

Chapter 1

Section 1.04

Ministry of the Solicitor General and
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Emergency Management in Ontario

Follow-Up on VFM Section 3.04, *2017 Annual Report*

RECOMMENDATION STATUS OVERVIEW

	# of Actions Recommended	Status of Actions Recommended				
		Fully Implemented	In the Process of Being Implemented	Little or No Progress	Will Not Be Implemented	No Longer Applicable
Recommendation 1	1			1		
Recommendation 2	4		2	2		
Recommendation 3	3		2	1		
Recommendation 4	3	2		1		
Recommendation 5	3	1			2	
Recommendation 6	2		1	1		
Recommendation 7	2		2			
Recommendation 8	3			3		
Recommendation 9	4	1	1	2		
Recommendation 10	3			3		
Recommendation 11	2		2			
Recommendation 12	3		3			
Recommendation 13	3	2	1			
Recommendation 14	3			3		
Total	39	6	14	17	2	0
%	100	15	36	44	5	0

Overall Conclusion

As of September 23, 2019, the Ministry of the Solicitor General (formerly the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services) and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

(formerly the Ministry of Municipal Affairs) had fully implemented 15% of the actions we recommended in our *2017 Annual Report* (the Ministry of the Solicitor General implemented four out of 36 actions and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing implemented two out of three actions). The Ministries had made progress in implementing another 36% of recommended actions.

The Ministry of the Solicitor General had fully implemented the recommendation to use independent nuclear expertise to assess nuclear risks, plans and response strategies as well as the recommendation to undertake a comprehensive review and update of the provincial risk assessment and to implement an ongoing cyclical review for it.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing had fully implemented the recommendation to implement processes allowing for more timely review and payment of financial-assistance claims from individual Ontarians and municipalities for disaster recovery. It also fully implemented the recommendation to document the requirements for its claims review processes and ensure that policies and procedures are in place and are applied consistently.

However, the Ministry of the Solicitor General had made little progress on 44% of the recommendations, including:

- reviewing best practices in other jurisdictions and establishing a governance structure that promotes and supports effective oversight of emergency management;
- reviewing the needs of municipalities and its own staffing practices, and put in place the appropriate level of support and staffing required to assist all of Ontario's municipalities in preparing for emergencies;
- providing the same level of support and assistance to municipalities regardless of whether a nearby nuclear facility is located inside or outside the province;
- developing, implementing and assessing the effectiveness of an appropriate and effective public-education program to prepare Ontarians for emergencies; and
- identifying appropriate performance measures related to emergency management program objectives, and regularly assessing program performance.

As well, the Ministry will not be implementing two recommended actions. See **Recommendation 5**.

The status of actions taken on each of our recommendations is described in this report.

Background

The Provincial Emergency Management Office (EMO) is a branch within the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management division of the Ministry of the Solicitor General (formerly the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services). It is responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating the emergency management programs of the province, the various provincial ministries and Ontario's municipalities.

The focus of emergency management is on protecting lives, infrastructure, property and the environment, and on helping to ensure the continuity of government operations and critical assets.

Emergency management involves five inter-dependent components: prevention, mitigation (risk and damage reduction), preparedness, response and recovery. To determine the priorities for emergency management and identify the activities to undertake within these five components, the following must first be identified:

- potential hazards (such as floods, forest fires and severe weather events);
- critical infrastructure (such as roads and telecommunications); and
- time-critical government services (such as those that need either to remain operational during an emergency or be restored quickly afterwards).

Although the province had some measures in place to prepare for and respond to emergencies, we found in our 2017 audit that there were weaknesses in the emergency management programs across the province, and in EMO's oversight and co-ordination of those programs.

The following were some of our significant observations:

- The governance structure for emergency management in Ontario was not effective for overseeing a province-wide program. The Cabinet Committee on Emergency Management is responsible for the oversight of emergency management, but had not met for several years.
- Emergency management was given lower-than-expected priority in Ontario. EMO competes with other priorities of its Ministry. EMO has not fared well in this environment in the past, having experienced significant cuts to its program, staff and budget.
- The latest provincial risk assessment was done in 2012, and was based on emergencies experienced in Ontario up to 2009. Therefore, the provincial emergency management program had not considered emergencies that occurred between 2009 and 2017, or the latest information on climate change and other developing risks, such as cyberattacks and terrorism.
- The provincial emergency management program did not focus on all five components of emergency management: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. The provincial emergency management program focused mainly on just two of these—preparedness and response—with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing also undertaking activities related to recovery through disaster financial-assistance programs. Although there was a plan in 2003 to expand the provincial emergency management program to include all five components by 2006, this had not yet been done.
- The two provincial emergency response plans prepared by EMO—the Provincial Emergency Response Plan and the Provincial Nuclear Emergency Response Plan—had not been updated since 2008 and 2009, respectively. As a result, these plans may not have reflected more current operations or events.

- Approaches for practising for emergencies were insufficient to ensure the province was ready to respond to emergencies: approximately 80% of the practice tests undertaken during the five years prior to our audit were basic, consisting of discussions and seminars, for example, and generally did not include simulations of actual emergencies.
- The province’s overall state of readiness to respond to emergencies needed significant improvement. For example, numbers of trained staff were insufficient for a lengthy emergency, and agreements were not in place for resources that might be needed for an emergency response.

We made 14 recommendations, consisting of 39 action items, to address our audit findings. We received commitment from both ministries that action would be taken to address our recommendations.

Status of Actions Taken on Recommendations

We conducted assurance work between April 2019 and September 2019. We obtained written representation from the Ministry of the Solicitor General and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing that effective October 31, 2019, they had provided us with a complete update of the status of the recommendations we made in the original audit two years ago.

Governance and Organization Structure Not Conducive to Effective Emergency Management

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (Ministry) through the Provincial Emergency Management Office review best practices in other jurisdictions and recommend

to the Cabinet Committee on Emergency Management a governance structure that promotes and supports effective oversight of emergency management in the province and increases emergency preparedness, and that the Ministry implement this structure with the approval of the Cabinet Committee.

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

In our 2017 audit, we found that although the Cabinet Committee on Emergency Management (Committee) had responsibility for the overall strategic direction of the province's emergency preparedness, the Committee did not meet regularly and had not delegated this responsibility to anyone else. In fact, we found no evidence that any formal meetings had been held in the past five years. We noted that without regular meetings, the Committee could not provide proper oversight and strategic direction for the province, could not offer a government-wide focus for emergency management, and was unable to demonstrate that the province was prepared to address an emergency.

During our follow-up, the Ministry told us that it recognized that oversight of emergency management can be made more effective by strengthening existing governance structures. It has identified the new members of the Cabinet Committee for Emergency Management. However, the Ministry has not undertaken a review of best practices of governance structures in other jurisdictions to inform changes to existing governance structures. It plans to undertake this work as part of an internal review that will be done on emergency management.

Recommendation 2

To ensure that the emergency management programs in place at Ontario's ministries and municipalities include all delegated responsibilities and are sufficiently preparing them to respond to emergencies, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office:

- *assess whether the Chief of Emergency Management has sufficient authority under legislation to enforce the legal requirements of ministries and municipalities and whether changes are needed to obtain this authority;*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

We found in our 2017 audit that the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* assigned the day-to-day responsibility for emergency management to the Chief of Emergency Management, who is an Assistant Deputy Minister. The Chief's responsibilities included monitoring, co-ordinating and assisting in the development and implementation of emergency management programs in the province for ministries and municipalities. However, the legislation did not give the Chief authority to enforce the legal requirements for ministries and municipalities; the Chief was empowered only to encourage and request the co-operation of ministries and municipalities.

During our follow-up, the Ministry informed us that it plans to undertake an internal review of emergency management, which will include a review of best practices in emergency management to determine what changes are required to the provincial program to better ensure that ministries, municipalities and the province are prepared to respond to emergencies.

As part of the internal review, it plans to do an assessment of the Chief's authority, including the power to enforce legislation relating to emergency management programs of ministries and municipalities. The Ministry then also plans to determine whether other legislative or non-legislative tools are needed to enhance emergency management standards and enforce compliance.

- *implement an oversight process that focuses on the quality and sufficiency of the emergency management programs in place;*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

When we conducted our audit in 2017, we found that the main oversight process for the emergency management programs of ministries and municipalities was in the form of a self-assessment compliance process using a checklist. This process did not look at the quality of the emergency management programs in place. Instead, it required ministries and municipalities to simply indicate if they had met certain requirements, and to provide a brief explanation of how the requirement was met—having an emergency response plan, for example, and using the plan to perform practice tests. This exercise did not assess whether these plans and tests would help ensure that an organization was prepared to respond to an actual emergency; nor did the process ensure that all required plans had been prepared.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry updated the checklist and guide for the annual ministry compliance review to assist in the development of their emergency management programs.

With respect to municipalities, the Ministry told us it undertook a legal consultation to gain an understanding of legal requirements for municipalities in the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. From this, it updated the compliance guide that is distributed to the municipalities.

However, for both the ministry and the municipal emergency management programs in place, the annual compliance review process has remained unchanged and does not focus on the quality and sufficiency of the programs. The Ministry informed us it plans to include the oversight process as part of the internal review of emergency management that it plans to undertake and intends to implement a new process based on the outcome of the review.

- *provide feedback to and work with noncompliant ministries and municipalities to ensure that they make timely improvements;*

Status: In the process of being implemented by December 2019.

Details

In our 2017 audit, we found that the Ministry did not have a process in place to follow up on organizations not in compliance with the legislated requirements for their emergency management plan to ensure corrections were made.

In our follow-up, we found that in 2018, the Ministry included information in the 2017 compliance review memos that were sent to ministries identifying areas of strength, opportunities for improvements, and recommendations. It also worked with some ministries found to be non-compliant during these reviews to help them improve their emergency management programs.

Ministry field officers also worked closely with municipalities in 2018 to continue the development of their emergency management programs and to address areas of non-compliance.

Although these were positive steps toward providing feedback and ensuring improvements were made, a formal process had not been put in place to follow up on non-compliance issues. The Ministry plans to put a process in place by December 2019.

- *summarize and report on the results of the compliance reviews to identify systemic issues across the province.*

Status: In the process of being implemented by March 2020.

Details

In 2017, our audit found that the Ministry had not analyzed the results of its compliance review process to identify systemic problems and gaps that may need to be addressed province-wide.

At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry had begun analyzing the results of ministry compliance reviews to identify areas needing additional help. In support of this, it provided us with a high-level summary of the areas of issues identified in the compliance reviews and common factors affecting compliance. Based on this analysis, the Ministry planned to implement tools, training or other activities to help ministries become compliant. The

Ministry informed us that it planned to complete this by March 2020.

The Ministry had not implemented a similar process for municipal compliance reviews, but informed us that it also planned to do this by March 2020.

Recommendation 3

To ensure that the Province has a co-ordinated emergency management program in place that supports the ministries and municipalities with their emergency management programs and is able to share information in a timely manner, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office:

- *review the needs of municipalities and its own staffing practices, and put in place the appropriate level of support and staffing required to assist all of Ontario's municipalities in preparing for emergencies;*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

We found in our 2017 audit that municipalities were the first to respond to emergencies at the local level. However, in order to carry out these responsibilities, many municipalities required support from the Province. In this regard, the Ministry had field officers positioned throughout the province to assist Ontario's 444 municipalities. These staff members are critical to the success of emergency management, as they are the day-to-day face of the Ministry. In total, 10 field officers were available to assist with municipal emergency management programs, resulting in an average load of 40 to 50 municipalities each.

In our interviews with municipalities, we found that the resources, expertise and state of preparedness at the municipalities varied widely. Although many of the large and some of the medium-sized municipalities said they did not require a great deal of assistance from the province, most of the

smaller ones did need a high level of assistance; for example, with practice tests or strengthening their emergency response plans. Yet many of those told us that the Provincial Emergency Management Office did not provide enough support to assist with their emergency management programs.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry signed an emergency response agreement with Indigenous Services Canada to increase staffing for emergency management, which would free up existing field officers and operations staff to better support the needs of municipalities. However, it has not undertaken a review of its own staffing needs or the staffing needed to assist municipalities.

In addition, although the Ministry plans to hire additional staff in the areas of operations, program development, training development, field operations, planning and exercises, and executive office staff, no additional staff had been hired at the time of our follow-up.

- *develop central resources, supports and best practices for emergency management to allow for better co-ordination, expertise and consistency of emergency management programs across Ontario;*

Status: In the process of being implemented by March 2021.

Details

Our 2017 audit found that municipalities and ministries lacked support in the form of centralized templates and guidelines for items such as emergency response plans, plans for continuity of government operations, samples of practice tests, and information on lessons learned during past events.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had taken some action with regard to increasing the expertise and consistency of emergency management programs, mainly in the form of enhanced training sessions. It also continued to hold information-sharing meetings on a monthly basis.

The Ministry also planned to undertake a review of national and international best practices to

identify how to enhance emergency management programs in Ontario. It planned to complete this by March 2021.

- *review the information technology needs of the province and implement an effective, co-ordinated province-wide information technology solution.*

Status: In the process of being implemented by March 2020.

Details

In our 2017 audit, we found that the province had no co-ordinated Information Technology (IT) system in place for emergency management, even though it had spent about \$7.5 million on developing such a system.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had developed a draft business case, which included a review of the IT needs of the province for an emergency management system. It had also issued a Request for Bids proposal to procure an emergency-incident-management IT system to track, report on and manage emergency incidents. The Ministry expected to identify the successful bidder and enter into a contract by December 2019, and have the system implemented by March 2020.

Risk Identification and Assessment Processes Are Not Sufficient to Ensure the Emergency Management Program Includes All Areas of Concern

Recommendation 4

To ensure that the provincial risk assessment is effective at identifying and assessing current hazards in Ontario, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office:

- *undertake a comprehensive review and update of the provincial risk assessment, in collaboration with all ministries and municipalities;*

Status: Fully implemented.

Details

In our 2017 audit, we found that Ministry processes to identify and assess potential hazards were not sufficient to identify the areas of risk on which the province and ministries should focus their efforts. As a result, the emergency-management programs of the province and ministries either failed to include all risks or did not focus on the appropriate risks.

More specifically, we noted that the last provincial risk assessment was completed in 2012, based on information about emergencies in Ontario up to 2009. Therefore, the current assessment did not consider emergencies that occurred over the previous eight years or the latest information on the effects of climate change and other risks, such as cyberattacks and terrorism, whose frequency and severity may have changed.

We also found that the province, ministries and municipalities were all undertaking risk-assessment processes independently of each other, working in silos rather than collaboratively. The province completed its own risk assessment, even though it was the ministries that had subject-matter expertise on the hazards, and municipalities that had the local knowledge about where hazards were likely to occur.

We found in our follow-up that the Ministry had updated the provincial risk assessment, which includes a high-level assessment of the current hazards in Ontario. The updated version was developed in collaboration with expert advisers and representatives of ministries, municipalities, Indigenous groups and universities. It is available on the Ministry's website.

The provincial risk assessment also provides updated guidance to support municipal and ministry emergency management co-ordinators in the development of their own risk assessments.

- *seek approval for the assignment of responsibilities for new hazards;*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

During our 2017 audit, we found that when the Ministry completed the provincial risk assessment in 2012, it identified hazards such as cyberattacks and geomagnetic storms that were not included in earlier assessments. However, responsibility for these hazards had not been assigned to any ministry so, by default, the new hazards became the responsibility of the Ministry, which lacked the expertise to deal with them.

In our follow-up, the Ministry informed us that the assignment of new hazards identified in the updated provincial risk assessment will be considered after the Provincial Emergency Response Plan is reviewed and finalized.

- *implement an ongoing cyclical review process using best practices.*

Status: Fully implemented.

Details

In our follow-up, we noted that the Ministry intended to review the risk assessment every five years. The Ministry was unable to identify best practices for the timing of the ongoing review process for the risk assessment, so instead, it based the five-year cycle on staffing levels, potential for changes in current hazards and the expected work required to update it.

It plans to begin the review process one to two years before publishing an updated risk assessment in order to allow time for comprehensive engagements with relevant parties, and a review of the content.

Recommendation 5

To ensure that all critical infrastructure and time-critical services in the province are appropriately identified, and that up-to-date plans are in place to protect critical infrastructure and maintain continuity of government operations, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office:

- *develop and maintain a comprehensive listing and plans for the protection of critical infrastructure and all time-critical government services in the province;*

Status: Will not be implemented. The Office of the Auditor General of Ontario continues to believe that the Ministry, which has overarching responsibilities for emergency management in the province, should develop and maintain a comprehensive listing and plans to protect the province's critical infrastructure and time-critical government services.

Details

In 2017, our audit found that the Ministry did not have complete information on critical infrastructure in the province so that it could be prioritized and protected in an emergency; nor did the Ministry maintain a comprehensive, prioritized list of all time-critical services in the province. Such a list would be important in an emergency to help determine how to allocate limited government resources, such as staff, vehicles, generators and health supplies, to ensure continuity of the highest-priority services. We also noted that some continuity plans for government operations had not been prepared.

At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry stated that it does not plan to implement this recommendation. It currently maintains copies of ministry-level continuity of operations plans for the other ministries in the province. Critical infrastructure and time-critical services are identified at a branch and unit level within a ministry during the development of continuity of operations plans that are used locally. The Ministry told us that it does not need a comprehensive listing of this information or copies of these plans as it would not need to use the information during a provincial emergency response.

The Ministry plans to continue to work with the other ministries to ensure that they have identified critical services and developed continuity of operations plans to ensure that critical services are maintained during emergencies.

- *develop processes and supports to assist ministries with planning the continuity of their operations, including having an appropriate level of approval in place for the plans;*

Status: Fully implemented.

Details

We found in 2017 that the ministries we visited did not have in place adequate oversight practices for their continuity plans, leaving open the risk that they had not identified all time-critical services or planned appropriately to maintain them. Three of the four ministries we visited performed no review to ensure that all necessary continuity plans were completed.

We also noted that each of the ministries visited required different levels of approval for their branch continuity plans, with some branches requiring only that a manager approve the plans. This creates a risk that senior staff may not be aware if plans have been prepared for all time-critical services, or if the plans are up to date and reflect current operations.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had revised the Emergency Management Program Guide, which supports ministries with their emergency management programs. The Guide includes information on the components that a continuity of operations plan should include, information on how to assign responsibilities to employees, and how to identify critical functions. The Ministry also has a Client Services Advisor available to work with ministries to support their continuity of operations programs.

- *evaluate requiring municipalities to have plans for the continuity of their operations.*

Status: Will not be implemented. The Office of the Auditor General of Ontario continues to believe that the Ministry should, at the very least, assess whether municipalities have continuity of operations plans and for those that do not, assess whether they need support in preparing them.

Details

During the audit in 2017, we found that there was no legislative requirement for municipalities to have continuity of operations plans, even though it is equally important for them to continue to offer time-critical services to their residents and businesses during an emergency.

In our follow-up, the Ministry told us that it does not plan to implement this recommendation as it is confident that municipalities consider and incorporate critical infrastructure in their emergency plans. Municipalities and communities also maintain their own critical infrastructure lists.

The Provincial Emergency Management Program Does Not Focus on All Five Components of Emergency Management

Recommendation 6

To ensure that Ontario is making reasonable efforts to prevent potential hazards or mitigate their impacts, and that these efforts are co-ordinated with emergency management programs, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office work with ministries and municipalities to:

- *determine what prevention and mitigation activities are being done in the province;*
- Status: In the process of being implemented by March 2020.**

Details

We found in our 2017 audit that although there are five interdependent components of an emergency management program (prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery), the emergency management programs in Ontario mainly focused on preparedness, response and recovery. However, it is essential to know what can be prevented or mitigated in order to know the extent of the preparedness and response activities needed.

The ministries included in the audit were involved to some extent in prevention and mitigation activities, but most of the activities took place outside of emergency management and they were not taken into account by, or co-ordinated with, the activities of the ministries' emergency management branches. In addition, the Ministry did not maintain information on the mitigation and prevention initiatives undertaken in the province.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had worked with other provincial governments, as well as the federal and territorial governments, to support the development and launch of the Emergency Management Strategy for Canada. This strategy, based on the United Nations' Sendai Framework, focuses on strengthening Canada's ability to assess risks and to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. The Ministry told us that it planned to work with the different levels of government to develop an action plan to implement the recommendations under this strategy.

In addition, the Ministry provided a list of some of the mitigation and prevention activities occurring in the province, but it had not undertaken a process to develop a complete listing of mitigation and prevention activities for all ministries and municipalities. The Ministry planned to undertake and complete this process by March 2020.

- *assess the costs and benefits of other prevention and mitigation opportunities to determine which ones to implement and incorporate into their emergency management programs.*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

During our 2017 audit, we noted that that the Ministry was not comparing the costs of possible prevention and mitigation efforts with the potential savings in response and recovery costs. If prevention and mitigation activities were improved in the province, the need for expensive recovery assistance in certain areas could decrease.

In our follow-up, the Ministry told us that as part of Ontario's commitment to implement the Emergency Management Strategy for Canada, it planned to undertake a cost/benefit analysis to assist with decision-making in relation to prevention and mitigation proposals.

Emergency Preparedness Activities Need Improvement

Recommendation 7

To ensure that the province and its ministries are appropriately prepared to respond to an emergency, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office work with ministries to:

- *annually review and update their emergency response plans for any recent events or best practices;*

Status: In the process of being implemented by March 2020.

Details

Our 2017 audit found that although the two provincial emergency response plans, the Provincial Emergency Response Plan and the Provincial Nuclear Emergency Response Plan, were to be fully updated every four years, they had in fact not been updated since 2008 and 2009, respectively. These plans were also to be reviewed annually and updated, if required, to incorporate program changes, current best practices, results of practice tests and experience from significant emergencies.

Ministries are also required to review their emergency response plans annually and update them as needed. However, we found that many plans had not been updated for several years, and there was no evidence of annual reviews being done.

In our follow-up, we found the Ministry had updated the Provincial Nuclear Emergency Response Plan, and received Cabinet approval for it. The Provincial Emergency Response Plan

had also been updated and is expected to be submitted to the Solicitor General for approval by December 2019.

The Ministry had not put a process in place by the time of our follow-up to ensure that all ministries review their plans on an annual basis and update them for recent events and best practices. It plans to do this by March 2020.

- *implement a multi-year testing strategy based on high-risk and high-consequence events that periodically tests emergency response plans using a variety of testing methods*

Status: In the process of being implemented by March 2021.

Details

Our audit in 2017 noted that an important aspect of emergency preparedness is the performance of practice tests for a simulated emergency with all relevant parties. An expert we engaged during the audit noted that best practices required practice tests to be based on high-risk and high-consequence events, and that the plans use a multi-year approach, usually three to five years.

We found that the ministries we visited focused on meeting the requirement in legislation of conducting one practice test per year rather than working toward the best preparation for responding to an emergency. In fact, none of the ministries we visited had a multi-year strategy in place to ensure that all emergency response plans were tested periodically. In addition, 82% of the practice tests performed were of the basic type and not based on the simulation of an emergency. Of further concern, three of the ministries focused their practice tests on plans for continuity of operations, as opposed to response plans for specific emergencies.

In our follow-up, we found the Ministry was developing a provincial program for practice tests based on current risk, needs assessments, corrective action planning and best practices that it plans to implement by March 2021. A draft strategy was developed that includes details on the development and selection process of the multi-year practice test

schedules, the annual review process, and the process to implement and track corrective actions.

The Ministry also developed a draft needs-assessment questionnaire to assist with the identification of ministry and municipality practice test needs.

Recommendation 8

To ensure that lessons learned from actual past emergencies and practice tests for response plans are used to improve emergency management programs, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office work with ministries to:

- *develop standardized criteria that specify when lessons-learned reports are to be completed;*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

During the 2017 audit, we found that there were no province-wide or ministry criteria to specify when lessons-learned reports for practice tests or actual past emergencies should be completed, or who should complete them.

When we reviewed all the practice tests undertaken from 2012 to 2016 across the ministries we visited, we found that reports had been prepared for only half of them.

In our follow-up, we noted that the Ministry had training courses for practice tests that include information on lessons-learned reports and what to include in the reports. The Ministry also told us that it was working on developing standardized criteria for when lessons-learned reports are to be completed.

- *implement the recommendations of these reports in emergency management programs; and*
- *track and periodically report on the progress made in implementing them.*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

During the follow-up, we found that the Ministry included the development of a lessons-learned corrective-action tracking system in its 2019/20 business plan to assist with tracking and implementing recommendations from lessons-learned reports. However, to date no further action had been taken.

Recommendation 9

To ensure that Ontario's nuclear emergency management program is effectively preparing the Province to respond to nuclear emergencies that may impact Ontarians, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office:

- *use independent nuclear expertise at all times to assess nuclear risks, plans and response strategies;*

Status: Fully implemented.

Details

In our 2017 report, we found that the Provincial Nuclear Emergency Management program required the Ministry to have its own staff with specific technical knowledge to assess risks and provide the Province with independent and objective advice.

At times, however, we noted this position was vacant, and the Ministry relied in part on a technical network of retired nuclear power company staff and a nuclear consulting group. It also had a staff member from a nuclear power company in the position who was paid directly by the power company, which could pose a risk to the Ministry's objectivity.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had staffed a senior scientist position to improve the independence of its nuclear expertise. In addition, the Ministry hired additional staff with backgrounds and training in nuclear science and engineering to support the province's response to nuclear incidents and emergencies.

- *develop agreements with the Ontario nuclear power companies that state the requirements and deliverables for all parties;*

Status: In the process of being implemented by March 2020.

Details

In 2017, we found the Ministry received annual funding from nuclear power companies located in Ontario for the Provincial Nuclear Emergency Management program. Although the funding was for the provincial nuclear program, it was not tied to any requirements or deliverables.

In our follow-up, the Ministry told us that it had initiated discussions between its legal counsel and the nuclear power companies to develop new agreements that will outline clear deliverables, support, outcomes and performance measure for all parties. It also noted that all parties have agreed in concept to the need to update the agreements, but no draft agreements had been prepared at the time of our follow-up. The Ministry plans to have agreements in place by March 2020.

- *develop agreements with the US nuclear power companies that state the requirements and deliverables for all parties;*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

Our 2017 audit found that municipalities located near nuclear power facilities in Ontario received assistance from the nuclear power companies to assist with their emergency management programs and response training. However, one municipality located near a US power company told us that although the company provided some funding, it was insufficient to support its nuclear emergency program.

In our follow-up, we noted that the Ministry had not taken any action on this recommendation because, the Ministry said, the development of an agreement was partly dependent upon updates being made to the emergency response plan of the US nuclear power company.

- *provide the same level of support and assistance to municipalities regardless of whether a nearby nuclear facility is located inside or outside the province.*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

In our 2017 audit, we found that neighbouring US states had nuclear power facilities that could require an emergency response within Ontario. Yet Ontario municipalities that could be affected by these US facilities received little assistance from the province. As a result, municipalities located near out-of-province nuclear facilities were left to fund much of their own emergency preparedness and response activities, even though off-site nuclear emergencies are the province's responsibility.

The Ministry had not taken any action on this recommendation. According to the Ministry, the level of support and assistance that would be provided to municipalities and the resources needed were partly dependent upon updates being made to the emergency response plan of the US nuclear power company.

Planning Improvements Are Needed to Prepare for Effective and Efficient Emergency Response to Potential Future Emergencies

Recommendation 10

To ensure that Ontarians are informed on how to prepare for an emergency and on risks to be aware of in the province, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office work with ministries to:

- *develop an appropriate and effective public education program on preparing the public for emergencies that the Province may face;*
- *implement the program; and*
- *assess the effectiveness of the program.*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

We noted in our 2017 report that legislation requires each ministry to provide public education on emergency preparedness and that there are benefits to having a co-ordinated provincial approach to public education. However, there was no such approach in Ontario.

Instead, the Ministry used the Internet and Twitter to raise public awareness about possible emergencies, and it reinforced its messages during the annual Emergency Preparedness Week in May. However, we found that its reach through Twitter was less than 0.5% of the Ontario population and, therefore, ineffective.

During our follow-up, we found that the Ministry continued to rely on Twitter, the Internet, and on its annual Emergency Preparedness Week.

The Ministry told us it was liaising with Public Safety Canada and other provinces and territories to align provincial strategies on public education with federal initiatives. It also made a commitment to draft a provincial nuclear-public-education strategy to be shared with nuclear communities and stakeholders. The Ministry also plans to include a review of the public education program for emergency management as part of the internal review it intends to undertake.

Recommendation 11

To ensure that the province is ready to respond to emergencies effectively, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office (EMO):

- *approve and mandate a standardized emergency response approach for the Province;*
- Status: In the process of being implemented by March 2020.**

Details

In 2017, we found that Ontario had not mandated a standardized-response approach to emergency management, which includes a standard organizational

structure, functions, processes and terminology for use at all levels of the response, and between organizations. The use of a standardized approach to respond to emergencies can help avoid problems that can occur when multiple organizations are working together. It helps provide a common understanding of response functions, such as who is in control and who the decision-makers are.

We noted during our follow-up that the Ministry had restarted the Incident Management System project, first launched in 2009, which is a standardized approach to emergency response. It had engaged a steering committee of members from over 30 organizations to oversee the project. It had also completed a jurisdictional scan of incident-response systems to ensure alignment with best practices of neighbouring jurisdictions, and had updated a draft version of the Incident Management System Doctrine, which included input from key partners. The Ministry planned to have a standardized emergency response for the province in place by March 2020.

- *work with ministries to develop a strategy for lengthy, large-scale emergency staffing requirements within EMO's and the ministries' emergency operations centres.*

Status: In the process of being implemented by March 2020.

Details

In 2017, we found that the Ministry had not identified and trained sufficient staff to maintain the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) around the clock during a large-scale emergency lasting more than two weeks, or a series of simultaneous emergencies. Instead, its plan was to have internal staff work around the clock during a prolonged emergency. Since staff were unable to work effectively around the clock for longer than two weeks, essential operations could not be guaranteed past this limit.

During the follow-up, the Ministry worked on enhancing staff training to improve availability

and deployment within the PEOC for the 2019/20 flood and forest fire seasons. The Ministry told us that several training sessions had been provided and that all Emergency Management Branch staff had participated in at least one. However, it had no records of the specific training staff received. Thus, it was unable to determine how many staff had been adequately trained and were available to work in the PEOC.

In addition, an All-Hazards Incident Management Team working group was established to work on a discussion paper on the topic. The paper will provide options and recommendations for developing a team in Ontario, with a goal to enhance staffing to assist the PEOC, ministries and municipalities. The Ministry planned to have a staffing strategy in place by March 2020.

Recommendation 12

To ensure that the province is ready to respond to emergencies efficiently and economically, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office:

- *work with ministries to ensure that they plan for and enter into all relevant agreements and plans for any resources that may be needed during an emergency and, whenever possible, ensure that these agreements specify pre-established rates for these resources;*
- *work with ministries to ensure that they plan for and enter into all relevant agreements and plans for any services that may be needed during an emergency and, whenever possible, ensure that these agreements specify pre-established rates for these resources;*

Status: In the process of being implemented by March 2021.

Details

In our 2017 report, we found that the Ministry and most of the ministries we visited had few agreements in place for goods and services that might be

needed during an emergency—most had not even determined what types of resources they might need. Such agreements can improve the efficiency of emergency responses, especially if they include pre-established rates. In an attempt to address this, the Ministry created a supply chain group in 2008 involving all levels of government and the private sector. However, the group never began operations.

We also found that most of the ministries had not entered into mutual-aid agreements to obtain assistance from other jurisdictions and other levels of government during an emergency.

During the follow-up, the Ministry hired a staff member to support the development of the Emergency Management Supply Chain and Logistics Framework Project and update a draft charter for a new cross-ministry supply-chain program. The Framework Project is to establish a collaborative emergency logistics and procurement planning process in the province, and is to explore options for inter-ministry resource sharing and joint procurement. The Ministry planned to have the new program in place by March 2021.

The Ministry had also joined the Northern Emergency Management Assistance Compact, which provides a framework for sharing resources between member jurisdictions during an emergency or disaster. The Ministry still needed to develop standard operating procedures and address some barriers for cross-border assistance, which it also planned to do by March 2021.

- *develop its own specialized response team.*
Status: In the process of being implemented by March 2021.

Details

In our 2017 audit, we found that the Ministry did not have a specialized provincial response team in place to respond to any type of emergency. Although it developed the concept for such a team in 2008, and intended to launch it in 2012, the team was still not in place.

As mentioned previously, our follow-up noted that the Ministry had established an All-Hazards Incident Management Team working group to develop a discussion paper on the topic. At the time of our follow-ups, the paper was in draft format and was being reviewed by a steering committee to determine next steps. It provides options and recommendations for developing a team in Ontario, with a goal to enhance staffing to assist the PEOC, ministries and municipalities. The Ministry hopes to complete this by March 2021.

Financial Assistance Recovery Programs Lack Timeliness and a Consistent Approach to Handling Claims

Recommendation 13

To ensure that the provincial government provides timely and consistent financial assistance to those who are affected by the consequences of natural events, and to encourage prevention and mitigation efforts, we recommend that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs:

- *implement processes to allow for the more timely review and payment of claims;*

Status: Fully implemented.

Details

During the 2017 audit, we found that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (formerly the Ministry of Municipal Affairs) had a target to finalize eligible claims and make payments to 80% of individuals under the Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians (Disaster Recovery) program within eight months of the activation date of the program after a disaster. However, it met this target for only about 40% of claims during the program's first year in 2016. We also noted that as of the end of August 2017, more than 25% of all claims submitted for events in 2016 had not been paid.

The Municipal Disaster Recovery Assistance (Municipal Recovery) program paid claims to

municipalities within eight months of the submission date, but there was no target for when payments should be made.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing changed the 80% target for the Disaster Recovery program, requiring claims to be finalized and payments made within eight months of when a claim was received, instead of from the activation date of the program. Despite this change, it was meeting both targets.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing also improved the time it takes to activate the Disaster Recovery program after a disaster occurs, from between five and 27 days during the 2017 audit, to between one to 11 days at the time of our follow-up.

Other actions taken to improve payment timelines for the Disaster Recovery program included better collaboration with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's fee-for-service adjusting firm by holding weekly meetings to discuss files with outstanding issues; the development of a detailed call centre script to ensure applicants have access to correct program information; and holding information sessions following disasters to provide information about the application process in order to improve the quality and completeness of applications.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing also made several improvements to the processes for the Municipal Recovery program, such as providing outreach to ensure municipalities are aware of program guidelines and application requirements prior to the application deadline. It also conducted training workshops for municipalities to increase their understanding of application and documentation requirements to help improve the quality and completeness of applications to support a faster review.

- *document the requirements for its claims review processes and ensure that policies and procedures are in place and are applied consistently;*
Status: Fully implemented.

Details

In our 2017 audit, our review of claims that had been paid for the two new financial assistance recovery programs found that policies and procedures were applied inconsistently during claims processing. We also noted that guidelines were lacking or unclear, leading to exceptions and judgment calls in claims administration. In addition, an informal appeals process was used to handle disputes after a final claim amount was determined, which created unfairness for those not aware of this informal option.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing worked with a consultant and the Office of the Provincial Controller to document process narratives and internal controls for both financial assistance recovery programs. The consultant identified opportunities to improve program-level controls, and these have been implemented.

In addition, for the Disaster Recovery program, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing provided updated guidance and training to the fee-for-service adjusting firm to help ensure file assessment processes are applied consistently. It also improved its intake and payment verification templates to ensure staff apply processes consistently.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing also established a working group for the Municipal Recovery program to provide feedback on claims processes, with an aim to update its program documentation on an ongoing basis. The working group met once in late 2018, shortly after it was established. In addition, claim reviews and approval procedures are now documented in the procedures manual.

- *consider adding prevention and mitigation incentives to avoid similar consequences from potential future emergencies to financial assistance programs.*

Status: In the process of being implemented by December 2020.

Details

In 2017, we found that Ontario's financial assistance recovery programs were designed to fund repairs back to pre-disaster conditions only, even though it might be more beneficial to build better replacement structures to reduce vulnerability to future emergency events.

Our follow-up noted that the province had developed a Made in Ontario Environment Plan that encourages municipalities to incorporate climate-resilient improvements when repairing or replacing damaged infrastructure after a natural disaster.

In addition, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing undertook a policy review to develop options for providing an incentive to municipalities to improve local climate resilience by rebuilding better after a disaster to reduce the risk of repeat damage from future weather events. Following this, in June 2019, the Minister introduced a \$1-million pilot program for the 2019/20 fiscal year through the Municipal Recovery program to encourage municipalities to incorporate climate-resilient improvements when repairing or replacing infrastructure hit by a disaster. After the fiscal year ends, it plans to evaluate the project to determine if it will continue to provide this funding. It plans to make this decision by December 2020.

The Province Does Not Measure the Performance of Its Emergency Management Program or the State of Readiness in Ontario

Recommendation 14

To ensure that the Provincial Emergency Management Office (EMO) and ministries are held accountable for Ontario's state of readiness and that information is available on the performance and effectiveness of their emergency management programs, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, working through EMO and ministries:

- *identify appropriate performance measures related to the emergency management programs' objectives;*
- *regularly assess the programs' performance; and*
- *report publicly on the results.*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

In 2017, we found that the Ministry had not established any performance measures relating to the delivery of program objectives or the effectiveness of the provincial emergency management program. In fact, it informed us that it did not know what the overall state of readiness was in Ontario. Similarly, none of the ministries that we visited had developed any specific performance measures for their emergency management programs.

We also found that although the Ministry reported annually on municipal and ministry compliance with the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, statistical and performance data was not always available to support or verify compliance.

During the follow-up, we noted that the Ministry had made little progress on our recommendation. It plans to look at national and international best practices for performance measures related to emergency management as part of the internal review it intends to conduct and then implement a new process.