

# West Coast Emergency Cultural Awareness and Safety Plan Update



ACRD Emergency Executive Committee Meeting

May 28, 2026

# A Collaborative Initiative

*This initiative is grounded in partnership, lived experience, care, and shared responsibility*



Tseshaht  
First Nation

ANCIENT SPIRIT, MODERN MIND



Yuutu?it?ath



Uchucklesaht



DISTRICT OF  
Tofino



DISTRICT OF  
UCLUELET



ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT  
REGIONAL DISTRICT



CITY OF  
PORT ALBERNI



# How the plan was developed



# Engagement Sessions



## Engagement Process:

- Partner representatives
- Staff
- Leadership
- Executive
- Elders
- Community members
- Online community survey
- Key informant interviews



# Plan Content: Part 1

## PART 1: INTRODUCTION, RELATIONSHIPS, AND COMMITMENT

### Section 1: Executive Summary: A Facilitator's Witness Statement

- 1.1 The Table Was Set
- 1.2 The Invitation and How We Got Here
- 1.3 What Was Witnessed
- 1.4 A Critical Juncture
- 1.5 Why this Plan is a Vessel, Not A Document

### Section 2: Introduction and Call to This Work

- 2.1 Why We Were Called to This Work
- 2.2 Commitment to Relational Emergency Management
- 2.3 Purpose of the Plan
- 2.4 Partnership and Collaboration

This plan is not a technical checklist.  
It is not a stand-alone policy document.  
It is not a summary of data.

This plan is a vessel.  
It carries lived experience, relationship,  
responsibility, and shared commitment.

Trust is not built  
in an  
emergency;  
however it is  
revealed in one.

"It feels like our title and our rights and our inherent right to self-government, our sovereignty is all respected in a different way now and we're valued. Our opinions matter at those tables."

~ Wahmeesh (Ken Watts),  
Elected Chief Councillor,  
Tseshaht First Nation



# Plan Content: Part 2

## PART 2: GROUNDING THE WORK AND FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

### Section 3: Grounding and Foundation

- 3.1 Background and Context: What Shaped This Work
- 3.2 Approach: How This Work was Grounded and Developed
- 3.3 Foundational Principles: What Guides This Plan
- 3.4 Key Guidance: Ethics, Values, and Responsibilities
- 3.5 Understanding Cultural Safety in Emergency Management
  - 3.5.1 Context Matters: How Safety is Experienced in Emergencies
  - 3.5.2 Circle as Ceremony, Community as Safety
  - 3.5.3 The Mirror Gap
  - 3.5.4 What Happens When Trust is Absent
  - 3.5.5 Teaching from Nuu-chah-nulth Leadership
- 3.6 The Ground, the Sky and the Sweet Spot
  - 3.6.1 The Ground: What is Required
  - 3.6.2 Contributions, Reciprocity, and the Dignity of Agency: Reframing the Model
  - 3.6.3 From Rescue to Relationship: Reciprocity and Shared Responsibility
  - 3.6.4 Community Capacity, Contributions, and Resilience
  - 3.6.5 Five Senses of Cultural Safety
  - 3.6.6 Tending the Soil
  - 3.6.5 The Sky: What Is Positive and Possible

#### *The Ground, the Soil, and the Sky*

**The Ground:** what is legislatively and operationally required.

**The Soil:** practicing right relationship, rooted in care, compassion, and shared responsibility.

**The Sky:** what becomes possible when relationship and trust are present.

How you talk to people matters just as much as what you tell them.

How emergencies are handled matters as much as the emergency response itself.

Decisions made before, during, and after an emergency can either strengthen trust, relationships, and safety, or deepen fear, harm, and trauma.

# Plan Content: Part 3

*Emergency actions are temporary. Relationships are lasting.*

## PART 3: WHAT WE HEARD

### Section 4: Community Voices, Lived Experience and Shared Teachings

- 4.1 Safety Is More Than Physical Protection
- 4.2 Trust and Relationships: Safety Comes From Relationships, Not Systems
- 4.3 Communication That Builds Trust: Being Heard, Understood, and Oriented
- 4.4 Culture, Identity, and Belonging
- 4.5 Place, Land, Displacement, and Evacuation
- 4.6 Meeting People Where They Are At

Emergency responses are shaped by lived experience, relationships, resilience, and the realities people carry with them into a crisis.

*"If folks are more safe in a given scenario, then they are more apt to contribute to the solutions, either now or in the future. We need to cultivate that. We need to create those chances for dividends."*

Savaacath (John Jack), Chief Councillor for Huu-ay-aht First Nations and ACRD Board Chair

People are more likely to act when they trust the messenger, not just the message.

Let me describe what culturally safe emergency management looks like. Because that is exactly what emerged from the circles.

It looks like hearing Nuu-chah-nulth songs, singing, and drumming in the shelter. It looks like traditional Nuu-chah-nulth security, blanketed, familiar, trusted. It is the sight of cedar in the emergency shelters and the smell of fish soup on the stove.

It is the comfort of the familiar reaching through the chaos of a crisis and telling your nervous system: you are among your people. You are safe.

This is not decoration.  
This is medicine.

*Nene Kraneveldt, Nuu-chah-nulth facilitator*

# Plan Content: Part 4

## PART 4: PUTTING WHAT WE HEARD INTO PRACTICE

### Section 5: From Listening to Action

- 5.1 EOC Director
- 5.2 EOC Liaison
- 5.3 Information Officer
- 5.4 Operations Section Chief
- 5.5 Logistics Section Chief
- 5.6 Planning Section Chief
- 5.7 Emergency Support Services Director and Group Lodging Lead
- 5.8 Preparedness: Emergency Program Coordinator
- 5.9 Leadership Preparedness
- 5.10 Recovery: Leadership
- 5.11 Community Recovery

*"It's about meeting people where they're at. It's about nurturing them and supporting them wherever they go and whatever it is they decide to do... ensuring that they understand the information, the correct information, but it's also connecting it back to our culture in a good way."*

~ Wahmeesh (Ken Watts),  
Elected Chief Councillor,  
Tseshah First Nation



# EOC Quick Reference Guides

## EOC DIRECTOR

*Leadership, Cultural Safety, and Decision-Making Under Pressure*

### Why This Role Matters

The EOC Director sets the tone for the entire emergency response. Decisions made in this role shape not only operational outcomes but also how people experience safety, trust, authority, and relationships that extend long beyond the emergency itself.

For communities, particularly Indigenous communities, it is important to make decisions and take actions *with them, not for them*. Recognize that emergencies do not occur in isolation; they unfold within local context, history, lived experience, and for many, institutional harm. Effective emergency management therefore requires leadership that upholds care, respect, dignity, cultural safety and alongside physical protection.

As EOC Director, your role is not only to manage risk and resources. It is to hold the system steady under pressure. How you lead will influence how others communicate, decide, and show up. Emergency management is temporary; however, relationships will endure long after the hazard has passed. Decisions that respect Indigenous authority and self-determination lead to stronger outcomes and lasting trust.

### What We Heard

- Emergencies are experienced through lived history, not just present-day risk
- Decisions that overlook lived realities can unintentionally increase harm
- Trust is shaped not only by outcomes, but by how decisions are made
- Actions taken without explanation or consultation can feel controlling or dismissive, even well-intentioned
- Rushed decisions can unintentionally override dignity, safety, and trust
- Communities want to be engaged early, not informed late
- Trust is shaped by process as much as outcome
- Trust grows when leaders are transparent, honest about uncertainty, and share information
- Coordination across agencies increases confidence and reduces confusion
- Calm, compassionate, relational leadership helps people feel safer and more able to act
- Emergency actions may be temporary, but their relational impacts are lasting
- Emergency actions that reflect responsibility, fear, or experience — not resistance

### What Culturally Safe Leadership Looks Like in This Role

Culturally safe leadership is demonstrated through how decisions are made and communicated. It is intentional, grounded, and relational. In practice, this means:

- Leading with calm, steady and cooperative presence rather than visible urgency or command
- Creating decision-making space that values context, lived experience, and local knowledge
- Explicitly signalling that cultural safety, care, and dignity remain priorities, even under pressure
- Respecting Indigenous governance, protocols, and authority structures
- Inviting Indigenous liaisons into the EOC and supporting their participation
- Engaging First Nations leadership early, consistently, and meaningfully
- Being transparent about what is known, unknown, and still evolving
- Avoiding "decide-announce-defend" approaches that undermine trust
- Recognizing that communities experience risk, time, and urgency differently
- Supporting coordination and alignment across agencies to reduce confusion
- Recognize that safety includes emotional, cultural, and relational dimensions, not only physical protection
- Prioritize relationships over procedural speed, without losing sight of safety responsibilities

### Decision Prompts: Leadership Considerations

*These are not instructions. They support trauma-informed, culturally safe, and responsible decision-making.*

#### Before major decisions are finalized

- Who has been engaged, and who is missing?
- Are we acting *with* communities, or making decisions *about* them?
- What community knowledge or lived experience should inform this decision?
- Are we fulfilling our legislative responsibility to consult and collaborate with First Nations?
- Have First Nations leadership had an opportunity to raise concerns or provide context?
- What assumptions are we making about compliance, capacity, or urgency?
- Are decisions trauma-informed, culturally safe, and relational?
- Have we considered relational impacts, alongside legal and procedural requirements?
- Do our decisions reflect our organizational values?

#### When urgency is high

- Are we prioritizing speed over relationships, trust, clarity or care?
- Is urgency overriding explanation or engagement? Is there time for orientation or explanation, even if there is not time for consensus?
- What harm could this decision unintentionally create?
- How will this decision be experienced on the ground?



# Plan Content: Part 5

## PART 5: PRACTICE AND LEARNING COMPANION

### Section 6: A Shared Cultural Safety Decision Lens

- 6.1 Practical Scenarios: Applying the Lens
- 6.2 Before an Emergency: Relationships and Readiness
- 6.3 During an Emergency: Responding in a Good Way
- 6.4 Evacuation with Dignity
- 6.5 Reception Centres as Spaces of Care
- 6.6 After an Emergency: Healing, Return, and Ongoing Care

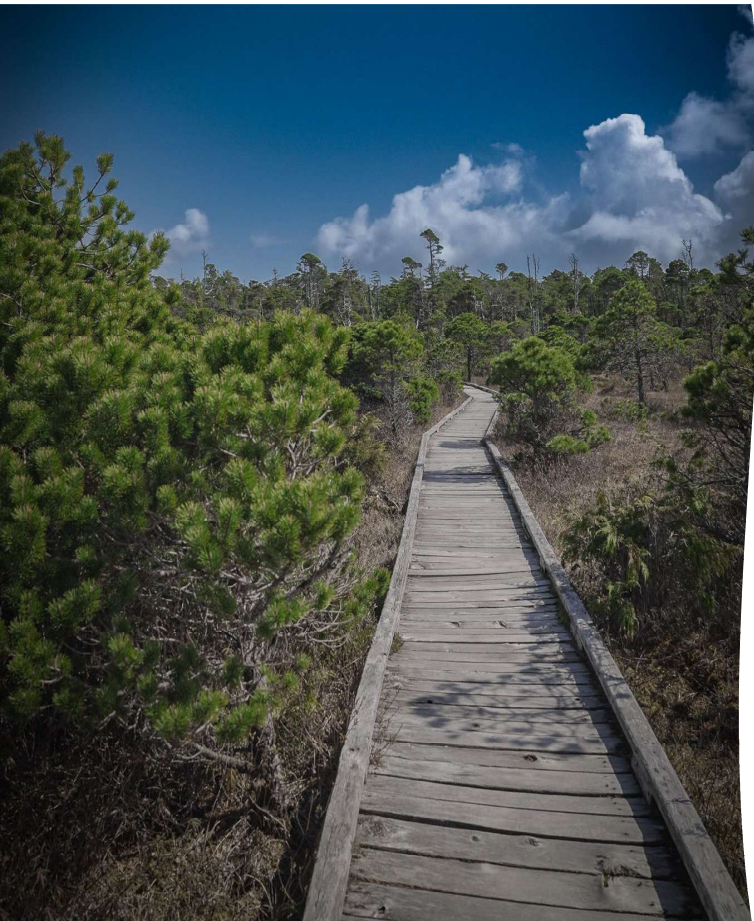
"Something we don't talk about is what happens after the emergency. I believe that aftercare is actually one of the most important pieces. Going through an example of a wildfire can be really traumatic to people and we don't often treat it as that."

~ Wahmeesh (Ken Watts),  
Chief Councillor, Tseshaht First

"Huu-ay-aht has its own administration... those people within the culture of service have a better understanding of what it takes to effectively communicate all of the options and expectations of a given scenario."

Savaac̓ath (John Jack), Chief  
Councillor . Huu-av-aht First Nations





# Plan Content: Part 6

## **PART 6: LOOKING FORWARD**

### **Section 7: Commitments, Accountability, and the Path Forward**

- 7.1 This is Not an End Point: Commitment
- 7.2 Accountability
- 7.3 The Path Forward: A Living Practice
- 7.4 Closing Reflection
- 7.5 Recommendations



# Plan Content: Part 7

## PART 7: SUPPORTING MATERIALS

### Section 8: Supporting Materials

- 8.1 Engagement Summary
- 8.2 Relevant legislation and policy context
- 8.3 References



## Next Steps

- Internal review
- Draft to partners for review and feedback
- Partnership meeting
- Finalize plan
- Approvals
- Public release
- Community communication
- Implement prioritized recommendations:
  - Graphic storyboard
  - Project video
  - RC visual materials
  - Culture Kits
  - Information sharing/ training





**Thank you**

Questions?