The plan will be:

- **reviewed** in response to changes in regional government structure, communications tools, and/or policy
- updated when gaps and shortfalls involving public communication are presented through training, drills and emergencies
- **reviewed following legislative changes**, including updates to the *Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA)*, BCEMS, or federal alerting systems

Any revisions will be recorded in the version control table and communicated to all partner jurisdictions and affected departments.

Training and awareness

To ensure the plan is implemented effectively:

- IOs and AIOs will receive **orientation on the ECP** as part of their onboarding or seasonal refresher training. This includes message development protocols, media coordination, and alerting procedures.
- IOs and AIOs will also receive **basic training in the Incident Command System (ICS)** and the BC Emergency Management System (BCEMS). This may be delivered through the **Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC)** or equivalent providers. ICS 100 and 200 are recommended minimum levels for all personnel assigned to public information roles.
- Training will emphasize that during activations, **communications staff work within a “command and control” structure**, where day-to-day reporting lines are suspended. The Information Officer (IO) reports directly to the **EOC Director**, not their regular manager or department lead.
- Partner agencies, municipal communicators, and elected officials will be briefed annually on key roles, spokesperson protocols, and message approval processes.
- Content from the plan may be incorporated into tabletop exercises, IO simulations, or cross-jurisdictional drills, with feedback used to refine workflows and build confidence in real-world implementation.



Section 11: Acknowledgements

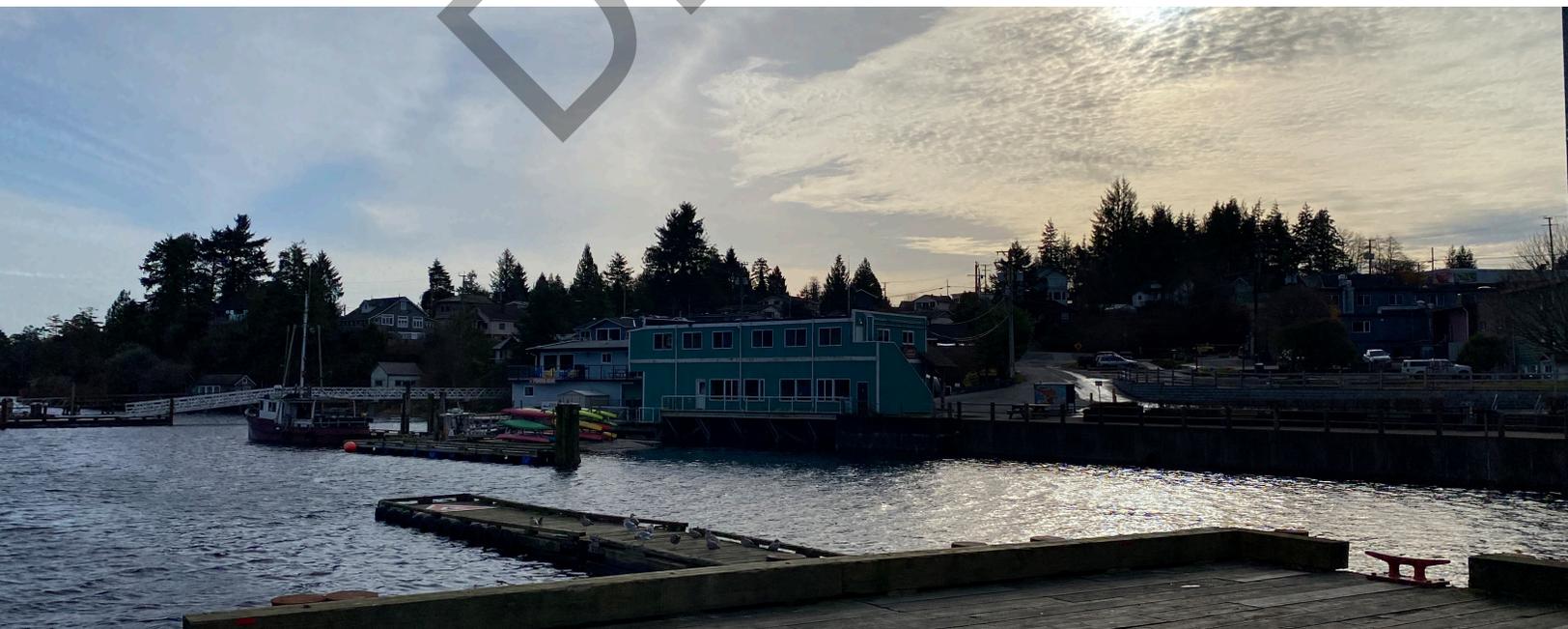
The development of this Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan (ECPNP) was made possible through the input, time, and thoughtful contributions of many individuals and organizations across the Alberni-Clayoquot region.

The emergency program would like to extend its sincere thanks to all those who participated, including:

- Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation for their ongoing leadership, collaboration, and partnership in supporting clear, respectful, and culturally grounded emergency communications.
- Elected officials, members of the ACRD Board, and the City of Port Alberni Council for their support and strategic guidance.
- First responders, including the region's volunteer fire departments, for their dedication to public safety and their practical insight throughout the planning process.
- Municipal and regional staff from across the ACRD, the City of Port Alberni, and neighbouring communities for their operational expertise and collaboration.
- Emergency Support Services volunteers.
- Island Health, the Ministry of Transportation and Transit, DriveBC, Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR), the Port Alberni Port Authority, the Alberni Valley Chamber of Commerce, and other provincial and community agencies who shared experience, lessons learned, and coordination guidance.
- All the stakeholder organizations and individuals who participated in engagement activities, provided feedback, and helped shape the priorities and direction of this plan.
- Members of the Emergency Communication Plan Steering Committee, including representatives from the City of Port Alberni, the ACRD, Tseshaht First Nation, and Hupačasath First Nation, for their leadership and contributions to the development of this plan.

We are especially grateful to all those who shared their time, stories, and expertise — and to those who continue to work every day to help keep their communities informed and resilient.

This project was made possible in part through funding support from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM).



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Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan



ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT
REGIONAL DISTRICT



— CITY OF —
PORT ALBERNI

Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the work of emergency preparedness, response and public information in the Alberni-Clayoquot region takes place on the traditional, ancestral and unceded homelands of First Nations who have cared for these lands, waters and communities since time immemorial. In the Alberni Valley, this work has been carried out in partnership with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation, whose leadership, knowledge and responsibilities to their members and territories are central to how emergency information is planned, delivered and understood.

We recognize that emergencies such as wildfire, tsunami risk, flooding, infrastructure disruption and smoke events cross boundaries, and that different communities experience different impacts. We also recognize that public information in an emergency is not only operational — it is about trust, safety, cultural respect and accountability to the people most affected.

This report is intended to support a coordinated, respectful and transparent approach to public information before, during and after emergencies. That includes working in a way that reflects the authority and voices of First Nations governments, supports their communities and serves all residents across the region.



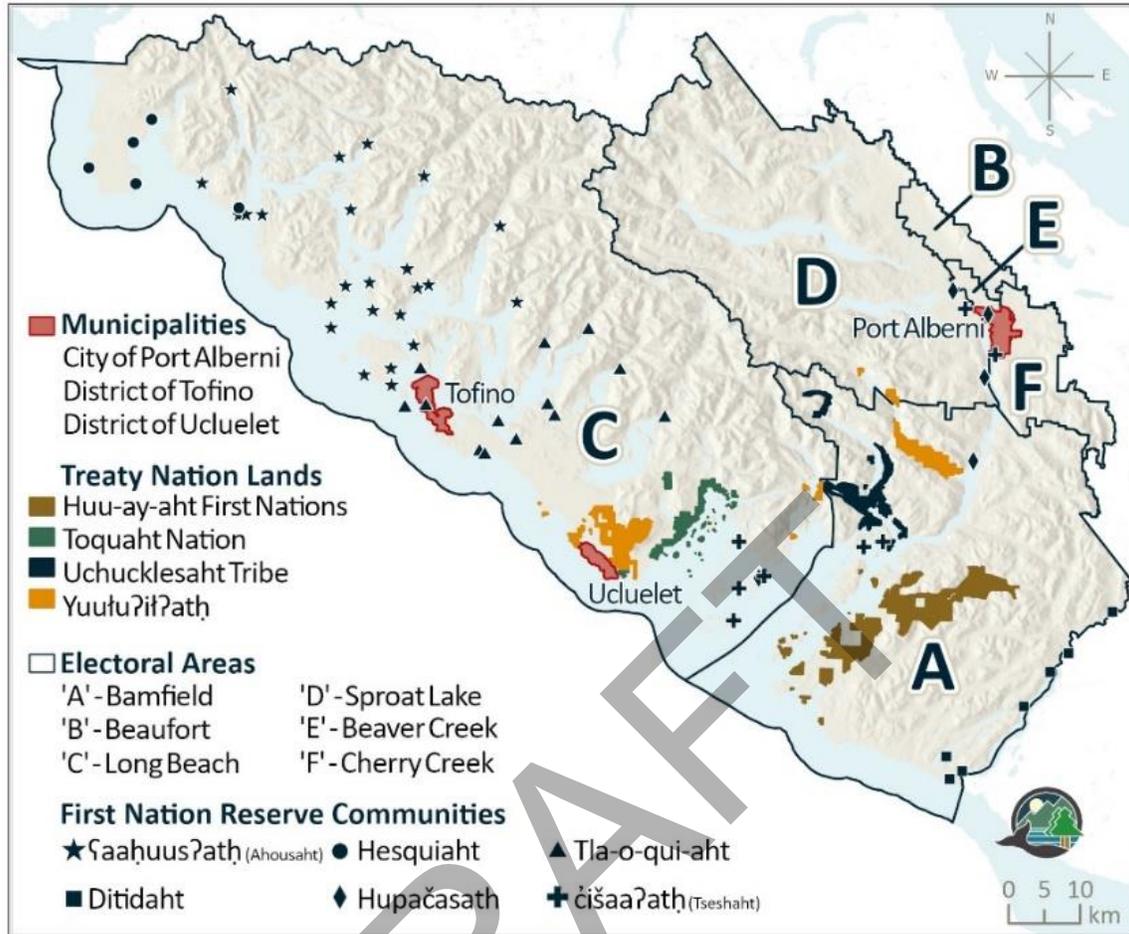
Tseshaht
First Nation



hupačasath
First Nation

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ACRD GIS team: Administrative Areas

Disclaimer

This report was prepared for the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District to document the work completed under this project, summarize current implementation status and identify next steps to continue strengthening the emergency communications and public information function for the region. It is based on information provided by the ACRD, participating First Nations and local government partners, and on discussions, documents and observations available to the project team at the time of writing.

The analysis, recommendations and implementation priorities in this report build on the findings and recommendations of the Phase 2 interim report and the Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan and supporting resource guides developed for the ACRD, Tseshahat First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation. They are intended to support program planning, internal decision-making and coordination between governments before, during and after emergency events. They are not intended to replace legal advice, operational direction from Incident Command or the authority of any Nation or local government.

This report should be read as guidance to support continuous improvement of the Emergency Program's communications and information function. The ACRD and partner governments remain responsible for activation decisions, public information releases and operational actions during any emergency.

Executive summary

Over the past year, the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District's emergency program, working in partnership with the City of Port Alberni and in collaboration with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation, has taken important steps to make emergency communications more consistent, more coordinated and more useful to the public.

This work, led by Adriane Brown Group Inc., began with engagement, a comprehensive review process, and interviews across jurisdictions. Phase 2 of the project identified concrete gaps: unclear activation levels and roles, uneven access to publishing channels, limited depth in the information function, uncertainty around who was speaking for the region during multi-jurisdiction events, and a lack of clear, trauma-informed public messaging for residents and evacuees. It also surfaced opportunities: stronger collaboration with First Nations, better use of mapping and alerting tools, and a clearer identity for the emergency program as a trusted, coordinating voice.

In direct response, the project delivered a full emergency communication plan for the emergency program, companion standard operating procedures, resource guides and ready-to-use public messaging templates. Parallel plans and guidance were also developed with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation to support aligned, respectful public information during shared events while honouring each Nation's distinct governance. Training and orientation sessions were delivered to begin building comfort, common expectations and depth in the information role.

Those tools were tested quickly. This summer, the region faced wildfire activity, evacuation-related public information needs and a tsunami advisory. The emergency program began putting the new approach into practice under real pressure: declaring who was leading on what, issuing clearer and more frequent public updates, coordinating messages across governments and focusing on what residents needed to know and do next. Public demand for timely, reliable information increased significantly, and the emergency program's channels — including social media — saw rapid growth in reach and expectations. That is meaningful progress. It has already improved how the emergency program shows up for the public.

At the same time, recent activations also showed what still needs attention. The information function is still carried by a very small number of people. Access to official web, social and alerting channels is not yet fully documented, which can create delay. The predictable cadence of situation updates is understood but not yet routine. Joint public messaging with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation is working in practice, but the steps for clearing and sequencing shared messages are not yet fully captured in one simple reference for everyone. The task now is to lock them in.

This final report does three things.

First, it documents what has been delivered. The emergency program now has: a defined information function inside the Emergency Operations Centre; an operational model that distinguishes between monitoring, partial activation and full activation; standard wording and templates for evacuation alerts, evacuation orders and reception-centre communication; guidance for trauma-informed and culturally respectful messaging; and partner-specific plans developed with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation.

Second, it provides a clear set of implementation priorities for the next 12 months. The priorities are designed to make the current gains durable and sustainable, not to create new work. They focus on:

- Confirming and documenting the primary Information Officer and at least one trained backup so coverage does not rest on one person.
- Confirming direct publishing access (and backup access) for web, social and alerting channels so approved messages can go out without delay.
- Adopting a predictable public update cadence during activation so residents — and elected officials — know what to expect and when to expect it.
- Continuing to build joint public information practices with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation and extending that approach to other Nations and Indigenous governments in the region where invited.
- Maintaining the plans, contact lists, access credentials, templates and GIS/map supports as live tools, stored in one accessible location and reviewed after each activation.
- Improving public readiness now, in plain language, by telling people where to go for official information, how alerts work and what different alert types mean.

Third, it hands off a working accountability tool. Appendix A includes an implementation tracker that lists each key recommendation from Phase 2, what action has already been taken, the current status, who now owns it and the next step and timing. The intent is that this table becomes part of routine program management. It is meant to be updated after each significant activation and at regular program check-ins so that progress is visible — to senior staff, to elected officials and to First Nations and other response partners.

In simple terms: the groundwork is in place, and it is already proving useful. The emergency program has moved from ad hoc communication toward an identifiable information function that can draft, clear and publish urgent information for the public. The next 12 months are about making that capability durable: supporting the people doing the work, keeping shared messaging with First Nations active, locking in access to channels, and setting habits — cadence, activation notices, consistent language — that the region can rely on in the next event.

If those steps are carried through, emergency communications in the Alberni-Clayoquot region will be more timely, more coordinated and more sustainable. Most importantly, residents and evacuees will be more likely to receive clear, respectful information they can act on when it matters most.

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Final project report

Project overview

Over the past year, the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District's emergency program has focused on strengthening how it communicates critical information to the public, media and partner agencies, and how it coordinates information with First Nations, local governments, responders and other emergency management partners across the region. The work moved from assessment to action. Building on engagement with staff, elected leadership, Tseshaht First Nation, Hupačasath First Nation and other response partners, Phase 2 examined where communications could most credibly support preparedness, response and recovery across jurisdictions in the Alberni Valley.

The aim throughout has been practical. The project set out to ensure the program can communicate clearly, consistently and in a timely manner before, during and after emergencies; to formalize how partners work together; and to give staff tools they can use under pressure. The Phase 2 findings now sit at the core of a completed Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan for the emergency program, along with standard operating procedures and companion resource guides. Parallel plans were developed in collaboration with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation. Those plans respect each Nation's governance while aligning public information during shared events so people receive clear, timely information about what is happening, what they need to do and how to get support, and can make informed decisions for themselves and their families.

Goals and objectives

From the outset, the project set out to: clarify the emergency program's role and activation practices; strengthen identity and public trust; strengthen collaboration with First Nations governments in emergency communications; and build a modern, scalable communications system that is operationally sound. Those goals were shaped by engagement across local governments, First Nations, responders, and community organizations, and aligned with British Columbia's Emergency and Disaster Management Act and British Columbia Emergency Management System (BCEMS) principles.

Approach and methodology

This work was grounded in local context. The project began with structured engagement across the Alberni Valley and the region, including conversations with ACRD and City of Port Alberni staff, First Nations leadership and staff, Emergency Support Services, elected officials and operational responders. That engagement focused on how emergency information is actually produced and shared under pressure, what has worked in recent events and where trust has been strained or tested.

Phase 2: Key findings

Phase 2 confirmed several gaps that were getting in the way of consistent, trusted public information: unclear Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) activation levels and signals; uneven visibility and branding; the need to embed Information Officers consistently within the EOC; and the lack of a single, reliable "source of truth" online during activations. It also emphasized collaboration with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation in the emergency program and in joint communications. These insights drove a pragmatic pivot: in addition to finalizing the ACRD's emergency communication plan, the project developed stand-alone emergency communication plans and tools for Tseshaht First Nation and for Hupačasath First Nation. The intent is that, in an incident that affects more than one government, messaging can be coordinated early — while each Nation continues to speak in its own voice and on its own authority.

In parallel, we completed a document and system review. This included existing emergency plans, activation procedures, past public communications, media response patterns, and internal workflows. We also looked at practice from comparator jurisdictions of similar scale to understand how other regions are handling activation signalling, public updates, mapping, and joint messaging in multi-party incidents. These inputs formed the basis for the Phase 2 interim report, which identified the core issues and risks, recommended specific fixes and set the focus for the rest of the work.

Deliverables

Following the engagement and analysis work, the project moved into development and delivery.

We produced a complete Emergency Communication and Public Notification Plan (referred to in this report as the “emergency communication plan” or “the plan”) for the ACRD and the City of Port Alberni partnership, supported by standard operating procedures and a set of resource guides. The resource guides include an Information Officer guide and social media guidance; media relations and spokesperson guidance; and an Emergency Support Services (ESS) communications guide with ready-to-use templates, holding statements and reception-centre updates. These materials also include situation update formats, approval and release pathways, reception-centre communications direction and a first-operational-period checklist for the information function.

Orientation and tabletop-style training were delivered to introduce these tools, build common expectations and begin developing depth in the Information Officer role so it is a clearly defined and understood function, within the ACRD’s Emergency Operations Centre structure.

The result is a practical toolkit the program can use under pressure. It supports consistent public messaging, applies trauma-informed and culturally respectful language, and sets out how to staff and resource communications during an activation. It also captures key workflows such as information approvals and alerting so that accurate public information can be issued quickly.

In parallel, stand-alone emergency communications plans and resource guides were developed with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation. These plans are designed to support coordinated, respectful public information during region-wide events, while recognizing each Nation’s governance and ensuring their communities receive clear, timely information about what is happening, what they need to do and how to access support.

Purpose of this report

This final report documents what was delivered, summarizes implementation to date, and sets a focused action plan to continue strengthening emergency communications capacity across the region and with First Nations partners. It builds directly on the findings and recommendations outlined in the Phase 2 interim report and does not introduce new concepts. Instead, it moves the work from analysis into operations. The report identifies immediate next steps, resourcing considerations, and a sensible sequence for adoption, training, and maintenance so the system remains ready for the next activation.

Status of implementation and early results

Since the emergency communication plan and supporting materials were delivered to the ACRD, portions of the system have already been used in real events. The district and its partners faced multiple incidents this summer, including evacuation-related wildfire activity and a tsunami advisory that drew immediate public attention. These situations, noted below, pressured the information function in real time and helped test early versions of the workflow that was developed through this project.

- **Nahmint Mountain Wildfire** (June 2025): Early in the season a small lightning-caused fire southeast of Sproat Lake was actioned quickly and listed as “Being Held” as weather moderated. While lower impact, it prompted readiness messaging and monitoring.
- **Tsunami Advisory** (July 29–30, 2025): Following a magnitude 7.1 earthquake near the Alaska Peninsula on July 29, federal authorities issued a tsunami advisory for parts of coastal British Columbia. Port Alberni activated public information protocols, advising residents to avoid waterfront areas while no evacuation was ordered. The advisory was lifted July 30 after wave activity subsided with no significant damage reported in the inlet.
- **Wesley Ridge Wildfire** (early August 2025): Over the August long weekend a separate wildfire near Cameron Lake led to intermittent closures of Highway 4 and smoky conditions affecting travel and recreation. The incident remained “Being Held” within days as crews reinforced control lines; communications focused on travel advisories and minimizing spontaneous traffic to the area.
- **Mount Underwood Wildfire** (mid-August 2025): Discovered August 13 northeast of the Alberni Inlet, this lightning-caused wildfire grew quickly in steep terrain. BC Wildfire classified it as a Wildfire of Note; the ACRD issued evacuation alerts and then an evacuation order for the China Creek Campground and marina area as conditions evolved. Coordinated updates from the ACRD, City, and partners emphasized safety messaging, closures, and reception-centre support. By late August the fire’s spread had slowed, alerts were downgraded, and the order was rescinded as crews strengthened containment.

Collectively, these incidents highlighted three strengths the project seeks to institutionalize: faster activation signals and clearer public updates; visible cross-jurisdiction coordination including with First Nations; and consistent, trauma-informed messaging across channels that points back to a single “source of truth.”

In activation, staff began applying the new roles, approvals and message responsibilities outlined in the plan and resource guides. Public updates were issued more quickly and with greater clarity about what was confirmed and what was still being assessed. Staff also demonstrated more discipline in naming a lead source of information and in avoiding contradictory messaging between jurisdictions. This was a specific recommendation of Phase 2 and was one of the main risks identified going into this work. The ACRD and First Nations started to act on it under pressure, which is encouraging.

The training and tabletop orientation that were delivered as part of the project also showed results. People were more familiar with what an Information Officer is expected to do inside an Emergency Operations Centre. Staff relied less on informal “who is available” communications and moved toward a more defined information function with accountability for drafting, approval and release. This is foundational. It supports both speed and credibility.

Use of common language and trauma-informed public messaging was also visible. During this summer’s activations public-facing content focused on what people needed to do, what was being done for them and when the next update would come. This represents a shift away from reactive one-off media answers toward consistent situation reporting intended for the whole public. That approach is directly aligned with the intent of this project.

There are also areas where implementation can continue to strengthen and evolve:

- **Staffing resources:** The new communications and approval model still depends heavily on a very small number of people. Coverage depth is not yet where it needs to be to sustain a multi-day or multi-incident response without fatigue. Continued focus on identifying primary and backup coverage for the information function will help with sustainability, reduce stress on staff and protect the program’s ability to keep issuing timely public updates.

- **Website and social media:** The emergency program’s web presence has improved and is becoming more visible to the public, which is a positive shift. At the same time, there is still important work ahead. Phase 2 recommended moving toward a dedicated, program-branded website or landing environment as an owned channel for official information, rather than relying primarily on Facebook or asking partner jurisdictions to host updates. That direction still stands. A single, clearly identified location for official information — controlled by the emergency program — will reduce confusion during multi-jurisdiction events and provide a stable “source of truth” the public can turn to before, during and after an activation.

The program’s social reach has also expanded quickly. The emergency program’s Facebook following has grown from approximately 3.7K followers in April to roughly 10K followers now, reflecting strong public demand for timely, trusted updates. That growth is an asset and shows the value of more consistent situation reporting. It also creates new expectations: people will now look to the program first, not last.

The next step is to build on that momentum by (1) establishing and maintaining a presence on at least one additional platform so the program is not dependent on a single commercial channel, and (2) formalizing access, credentials and backup publishing authority for all channels. Right now, the ability to post updates can depend on specific individuals, or informal workarounds. That creates the risk of delay and adds stress in fast-moving situations. Pre-arranged channel access and documented backups should now be treated as core readiness.

In a few cases, comments on posts were turned off during high-pressure periods. Given the volume, tone and speed of incoming questions, this was understandable from a resourcing point of view. It is also a signal that the information function is carrying public inquiry management on top of drafting, clearance and publishing. As capacity grows, the goal should be to avoid fully turning comments off in most situations and instead use approaches such as hiding or moderating specific comments while continuing to post steady situation updates. This helps maintain transparency and trust while still managing workload and preventing staff burnout.

- **Collaboration with First Nations:** The relationship between the emergency program, Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation has continued to strengthen and grow through the collaborative work on this project, and that was an asset in recent responses. Staff worked together to share information, align messages and respect each other’s roles when communicating with the public. The next step is to keep building on that approach through ongoing collaboration, shared training, and continued joint planning and exercises, so that this way of working becomes routine and not dependent on specific individuals. There is also value in extending this collaboration to other First Nations and Indigenous governments in the region over time, where invited. As part of this, the ACRD may wish to continue exploring an Indigenous liaison role within its broader cultural safety work. The intent of that role would be to help coordination and information flow between governments in an emergency, while recognizing that no single liaison can speak for or represent the interests of all Nations.
- **Alerting:** During this summer’s events it became clear, through questions and comments on public posts, that many residents are not yet clear on how emergency alerts work, who sends them, who receives them and what different alert types mean. This is consistent with what was identified in Phase 2. Since then, we have seen the emergency program begin to proactively explain how and when subscribers receive alerts, and the difference between an evacuation alert, an evacuation order and the various types of tsunami advisories, for example. That is a positive step and should continue. Clear, repeated guidance on when Voyent Alert is used, who receives it, what each alert type means and what people are expected to do when they receive it will reduce confusion and help residents take timely action.

- **Timing and cadence of public updates:** During this summer’s events, some situation updates were issued on a steady rhythm, and some were more ad hoc. The plan calls for providing regular public updates at known times during an activation so people understand what has happened, what is being done and when they will hear more. Making that cadence part of normal practice will help build public confidence and will also support the confidence of elected officials, who are often under pressure to respond publicly and need to be able to point to a reliable source of official information.

Of note, the observations in this section are made from outside the response. They reflect real-time monitoring of public updates, social media channels and situation reporting during this summer’s incidents, and follow-up conversations about how those events were managed. They are not based on direct participation in the Emergency Operations Centre during activation, nor on formal after-action reviews. The intent is not to assess performance, but to recognize where progress is already visible and to highlight areas that would benefit from continued support.

In short, the communications groundwork is in place, and it is already proving useful. The ACRD has moved from ad hoc communications toward an identifiable, staffed information function that can draft, clear and publish urgent information for the public. Based on what we were able to observe from outside the response — by closely following public updates, social channels and situation reporting during this summer’s incidents, and through follow-up conversations — that shift is visible in practice. At the same time, the recent activations also showed where continued attention will be helpful. Building more depth in trained communicators, ensuring consistent access to official channels and continuing to strengthen the shared approach with First Nations and other neighbouring governments will make the system even more reliable and sustainable. These are the areas carried forward into the recommended action plan that follows in this report.

Implementation priorities for the next 12 months

The work done to date has moved emergency communications for the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District from being something carried by a few key people, to a more defined information function with plans, tools and trained support. The next 12 months should focus on making that progress durable — so it is routine and reliable across incidents, jurisdictions and staffing changes. These are not new asks. They are the logical next steps flowing from Phase 2, from the completed plans and resource guides for the ACRD, Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation, and from what we observed during this summer’s activations. Some items come first because they enable the rest.

The overall objective for the next year is to make the communications and information function something that can be stood up quickly, staffed sustainably and trusted by the public, elected officials and partner governments.

- **Stabilize the Information Officer role.** Confirm the Information Officer as a core Emergency Operations Centre function and ensure the role is formally staffed whenever the EOC is partially or fully activated. Identify a primary lead and a trained, qualified backup, with clear expectations for availability during activation. Define the reporting line, approval path and immediate duties in the first operational period. The goal is to avoid single-point dependency on one communicator and to make the work sustainable.

Owner: Emergency program leadership.¹

- **Build depth.** Develop a small bench of people — including staff who can step into Assistant Information Officer roles — who can perform key information tasks under pressure: drafting first updates, clearing content with operations, publishing through official channels and delivering reliable situation updates on a

¹ For the purposes of this report, “emergency program leadership” means the Protective Services Manager working with the Chief Administrative Officer of the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District and the Chief Administrative Officer of the City of Port Alberni. This reflects the shared nature of the program, including funding, operational readiness and public communication responsibilities outside of a formal Emergency Operations Centre activation.

set cadence. This can be achieved through short orientations and regular refreshers, not only full-scale exercises.

Owner: Emergency program leadership.

- **Keep training active.** Schedule short, regular touch points rather than treating training as a one-time deliverable. This includes onboarding new staff and newly elected officials into how public information flows, what their role is and what their role is not. Tabletop work should continue, but lightweight, scenario-based run-throughs will matter more for retention and confidence. Frequent and ongoing training on Voyent Alert must also be maintained. As well, emergency responses will always be improved through social gatherings and informal events that bring together individuals and collaborators that are relied upon to support emergency incidents.

Owner: Protective Services Manager.

- **Confirm publishing access and backups.** In advance of the next activation, confirm who can post directly to ACRD and partner channels (web, social, alerting) and under what authority. Where access currently sits with individuals in other departments or other jurisdictions, put in place documented backup access so approved updates can go out without avoidable delay. This reduces stress in the moment and keeps messaging timely.

Owner: Protective Services Manager (for readiness and access management), and Information Officer (for activation use).

- **Strengthen joint public information with First Nations.** The plans and resource guides developed with Tseshah First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation give everyone a shared structure for public information. The next step is to keep that collaboration active through shared training, continued joint planning and regular communication so this way of working becomes routine, and sustainable even through staffing and role changes that will undoubtedly occur. There is value in extending this collaborative approach to other First Nations and Indigenous governments in the region over time, where invited. As part of broader cultural safety work, the ACRD may also wish to continue exploring an Indigenous liaison role to help support coordination and information flow during activation. That role can help connect, but it should not be treated as speaking for all Nations.

Owner: Emergency program leadership with Tseshah First Nation, Hupačasath First Nation and other Indigenous governments as appropriate.

- **Make operational cadence a habit.** Adopt a predictable update rhythm during activations — for example, morning and late afternoon situation updates — that tells people what has happened, what is being done and when they will hear more. This consistent cadence builds public confidence and supports the confidence of elected officials, who are under pressure to answer questions and need to be able to point to one reliable source of official information. It also reduces demand for unscheduled one-off responses.

Owner: Information Officer and EOC Director (during activations).

- **Embed service levels.** Begin applying the target approval and publishing timelines identified in this project for urgent public updates, evacuation messaging, alert amplification and corrections to misinformation during activations. These service levels should become part of how performance is assessed and how the information function explains its decisions to Incident Command, elected officials and the public (“we will have an initial holding line within X minutes; full situational update at Y”).

Owner: Information Officer and EOC Director (during activations).

- **Support public understanding of alerts.** Continue proactive public education on how alerting works — when tools like Voyent Alert are used, who receives them, what different alert types mean and what actions people are expected to take. This includes clarifying the differences between an evacuation alert, an evacuation order and tsunami advisories. Doing this in advance, and reinforcing it during activation, will reduce confusion and help residents act quickly and appropriately.

Owner: Emergency program leadership.

- **Maintain and update the material.** Confirm who is responsible for keeping the emergency communication plan, standard operating procedures (including the blackout / contingency communications SOP), resource guides, contact lists, access credentials, map templates and message templates current, and make sure the working versions are stored in one accessible location (for example, a maintained SharePoint site) as the single source of truth. Ensure information staff, Logistics, ESS and the EOC Director know where to find these materials, are comfortable using them and understand that they are the approved versions. Set a light review schedule: after each activation, note what worked, what slowed things down and what had to be created under pressure, and fold those lessons back into the materials; then do a brief formal check at least twice a year to confirm contacts, access, templates and any updates to arrangements with First Nations and local governments. As part of that cycle, run short walk-throughs of the blackout / contingency communications SOP so the team is confident using backup channels (radio, printed notices, reception-centre updates, signage) if normal systems fail. This keeps the tools live and usable, supports continuity between activations and helps staff avoid having to rebuild solutions in the middle of a response — including in a power or connectivity outage.

Owner: Protective Services Manager (to maintain the plan, SOPs, contacts, access and templates) and the Information Officer (to use these materials in activation).

- **Make public-facing readiness visible.** Continue improving the public-facing “one source of truth” location for emergency updates and make sure the community knows where to look before an incident. This includes ensuring that language is plain and respectful, that information is accessible to diverse and vulnerable residents and that First Nations are presented as active authorities, not as secondary voices.

Owner: Emergency program leadership.

- **Publish a plain-language public summary of the emergency communication plan.** Create and maintain a short page on the ACRD website that explains how emergency information will be shared, what channels will be used, how often people can expect updates during an activation and where to check first. This page should also explain, in simple terms, how the ACRD, local governments and First Nations work together during shared events. The goal is to set expectations now so that, in an emergency, residents already know where to go, what to expect and how to interpret what they are seeing.

Owner: Emergency program leadership.

Taken together, these priorities are intended to do two things. First, they protect and build on the progress already made: the creation of the plans and guides, the relationship work with First Nations and the early application of the new communications approach during real events this summer. Second, they give the ACRD and its partners a practical, staged path for the next year so that emergency communications becomes part of the way the region operates, not a special project.

To keep that momentum, the emergency program can watch a small set of signals after each activation: how quickly the first approved public update goes out once an incident is confirmed; whether situation updates are issued on a predictable rhythm so people know what happened and when they will hear more; whether public

messaging clearly states who is leading and reflects that consistently across jurisdictions, including with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation; whether the information function was able to publish directly to web, social and alerting channels without delay; and whether evacuees and affected residents received clear, respectful information about services and next steps. The goal is not to create a rigid scorecard. The goal is to build habits and continue supporting staff, so this level of performance becomes normal and sustainable.

Governance and ownership going forward

Under British Columbia's Emergency and Disaster Management Act, every local authority — including a regional district — must maintain an emergency management organization or join a multijurisdictional emergency management organization. The Act also requires each local authority to designate who is authorized to act on its behalf in an emergency.

In the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, those day-to-day emergency management responsibilities are carried by the Protective Services Manager, working with the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of the ACRD and the Chief Administrative Officer of the City of Port Alberni. This group is referred to in this report as “emergency program leadership.”

The ACRD and the City of Port Alberni also have local emergency management bylaws and plans in place that formally set out their emergency management structure, committees and delegated responsibilities. Those bylaws and plans identify an emergency program coordinator or program lead, and delegate authority to maintain plans, coordinate readiness and activate the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) when needed.

Emergency communications is now a defined part of the emergency program, not an ad hoc task. The plans and resource guides developed through this project have established an information function inside response, set expectations for the public about the kinds of updates they will receive during an activation and reinforced that messaging should be coordinated across jurisdictions, including with First Nations. The next step is to keep that function supported and in practice.

Day-to-day program stewardship should sit with the Protective Services Manager. The Protective Services Manager is best positioned to maintain the core materials, keep them current and make sure they are available the moment they are needed. This includes version control for the emergency communication plan, contact lists, pre-approved public messaging, social and web access arrangements and the “who to call first” information that supports early activation. The Protective Services Manager should also schedule light, regular touch points — short refreshers and orientations — so staff who may be asked to support the information function stay familiar with their role.

During activation, the Information Officer leads public-facing communications inside the Emergency Operations Centre. This role is essential. The Information Officer is responsible for drafting and clearing public information, coordinating timing and message discipline with Operations and Planning, tracking community questions and rumours and issuing regular situation updates on an agreed cadence. The Information Officer does not act alone. The EOC Director approves public releases, and Incident Command continues to verify facts on the ground. That working relationship needs to be applied consistently so that public information is accurate, aligned and timely.

Because emergencies in the region often cross boundaries, the program should continue to treat coordinated public messaging with Tseshaht First Nation, Hupačasath First Nation and neighbouring governments as normal practice. When an incident affects more than one jurisdiction, the expectation should be early contact, agreement on who will speak to which elements and clear public information that names the lead voice. This approach supports respectful communication, reduces confusion for the public and helps staff avoid competing demands in real time.

There is also a role for senior leadership. Elected officials and senior managers can help strengthen public trust by reinforcing the approved communications process rather than creating parallel statements during an activation. In

practice, this means leaders receive a brief heads-up before a public update is posted, understand what will be said and by whom and are prepared to echo that message. Doing so protects relationships and keeps the public focused on a single, reliable source.

To keep this structure durable over the next year, three practical commitments are needed:

- Confirm and document the primary Information Officer and at least one trained backup, along with reporting lines during activation.
- Ensure communication materials and resources are accessible to communicators and stored on a shared platform. Assign ongoing maintenance of the plan, resource guides, contact lists, message templates and channel access arrangements to the Protective Services Manager, with a simple review and update schedule.
- Keep joint public messaging with First Nations active through shared training, regular communication and continued planning together, so that this way of working becomes routine and is not dependent on who happens to be on shift.

Potential risks

The emergency program has already made meaningful progress. The emergency communication plan, the standard operating procedures, the resource guides, the defined information function and the work with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation are not theoretical. They have been used in real conditions — wildfire, evacuation-related messaging, a tsunami advisory — and staff have applied them under pressure with professionalism. The focus now is to keep that momentum, support the people doing the work and make sure these gains become routine, not temporary.

The first area to watch is depth and coverage in the information function. Phase 2 recommended an embedded Information Officer within the Emergency Operations Centre, with clear duties and backup, rather than asking someone to assist with communications off the side of their desk. That expectation is now understood and has been put into practice. The next step is to keep it supported. If primary and backup coverage are confirmed and kept current, the program can continue to respond quickly, avoid burnout and maintain consistent public messaging even during multi-day or overlapping activations.

The second area is consistency in signalling activation. One of the advances in this project is the move toward a clear, three-tier operational model (monitoring mode, partial activation, full activation) and the expectation that the status of the Emergency Operations Centre will be announced to partners, elected officials and the public. This gives everyone a shared picture of who is leading, what level of coordination is in place and what they can expect next. Continuing to use that structure — and issuing a short notice at the outset — helps reduce confusion across jurisdictions and protects staff from being second-guessed in the middle of a response.

The third area is joint public information with First Nations. A core recommendation in Phase 2 was to strengthen how Tseshaht First Nation, Hupačasath First Nation and the ACRD emergency program communicate with the public during shared events. That work is well underway. The plans and resource guides reflect a more coordinated and respectful approach, and recent activations showed tangible progress in collaborating with each other, and speaking with communities together, during high-pressure situations. The opportunity now is to keep building on that progress through continued collaboration, shared training and regular planning, including opportunities to extend that approach to other First Nations and Indigenous governments in the region where invited.

The fourth area is operational enablers. Phase 2 identified practical supports that allow staff to succeed: rapid production and posting of maps; direct control of web, social and alerting channels during activation; reliable alerting workflows; an Assistant Information Officer presence at reception centres; and clear procedures for when

normal communication channels fail. Many of these elements are now in place or partially in place — including a dedicated blackout and contingency communications Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that sets out how to communicate when power, cellular or internet service is disrupted. The next step is to make these supports part of normal readiness: stage the physical assets and contact lists they rely on, and run short walk-throughs so Information, Logistics, ESS and the EOC Director are comfortable using the blackout SOP in real time. When these tools are known, exercised and ready on day one, staff can focus on communicating with the public instead of improvising under stress.

The region has also developed a draft Highway 4 / critical infrastructure communications SOP (June 2025). That SOP sets out how roles, update cadence, signage, holding statements and spokesperson responsibilities will be coordinated when key transportation corridors are disrupted. Like the blackout / contingency communications SOP, this will need to be confirmed with partners, staged and walked through in advance. The goal is to make sure that during a Highway 4 closure or similar event, residents receive one clear, timely line of information instead of competing updates.

Finally, there is public confidence. Over the past season, public updates were issued more quickly, roles were clearer and residents received more regular situation information. That is a direct result of the work the team has already done. It has also raised expectations in the region — from residents, from elected officials and from partner governments — about the level of clarity and timeliness they will see in future events. Maintaining that level of clarity going forward will continue to build trust and will also reduce pressure on staff in the next activation.

In summary, the question is: “how do we keep this level of performance going without exhausting the people doing it?” The path is straightforward: confirm and support the Information Officer role and backup coverage; continue to use visible activation levels; keep growing the shared public information approach with First Nations; and finish standing up the technical pieces that let staff publish quickly and confidently. Doing this will protect staff capacity, keep communications reliable across jurisdictions and continue to build credibility with the public.

Conclusion and next steps

This project set out to build practical emergency communications capacity across the Alberni-Clayoquot region. The work did not stay theoretical. It began with engagement and assessment. The Phase 2 interim report identified specific gaps in activation structure, role clarity, publishing access, geographic information support, culturally safe messaging and how the ACRD, Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation work together in public. The project then delivered regional and Nation-specific plans, procedures, resource guides and training that defined the information function and gave staff and leadership tools they could actually use.

Those tools were tested sooner than expected and before they were fully socialized. Wildfire, evacuation-related response and a tsunami advisory required rapid, coordinated public information. The region began to put the new structure into practice: identifying who was leading, issuing clearer and more frequent public updates, coordinating messaging across governments and focusing on what residents needed to know and do next. That is meaningful progress. It has already improved how the emergency program shows up for the public.

At the same time, the recent activations showed where continued attention will be helpful. The information function still relies on a very small number of people. Channel access and backup publishing authority still need to be confirmed and documented. Joint public messaging with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation should continue to develop so that this coordinated approach becomes routine. The update cadence needs to move from “best effort” to habit. None of these items are new. They are consistent with the recommendations in Phase 2, and they align directly with the emergency communication plan, the standard operating procedures and the resource guides now in place.

Next steps for the coming year are clear:

- Confirm and document the primary Information Officer and at least one trained backup, including expectations during activation.
- Put channel access and backup publishing authority in place for web, social and alerting so approved messages can go out without delay.
- Adopt and hold to a predictable situation update cadence during activation (for example, set update times each operational period so residents and elected officials know when to expect information).
- Maintain the plan, guides, contact lists, channel access details and templates as live tools — reviewed after each activation and through scheduled check-ins.
- Continue joint planning, training and messaging work with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation and look for opportunities to extend that collaborative model to other First Nations and Indigenous governments in the region where invited.

Finally, this report includes an Implementation Tracker in Appendix A. That table lists each key Phase 2 recommendation, what has already been delivered, the current status, who now owns it and the next step. It should be maintained by the emergency program as the working accountability tool going forward. It is the bridge between this project and the next year of program work.

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Acknowledgements

This work reflects a high level of cooperation across the region. We would like to thank the staff, emergency program leadership team, responders and elected representatives from the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District and electoral areas, the City of Port Alberni, and local partner agencies and organizations who contributed their time, experience and candid feedback throughout this project.

With gratitude, we also acknowledge and thank Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation for their direct participation, guidance and leadership in developing communications approaches that respect governance, culture and community needs, and for their openness and collaboration in helping shape how public information will be provided during shared events.

Thank you as well to Emergency Support Services volunteers and reception centre staff, Information and Assistant Information Officers, GIS and mapping staff, and operational personnel who shared real-time lessons from wildfire, tsunami advisory and evacuation-related response. Their input directly informed the tools, templates and processes delivered through this project.

We recognize the strong leadership of the ACRD emergency program in driving this work forward and in beginning to apply the new communications model in real events, and we appreciate the continued support of senior management and elected leadership in prioritizing public information, trust and transparency as core elements of emergency response.

This project and the preparation of this final report were made possible with funding support from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM).

DRAFT



Tseshaht
First Nation



ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT
REGIONAL DISTRICT



CITY OF
PORT ALBERNI



hupačasath
First Nation

Appendix A: Implementation tracker

The Phase 2 report set out clear, practical recommendations across various action areas, including activation structure, program identity, digital channels and alerting, Information Officer systems and processes, and Emergency Support Services communications. This final report builds on those recommendations rather than creating new direction.

To support hand-off and accountability, this report includes an implementation tracker in Appendix A. The table is intended to become the working tool for the emergency program and partner governments going forward.

The implementation tracker lists, for each Phase 2 recommendation:

- The recommendation itself (for example: adopt and implement a three-tiered Emergency Operations Centre activation model that is publicly signalled and avoid “soft” activations).
- The action taken to date (for example: emergency communication plan completed; activation language drafted; partners briefed).
- Current status (in place and in use; in progress; not yet started).
- Owner going forward (for example: Protective Services Manager; Information Officer; ACRD leadership with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation).
- Target timing or immediate next step (for example: confirm activation notice and public posting process within three months; confirm backup publishing access for web and social within the next operational period).

This table should be maintained as a live document. It should be reviewed after every significant activation and as part of a scheduled quarterly or semi-annual check-in. Over time, it becomes the audit trail that shows Council, First Nations governments, senior staff and the public that the emergency program is continuing to act on the findings of Phase 2.

Appendix A: Implementation tracker

Phase 2 recommendation	Action taken / deliverable produced	Current status	Owner going forward	Next step / timing
<p>1. Ensure the Information Officer is embedded in the Emergency Operations Centre during activations, not working “off the side of their desk,” and identify role coverage / backfill in advance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information Officer duties, reporting lines and first-operational-period tasks are now defined in the plan and resource guides. Orientation and tabletop training were delivered to begin building familiarity and comfort in this role, including the expectation to assign Assistant Information Officers (AIOs) for surge support and reception-centre/public-facing information. 	<p>In progress. The Information Officer role has been stood up during recent activations, but depth is still thin, and the program still depends on a very small number of trained communicators. Coverage for sustained events, including AIO support, is not yet fully documented. This is a sustainability risk.</p>	<p>Emergency program leadership.</p>	<p>Within 3 months: confirm and document the named primary Information Officer, at least one trained backup and identified Assistant Information Officers, including expectations for availability, shift coverage in the first 72 hours and support to reception centres / public information points.</p>
<p>2. Confirm publishing access and backup authority. In an activation, the program must be able to publish directly to web, social and alerting channels without delay or relying on other jurisdictions to repost.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Channel guidance, tone and cadence for public updates are documented in the resource guides, including how to structure situation updates and link back to an official source. During recent activations, partners worked toward consistent messaging and directed residents to official updates. 	<p>In progress. Website and social media publishing access is still distributed across multiple people and jurisdictions. Backup access is not yet formalized in writing.</p>	<p>Protective Services Manager (for readiness and access management), and Information Officer (for activation use).</p>	<p>Within 3 months: confirm who can publish directly to ACRD and partner channels during activation, and document backup access so approved messages can go out without delay.</p>
<p>3. Adopt and implement a predictable public update cadence during activation. Provide regular situation updates at known times so people understand what has happened, what is being done and when they will hear more.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The emergency communication plan sets expectations for routine situation updates during activation. In recent activations, portions of this cadence were used (clearer, more frequent updates and stated timing for “next update”). 	<p>In progress. Some updates followed a steady rhythm; others were more ad hoc. The expectation is understood, but not yet consistent.</p>	<p>Information Officer and EOC Director (during activations).</p>	<p>Immediate: adopt and hold to a predictable situation update cadence (for example, morning and late afternoon). Brief elected officials on that cadence so they can point residents to the official source instead of improvising.</p>

Appendix A: Implementation tracker

Phase 2 recommendation	Action taken / deliverable produced	Current status	Owner going forward	Next step / timing
<p>4. Adopt and implement a three-tiered Emergency Operations Centre operational model (Monitoring Mode, Partial Activation, Full Activation) to clearly signal incident awareness, identify the lead agency and communicate early preparedness information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The emergency communication plan defines activation triggers and ties each level to communications expectations, including when the Information Officer is activated, when joint messaging should begin and when public notice of activation should go out. This structure has already been partially exercised during wildfire response and the tsunami advisory, with the emergency program proactively signalling its awareness of emerging incidents. 	<p>In progress. Staff have begun informally using “monitoring” and “activation” language, but consistent public-facing activation notices and status posts are not yet routine.</p>	<p>Protective Services Manager.</p>	<p>Within 3 months: finalize and adopt activation language and a standard “notice of activation” so every activation level triggers a brief notification to elected officials, partners and the public.</p>
<p>5. Formally issue and post a brief “notice of activation” at the start of each activation to make leadership and roles visible and avoid “soft activations.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft wording and expectations for public activation notices are built into the emergency communication plan and resource guides. During this summer’s events, portions of this practice were used (public updates naming who was leading and when the next update would come). 	<p>In progress. Used inconsistently. Not yet embedded as mandatory.</p>	<p>Information Officer, with approval by the Emergency Operations Centre Director (during activations).</p>	<p>Immediate: require an activation notice any time the program moves beyond Monitoring into Partial or Full activation and provide it directly to elected officials so they can reinforce the message.</p>
<p>6. Continue strengthening joint public information with Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation. Keep the collaborative approach active through shared training, planning and aligned messaging in shared events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standalone plans and resource guides were developed with each Nation. Joint messaging and respectful acknowledgment of Nation authority were used during recent activations. 	<p>In progress. Relationships are stronger and the approach is being used in practice; the steps for clearing and sequencing shared messages are not yet captured in one simple reference for everyone.</p>	<p>Emergency program leadership together with senior leadership from Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation.</p>	<p>Within 6 months: confirm, document and socialize the general approach for shared events (clearing and sequencing of shared messaging) and continue to exercise it. Extend this collaborative model to other First Nations and Indigenous governments in the region where invited.</p>

Appendix A: Implementation tracker

Phase 2 recommendation	Action taken / deliverable produced	Current status	Owner going forward	Next step / timing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural safety and inclusive language guidance is embedded in the delivered materials. 			
<p>7. Improve public awareness of where to get official information during emergencies and how alerting works. Present the emergency program as a coordinated, trusted source for the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Messaging approach, update cadence and joint information practices are defined in the emergency communication plan and resource guides. During recent activations, the emergency program began to be identified publicly in that coordinating role. The program has started proactively explaining how and when subscribers receive alerts, and the difference between an evacuation alert, an evacuation order and different types of tsunami advisories. 	<p>In progress. There is no single plain-language public summary that explains “where to look first,” how alerts reach people, what each alert type means and what action residents should take.</p>	<p>Emergency program leadership.</p>	<p>Within 6 months: publish and maintain a short, plain-language web page (and printable one-pager) that explains where official updates will appear, how often updates will come, how ACRD, local governments and First Nations work together during shared events and what different alert types mean. Keep this page current as part of routine program updates.</p>
<p>8. Build and maintain the Information Officer systems and workspace. Stand up a dedicated Information Officer SharePoint site or equivalent; create a Teams channel for IOs and Assistant Information Officers with controlled access; maintain version control and shift coverage expectations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core content (plan, templates, guidance) has been produced and organized. Orientation has started so key staff know what exists and where. 	<p>In progress. The technical workspace (SharePoint / Teams / access protocols) still needs to be finalized and maintained as the single source of truth, so staff are not hunting through email during activation.</p>	<p>Protective Services Manager to maintain the workspace; Information Officer to use it in activation.</p>	<p>Within 3 months: stand up the shared IO workspace with version control, current contact lists, access credentials and approved templates, and limit editing rights to protect integrity.</p>
<p>9. Strengthen alerting. Create clear procedures for when and how the emergency program will amplify provincial / federal alerts; finalize pre-approved templates for high-risk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Public Alerting SOP (June 25, 2025) now sets thresholds for when to issue a Voyent Alert and when to amplify an external advisory on ACRD web and social channels. It also covers geotargeting, 	<p>Substantially in place. The alerting workflow, approval chain and templates now exist and have already been applied in live events such as tsunami advisories, wildfire-related evacuation messaging and</p>	<p>Protective Services Manager.</p>	<p>Before the 2026 summer season: run a short tabletop using the Public Alerting SOP to walk through (1) when to issue a Voyent Alert vs when to amplify, (2) who approves and who sends, (3) who gets</p>

Appendix A: Implementation tracker

Phase 2 recommendation	Action taken / deliverable produced	Current status	Owner going forward	Next step / timing
<p>scenarios; and continue building the Voyent Alert subscriber base.</p>	<p>timelines, and when to request a provincial BC Emergency Alert for imminent threats to life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SOP defines who drafts, who approves, and who is authorized to send an alert. The Information Officer drafts the message using approved templates, the EOC Director approves during activations, and trained Voyent Alert administrators send once approved. In monitoring mode, the Protective Services Manager can authorize alerts. • Pre-written alert templates now exist for evacuations, tsunami messaging, flood, wildfire smoke and road closures, power and water disruptions, air quality, and boil water notices. These are aligned to plain-language standards and include expected public actions. • The SOP also documents how and when to notify elected officials, First Nations governments, section chiefs and first responders before (where possible) or immediately after an alert goes out, so elected officials are not surprised, and partners are aligned. 	<p>Highway 4 travel advisories in summer 2025. What remains is exercising the SOP with the team, confirming backup access for Voyent Alert administrators, and making the internal notification steps routine.</p>		<p>notified (elected officials, First Nations, section chiefs, first responders), and (4) how to document the alert. Also confirm subscriber growth and backup publishing access as part of readiness.</p>
<p>10. Emergency Support Services (ESS) communications. Pre-approve evacuee-facing messaging; assign an Assistant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Templates for reception-centre messaging and evacuee updates have been included in the resource guides. 	<p>In progress. The concept is defined, but reception-centre communications roles</p>	<p>Protective Services Manager with communications leads</p>	<p>Before the next large-scale ESS activation: identify and train at least one Assistant Information Officer per</p>

Appendix A: Implementation tracker

Phase 2 recommendation	Action taken / deliverable produced	Current status	Owner going forward	Next step / timing
Information Officer at reception centres; make sure people get clear information about services, supports and next update timing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Assistant Information Officer role is described and tied to ESS operations. 	and scripts still need to be exercised and normalized.	from partner jurisdictions and First Nations.	potential reception centre, with a simple script and update cadence.
11. Enhance GIS and mapping support. Embed GIS as part of activation; build pre-styled map templates for evacuation zones and hazard perimeters; enable backup GIS capacity; and improve the speed at which maps can be published publicly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GIS needs and turnaround expectations (5, 15, 30 minutes) have been identified, and map products are now recognized as a core public information deliverable, not an optional product. 	In progress. Work on building templates has been undertaken. GIS is not yet consistently integrated into the first operational period of an activation, and backup GIS coverage and publishing authority are still being sorted.	Protective Services Manager with GIS staff.	Within 6 months: confirm GIS role in the Emergency Operations Centre structure and prepare a “GIS EOC bin” with logins, map templates and posting instructions so mapping can be produced and published rapidly without delay.
12. Blackout and redundancy procedures. Develop a practical SOP for prolonged outages that identifies backup channels (for example, roadside signage, radio, satellite connectivity, reception-centre communications).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A dedicated Standard Operating Procedure (SOP): Blackout procedures and contingency communications (June 2025) has been produced. The SOP defines triggers (loss of power, cellular, internet or alerting), outlines immediate priorities for the Information Officer, and assigns roles for the EOC Director, Liaison Officer, Logistics and Emergency Support Services. It establishes fallback channels when digital systems fail: radio partners, printed/public notice boards, door-to-door notification, staffed information points, signage and reception-centre communication. 	In place. The SOP exists and is ready for use. It now needs to be socialized, exercised and built into normal activation so staff are comfortable using it without delay.	Protective Services Manager, working with Logistics, ESS and partner agencies with technical assets.	Within 6 months: integrate this SOP into the emergency communication plan and EOC quick-start materials; stage physical assets (signage, print templates, radio contacts) so they are immediately accessible; and run a short tabletop / walk-through so Information, Logistics, ESS and the EOC Director understand their roles.

Appendix A: Implementation tracker

Phase 2 recommendation	Action taken / deliverable produced	Current status	Owner going forward	Next step / timing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It includes messaging templates, a rapid-start checklist for the first operational period, guidance for supporting vulnerable residents and expectations for documenting actions. 			
<p>13. Highway 4 and other critical infrastructure communications. Create a repeatable SOP for closures and detours, clarify who leads on what (MOTT, emergency program, BC Wildfire Service, EMCR, First Nations) and develop pre-drafted messaging, signage and briefing cadence for elected officials and media.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A draft Highway 4 / critical infrastructure communications SOP (June 2025) has been prepared. The SOP outlines roles across agencies, expectations for scheduled situation updates, use of consistent holding statements, signage and public notice points and how information will be shared with elected officials and the public. The approach reflects lessons from previous Highway 4 disruptions, including the need for one clear lead voice and predictable update timing. 	<p>Drafted. The SOP now exists in written form, but it has not yet been formally adopted by all partners. Full implementation will require confirmation and buy-in from MOTT, BC Wildfire Service, EMCR, Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation, and it still needs to be exercised.</p>	<p>Emergency program leadership with MOTT, BC Wildfire Service, EMCR, Tseshaht First Nation and Hupačasath First Nation.</p>	<p>Within 12 months: confirm and adopt the SOP with partner agencies; agree on spokesperson roles and update cadence; stage signage / message templates; and run a short joint exercise or tabletop so all parties are comfortable executing it under real conditions.</p>
<p>14. Strengthen program identity and visibility. Select an inclusive program name, develop a shared visual identity and apply it consistently across channels, paired with light public awareness about the emergency program’s mandate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The emergency communication plan and resource guides present the emergency program as a single, recognizable function serving the region and reinforce the expectation of “one message, one source” during activation. Early messaging during this summer’s incidents began to identify the emergency program as a coordinating voice rather than only the municipality of the day. 	<p>In progress. Visual identity, naming and branding assets need to be developed, finalized and applied to web, social, templates and public briefings.</p>	<p>Emergency program leadership.</p>	<p>Within 6 months: finalize and apply a consistent program identity (name and visual standard) to the website presence, situation updates, public notices and activation statements.</p>

Appendix B: Glossary of key terms and roles

ACRD

Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District. The regional district emergency program is the focus of this project and this report.

Assistant Information Officer (AIO)

A trained support role for the Information Officer. The Assistant Information Officer helps with high-volume communication work such as evacuee information at reception centres, situation updates and social monitoring. The AIO role is also part of succession planning so that communications capacity does not depend on one person.

BCEMS

B.C. Emergency Management System. The Province's model for emergency management structure and coordination across all phases (mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery). The work in this project is designed to align with BCEMS expectations for clear roles, documentation and predictable public information.

BC Wildfire Service

The provincial agency responsible for wildfire response, wildfire status information (for example, "Wildfire of Note") and public advisories related to wildfire. The Highway 4 / critical infrastructure communications work and joint messaging work reference BC Wildfire Service as a key partner.

CAO

Chief Administrative Officer. The most senior staff role in a local government (the ACRD and the City of Port Alberni each have a CAO). In this report, the CAOs are part of emergency program leadership: they provide senior direction, resourcing and oversight even when the Emergency Operations Centre is not formally activated.

EDMA

Emergency and Disaster Management Act. Provincial legislation that modernizes emergency management in British Columbia. Under the Act, a local authority (which includes a regional district) must either establish and maintain an emergency management organization or join a multijurisdictional emergency management organization. The Act also requires the local authority to designate, in writing and by title or position, who is authorized to act on behalf of the local authority in emergencies. ([B.C. Laws](#))

EMCR

Emergency Management and Climate Readiness. The B.C. ministry responsible for provincial emergency management policy, coordination and support.

Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)

The coordination centre that is activated to manage an incident. The report refers to operational levels (monitoring mode, partial activation, full activation) and recommends clearly signalling activation status to elected officials, First Nations and the public at the outset of an event.

EOC Director

The lead position in the Emergency Operations Centre during an activation. During an activation, the EOC Director approves public information for release, with the Information Officer drafting, coordinating and delivering that

information. Outside an activation, authority for day-to-day readiness and maintenance sits with emergency program leadership, not the EOC Director.

Emergency program leadership

For the purposes of this report, “emergency program leadership” refers to the Protective Services Manager, in consultation with the Chief Administrative Officer of the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District and the Chief Administrative Officer of the City of Port Alberni. This reflects the shared nature of the program, including funding, operational readiness and public communication responsibilities. This definition is used in the report to describe who is accountable for maintaining the program between activations.

Emergency Support Services (ESS)

The function that supports evacuees and displaced residents (reception centres, basic needs, services and supports). The plan and SOPs call for assigning an Assistant Information Officer to support ESS, so displaced residents receive timely, accurate, plain-language updates.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Mapping and spatial data support (for example, evacuation zones, hazard perimeters, travel advisories, infrastructure impacts). The report treats GIS products as essential public information in the first operational period and recommends integrating GIS outputs directly into public updates and social posts.

Information Officer (IO)

The public information lead in an activation. The Information Officer reports to the EOC Director and drafts, clears and releases public information; coordinates timing with Operations and Planning; monitors questions, rumours and misinformation; and delivers predictable situation updates on an agreed cadence. The report recommends embedding this role formally in the Emergency Operations Centre structure and identifying trained resources.

MOTT

Ministry of Transportation and Transit. The provincial ministry responsible for highway / transportation corridor information (for example, Highway 4 status, detours, traffic control). The Highway 4 / critical infrastructure communications work recommends confirming spokesperson roles and synchronized update timing with MOTT, so the public gets one consistent message.

Notice of activation

A short, time-stamped public update issued at the start of an activation. It names who is leading the response, states the activation level (monitoring, partial or full), and sets expectations for when the next public update will be issued. The report recommends treating this as mandatory at the outset of every activation to reduce confusion.

Protective Services Manager (role in this report)

The Protective Services Manager is the ACRD staff position that is accountable for maintaining the emergency communication program in steady state. In practice, this role carries what many local governments refer to as “Emergency Program Coordinator” duties: keeping plans and SOPs current and accessible; maintaining alerting and public information procedures; ensuring that the Information Officer function is staffed and ready; and coordinating with senior leadership, First Nations and partner agencies.

Under British Columbia’s Emergency and Disaster Management Act, a local authority (including a regional district) must maintain an emergency management organization and must designate in writing who is authorized to act on behalf of that authority in emergencies, identified by name, title or position ([B.C. Laws](#)). In the ACRD, those day-to-

day emergency management responsibilities are carried by the Protective Services Manager as part of emergency program leadership.

Public alerting / Voyent Alert

Voyent Alert is the subscriber-base notification system used by the emergency program to send time-sensitive alerts such as evacuation alerts and orders, safety advisories, boil water notices, tsunami advisories and urgent protective actions directly to subscribers. The Public Alerting SOP now sets:

- when to issue a Voyent Alert;
- when to request a provincial BC Emergency Alert for an imminent life-safety threat;
- when to amplify trusted external advisories (for example, Environment Canada, BC Wildfire, National Tsunami Warning Center);
- who drafts, who approves and who is authorized to send.

The next step is exercising that SOP with the team and confirming backup access.

SOP (Standard Operating Procedure)

A step-by-step procedure for a critical emergency communication task. Each SOP sets out triggers, roles, approval steps, timelines, required notifications (including First Nations and elected officials where appropriate) and links to pre-approved public messaging. The emergency communication plan includes a set of SOPs that cover common high-pressure situations and are meant to be ready to use in the first operational period.

“Source of truth”

The clearly identified primary channel where the public is told to look first for official, current information (for example, a dedicated ACRD emergency information page or website). The report recommends naming and maintaining this source of truth early in an event and pointing all social/media messaging back to it.

UBCM

Union of British Columbia Municipalities. UBCM funding helped support development of the emergency communication plan, SOPs, and supporting tools described in this report.

“First operational period”

The first operational block in an activation (often the first 12–24 hours). The report is explicit that, in that first period, the Information Officer must: confirm activation status publicly; issue a notice of activation; establish cadence (“next update at ___”); support ESS with evacuee-facing information; and publish initial GIS-supported situational information.



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