



NORTH AMERICAN
HUMANITARIAN
RESPONSE SUMMIT



NORTH AMERICAN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE SUMMIT (NAHRS) PROJECT

CANADA PREPARATORY MEETING REPORT

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PREPARED BY GLOBAL EMERGENCY GROUP

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1. Introduction

There exist many different efforts (laws, legal authorities, compacts, memoranda of understanding, projects) related to strengthening cross border support during crises in North America. However, there is limited comprehensive understanding of these various efforts beyond the entities directly involved. This siloed approach across the three countries (Canada, Mexico and the United States), combined with significant bureaucratic barriers, will impede response efforts during a potential catastrophic disaster response when the rapid flow of humanitarian assistance (professional personnel, equipment and supplies) is required to save lives and reduce suffering.

The North American Humanitarian Response Summit (NAHRS) project represents a unique effort to improve the effectiveness of cross-border response to a potential catastrophic disaster in North America. NAHRS is implemented by the American Red Cross in partnership with the Canadian Red Cross and Mexican Red Cross, and with the participation of the countries' respective federal, state and provincial government entities involved in disaster response. Its objectives include:

- Identifying barriers and relevant work completed to date;
- Working to improve communication, coordination, collaboration and diplomatic relations and the exchange of ideas amongst all major parties involved; and
- Seeking to identify clear and quantifiable next steps to prepare for a major catastrophic response.

The NAHRS project was initiated on September 26th-27th, 2017 with a convening meeting at the American Red Cross National Headquarters in Washington, DC for NAHRS stakeholders from Canada, Mexico and the United States (US). The meeting socialized the project's goals and laid the foundation for the remainder of the effort. After the convening meeting, preparatory meetings were held to focus on country-specific barriers, gaps and solutions to cross border coordination and support during catastrophic disaster responses. The Canada Preparatory Meeting took place from February 13th-14th 2018 in Ottawa, Canada. During this meeting, participants from the Canadian Red Cross and Canadian Government gathered to pinpoint opportunities and barriers related to cross-border response to a catastrophic disaster in the Canada.

2. Meeting Methodology

The Canada preparatory meeting centered around an interactive Table Top Exercise (TTX), in which facilitators presented a catastrophic disaster scenario to engage participants to consider the triggers, requirements and protocols for accepting international aid from North American partners. The disaster scenario used was a 'Mega Ice Storm in Canada Scenario' in which extreme meteorological conditions result in a massive winter storm impacting Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa. The scenario included unprecedented levels of snowfall and ice, essentially debilitating the region and all three cities. An estimated 15 million people living within the affected area are impacted and 50 deaths reported from exposure and the inability to reach medical facilities. The snow and ice create widespread electrical outages with the Greater Toronto Area, Montreal, and Ottawa unlikely to have power restored within 3 weeks. The lack of power causes a number of cascading effects in eastern Canada, including issues with water and sewer services, transportation, and

internet/telephone communications. The event effectively overwhelms the Canadian system forcing the Canadian Government and other response agencies to consider the mechanisms for accepting international aid from North American neighbors.

The use of an extreme event helped participants suspend disbelief and imagine a situation in which national response capacities would be completely overwhelmed. Such an event would have significant and devastating economic and social impacts, presenting difficult moral dilemmas related to the prioritization of needs. This approach provided a frame for ensuing plenary and group discussions.

The TTX was presented in four distinct sessions to address NAHRS topics. Participants were divided into table groups, where they collaborated to work through TTX injects using an interactive online platform developed by Global Emergency Group (GEG) in partnership with the Urban Resilience Platform (URP). Facilitators supported each group as they worked through questions related to NAHRS key topic areas, making note of central challenges and themes presented across groups. The result of the Canada Preparatory Meeting was a series of defined challenges, solutions and next steps for improving the coordination of international response during catastrophic disasters in North America.

3. Key Topics

The NAHRS topic areas covered during the Canada Preparatory Meeting were:

1. Determination of national requirements and triggers for accepting and facilitating international support
2. Cross border movement of professional response personnel, their equipment & Licensure Issues
3. Cross border movement of humanitarian supplies and tools
4. Migration issues related to the movement of people from one country to another due to a disaster (either due to the threat of a disaster or following the occurrence of a disaster)
5. Accountability to affected persons

Each of these topic areas was covered in-depth during the TTX. The conversations and insights from these sessions supported development of a series of challenges and solutions.

3.1 Determination of National Requirements and Triggers for Requesting, Accepting and Facilitating International Support

During this session, participants were asked to use the scenario to answer the following questions:

1. What are the existing triggers in place for requesting international assistance from the US and Mexico? What are the challenges in applying these triggers? What solutions are there to address these challenges?
2. Should Canada request assistance from the US and Mexico in support of response and recovery efforts?
3. What types and quantities of assistance can be mobilized from the US and Mexico?
4. What are the likely challenges related to mobilizing assistance on the scale of what's needed?

The scenario's effect on Canada forced participants to consider pre-existing policies that dictate response activities and triggers for requesting international assistance, as well as what aid should

be requested from which international stakeholders. Participants agreed that public perception is a significant driver in determining if cross-border assistance is accepted or not; political will does not always follow operational logic. The primary reason for requesting international aid in a catastrophic disaster would be the over-stretching of domestic response capacity due to factors such as loss of infrastructure and other systems. Participants discussed the need to clarify who triggers requests for international assistance and who determines acceptance of cross-border support within the context of the Canadian political and legal landscape. In the event of a catastrophic disaster, continuity of operations is not always clear nor is how operational functionality and coordination will be maintained, especially along border areas, if operational capacity is directly affected and inoperable.

Solutions proposed for solving coordination issues in a catastrophic disaster response included:

- Having a Canada/Mexico/US direct channel of engagement
- Creating a flexible, and adaptable policy body (working group) to be established in real time to meet disaster requirements. A Canada-US agreement currently exists. Adding Mexico to the agreement may further support requirements
- Increase awareness of pre-existing policies to be applied in a timely manner, instead of reinventing the wheel in the moment
- Establish the North American Emergency Management Act to develop North American protocols for cross boarder disaster support with the assistance from a current body and/or working group with dedicated resources
- Develop clear Continuity of Operations planning for catastrophic disasters

3.2 Cross Border Movement of Professional Response Personnel and their Equipment and Licensure Issues

As aid begins to arrive from Mexico and the US to support the Canadian response, participants had to consider strategic and operational implications of receiving aid from North American neighbors. During this session, participants were asked to use the scenario to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges likely to arise related to this incoming international assistance?
2. What are the new solutions or ways of working that could address these challenges?

Challenges identified included:

- Determining the capabilities of the professionals who would be needed for this type of disaster such as snow plow and heavy equipment operators, engineers (structural, electrical etc.), electricians, and a diversity of technical expertise. Some of these professions are easier to get across border than others (snow plow driver is easier and an electrician is more complicated).
- Moving first responders across both international borders and across provincial boundaries. Ontario physicians, for example, lose their ability to practice medicine when they cross the provincial border into Quebec.
- The need for international teams to be self-sufficient and fully operational within a harsh cold weather climate.
- The policies, processes and mechanisms for obtaining visas for professional response personnel were not widely understood within the Canadian context. Similar to the US, there are no clear methods at the provincial or federal level for accepting licensure and credentialing for foreign professional response personnel (i.e. medical personnel, engineers, drivers, electrical workers). For those international personnel who are able to

enter Canada, it was also noted that integrating them into Canadian operations can be another challenge.

Proposed solutions included:

- Pre-certifying personnel for application to many different technical areas including engineers, electricians, physicians, etc.
- Expedited processing of license requests (temporary) across provinces and international borders. This could be for individuals or a classification of a group.
- Establish a Humanitarian ID or International Red Cross ID passport
- Pair up foreign and domestic medical teams to complement skills for streamlined assistance, which includes the notion of licensure reciprocity in the event of disaster
- Have the Federal Government adapt International Disaster Law (IDL) guidelines to standardize assistance process across North America
- Establish liaisons to support the integration of technical responders into operations once they arrive in-country

3.3 Cross Border Movement of Humanitarian Supplies, Equipment, and Tools

The next session continued to test the Canadian systems for accepting international aid by simulating receipt of large quantities of diverse aid supplies at Canadian borders and ports. During this session, participants were asked to use the scenario to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges likely to arise related to this incoming international supplies, equipment and tools?
2. What are the new solutions or ways of working that could address these challenges?

One of the challenges identified is the delay in receiving goods and materials within Canada. The problem arises when procured international materials, supplies, and equipment must meet Canadian standards. For example, trucks can be held at the border for long periods of time to undergo inspection before entering Canada. There are instances where supplies do not meet Canadian specifications for the weather requirements (e.g. generators that will not work after a day or two in the harsh Canadian temperatures). Internal to Canada, there are common specifications for supplies and transportation. Another challenge, in an event of this scale, is determining where staging and logistics hubs would be located. There is discrepancy between provinces on logistics hubs as some provinces have developed plans but others do not.

Proposed solutions included:

- Specifying the requirements and intended effects of needed supplies and pre-establish mobilization tables to reduce the likelihood of receiving unsolicited materials and supplies
- Pre-certifying supplies so that potential incoming supplies and their components meet Canadian safety requirements
- Engage in advance with private industry, especially common North American suppliers, and back up suppliers
- Create logistics hubs as a part of the Canadian country wide catastrophic disaster planning

3.4 Migration Issues related to the Movement of People from One Country to Another Due to the Catastrophic Disaster

The final TTX session was designed to have participants consider issues concerning migration due to a catastrophic disaster. The scenario presented two situations for working groups to discuss: a medical airlift of 6,000 dialysis patients, and the undocumented migration of 10,000 Canadian citizens seeking refuge in the US across the Detroit-Windsor border. During this session, participants were asked to use the scenario to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges likely to arise related to this large movement of people?
2. What are the new solutions or ways of working that could address these challenges?

There are a number of challenges related to migration of Canadian populations in the context of a catastrophic disaster scenario. Participants recognized the limited current capacity to process a mass influx of people at the border in terms of screening for visa issues, screening for medical issues, and the provision for people with specialized needs. The documentation requirements to facilitate receiving services such as medical services cross border, was highlighted. In Canada, a provincial legal system exists to assist in filling gaps in medical coverage and care. It is however, not linked to a coordination mechanism at the federal level. Lack of viable transportation options to move patients in need of medical care to international hospitals was also identified as a challenge.

Participants agreed that the first step was to determine the legal status of evacuee's going into the US, as they are not refugees. It was suggested that using the case study of the British Columbia residents who were evacuated to the US during the fires in 2017 would support this effort. Participants suggested that the ability to track evacuees and restore family links would not be sustainable without external support from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) or other National Societies.

Proposed solutions included:

- Explore partnerships with Google people finder and/or Facebook processes to increase capacity for tracking evacuees and restoring family links
- Work with telecommunications firms to pre-identify connectivity solutions in a catastrophic disaster response context
- Explore joint development of visa categories to better align with disaster contexts for a) Evacuees and people on the move and b) Professionals working in disasters
- Work across borders (US, Mexico and Canada) to establish agreements with social media providers regarding data (data analytics and sharing & data privacy systems)

3.5 Other key topics discussed during TTX sessions

A consistent theme across the working groups regarding existing Canadian catastrophic disaster response systems was the misleading perception of local capacities to cope with disasters. There is almost always a very strong local capacity to respond. However, the messaging to the Canadian population is often inconsistent related to what they can, or cannot, expect in terms of response support. In a catastrophic disaster, it might take 1-3 weeks for responders to reach the affected population and people need to be aware and prepare accordingly. Moreover, there is a fundamental operational difference between urban and rural communities and how they will require support. Participants agreed that this does not infer that rural communities will not require assistance but, within the Canadian context, there is a difference in terms of resiliency.

Participant solutions included:

- Include Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs) in catastrophe planning

- Promote the reality that most communities will have to be self-sustaining and able to take care of themselves for more than 72 hours. Community based disaster risk reduction for the most isolated communities
- Pre-establish community or neighborhood empowerment networks to support in times of crisis. Ensure they are integrated with local authorities and planning efforts

4. Key Findings and Conclusions

During the Canadian preparatory meeting, facilitators captured the various challenges and solution recommendations from the discussions. Participants were asked to first revise the list of challenges, and then determine if they agreed or disagreed with the resulting list. The same was done with the solution recommendations. Participants then voted individually on which solutions they believed to be important recommendations to put forward to the broader NAHRS stakeholders at the NAHRS Summit Meeting in March 2018. The top results are presented below.

Challenges

The challenges with highest levels of agreement, in order, include:

1. Clarity is needed as to who triggers international assistance within the Canadian political and legal landscape (considering province to state compacts)
2. There is a need to determine and plan for the diversity of technical expertise required in responses (e.g. engineers, heavy machine operators, etc.). Technical expertise does not just pertain to the medical field
3. We need to identify the legal status of evacuee's going into the US or another country; they will not be considered refugees. This determination may also have consequences for repatriation
4. It is unclear where the staging of logistics hubs will take place. Some provinces have planned for this and others have not.
5. Public messaging regarding individual preparedness planning and what the public should expect in terms of a response times is inconsistent across Canada
6. There are limited systems and processes for transporting people with medical needs across international borders in the US
7. Challenges arise related to the integration of international personnel into Canadian operations
8. There is no method to repatriate citizens if there is a mass migration across borders, especially when people may not have identification
9. International relief supplies consistently do not meet Canadian specifications for the weather requirements (e.g. generators that will not work after a day or two in the Canadian temperatures) which can cause delays at customs
10. Standards regarding food, medicine and other regulated items may impede the ability to meet the humanitarian requirements

Solutions

The recommended solutions receiving the highest numbers of votes, in order, included:

1. Create the North American Emergency Management Act to establish North American protocols for cross border disaster support. This would be supported by a body or working group with dedicated resources
2. Establish the pre-certification of personnel for application to many different technical areas including engineers, electricians, physicians, etc.
3. Explore the joint development of visa categories to better align with disaster context and requirements, including a) professionals working in disasters and b) evacuees/people on the move
4. Develop a Humanitarian ID or International Red Cross passport
5. Consistently promote the reality that most communities will have to be self-sustaining and able to take care of themselves (for more than 72 hours). Apply community based disaster risk reduction approaches or the most isolated communities
6. Develop a method to expedite processing of licence requests (temporary) across provinces and cross border (individual or classification of group)
7. Adapts the International Disaster Law (IDL) guidelines to standardize assistance processes across North America
8. Create logistics hubs as a part of Canadian country-wide catastrophic disaster planning
9. Pre-certify that potential incoming supplies and their components meet Canadian safety requirements

Results from the NAHRS Canada Preparatory Meeting will be shared with attendees of the North American Humanitarian Response Summit in Washington, DC from March 14-15, 2018.