

**Fire preparedness announcement  
Kamloops, B.C.  
Premier Gordon Campbell  
April 17, 2004**

*Check Against Delivery*

Last year we went through a horrendous summer of fire, trauma and concern for people all over the province. It tested our spirit. It tested our resilience. It tested our strength as a province.

People across the country recognized that we met the challenge in a way that was truly exceptional: because of the work of our Forest Service, our property protection personnel, our armed services, and our thousands of volunteers who put themselves in harm's way to protect the public in British Columbia.

I'm pleased to be here today with MP Betty Hinton; Claude Richmond, Speaker of the House and MLA for Kamloops; Kevin Krueger, the MLA for Kamloops-North Thompson; Roger Harris, the Minister of State for Forest Operations; as well as our Minister of Forests, Mike de Jong.

We're also joined today by a critical part of the army that went up against those forest fires; municipal government representatives - Frank Leonard, the president of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, and Corinne Lonsdale, who sits on the executive of the UBCM.

Last year we brought together Armed Forces, volunteers, First Nations firefighters, and property-protection firefighters from all over the province. In spite of the challenges we faced, we knew at the outset we could learn from that experience.

We asked the former Premier of Manitoba, Gary Filmon, to present us with a report. I want to thank all of those who participated in developing that report and sharing their information.

We have to be committed to learning when we go through those experiences. I can say to the crew and the representatives here today: they were beyond good - they were exceptional. They worked and acted beyond what anyone imagined they could do.

And the crews and the Forest Service were the first out to see what they could do to improve. We had our emergency response team looking at what they could improve.

With their input, Mr. Filmon's report made 42 separate recommendations. Today, I'm announcing the province will be implementing all 42 of Mr. Filmon's recommendations. There will be an investment of \$13 million in resources, in staff and in planning needed to meet each and every one of those recommendations.

I'd like people in British Columbia to know this: we all have to be diligent. We all have to recognize what we can contribute, to preventing this from happening in the future. We've learned from what we did and we are going to be adding to our capacity to deal with the challenges that a forest fire season presents.

There's a number of steps we're going to take and that will be adopted right away. First, we are adding five more unit crews across British Columbia to increase the total number of unit crews to 27. Those new crews will provide 100 additional professional personnel across B.C. to support the firefighters. They'll be located in Kamloops, in Prince George, in the southeast and in the Cariboo.

With us today are some of those exceptional people who did such a great job last year. Member from one of our initial attack crews are here: Hugh Murdoch, Steve Bucher and Travis Abbey. We also have one of our unit crews with crew leader Raymond Dick, Darcy Saul, Mike Narcisse and Kevin Antoine. Last summer, each of these men fought blazes in McClure, Strawberry Hill, McGillivray and others.

They, and countless structural firefighters, volunteers, First Nations crews, emergency personnel, people from across government, Armed Services from across the country, folks from south of the border in the United States, all worked extremely hard to protect people and their property. I'd like to say thank you to each of you for what you've done.

We've also added two new air tankers to our fleet. We know, and our firefighters know, that proper equipment is a critical part of fighting wild fire and ensuring that we're prepared. The Convair 580 can reload in five minutes, and it holds 8,000 litres of retardant.

We also know that communities need to be better prepared to managing interface fires, those fires that come close to where we live.

Today the province is announcing we'll provide \$3 million to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities. That's going to go to local governments to improve interface fuel management, emergency planning and community sprinkler systems. Municipalities will be a critical part of our front line response should we be faced with another incredible fire season.

We have more people, more equipment, and more resources to improve planning. We're also asking the public to be part of this. We still have a very dry land base with lots of fuel. We've had 93 fires so far this year, and 83 of those fires were started by people.

We are saying to the people of British Columbia: what you do makes a difference. We can prepare, train our personnel, provide the equipment, carry out the prescribed burns, and reduce the fuel load, but we need each citizen of this province – those who work in the forests, those who play in the forests, and those who pass through the forests – to understand what you do makes a difference.

Think of that number again: 83 out of 93 fires this year were started by people. Not because they wanted to damage our forests or the health of our environment or our landscape, but because they were thoughtless. So I ask everyone to be part of this initiative, because if we all work together we can prevent an awful lot of the damage and the type of challenges that we faced last year.

On behalf of all of us in British Columbia, let me say thank you once again to you for the exceptional job you did last summer. Thank you very much.