

International Association of Fire Fighters

Responses

1. Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

Investments in public, border, and community infrastructure help build a stable economy. Such investments must be balanced with a sound emergency management system capable of adapting to evolving threats. In 2007 the federal government recognized the importance of incorporating proper hazardous materials response resources into Canada's emergency management system by partnering with the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) to fund the IAFF's Canadian Haz-Mat and CBRNE Training Initiative. This program provides a recognized level of hazardous materials and chemical, biological, radioactive, nuclear and explosive response training to first responders, including professional and volunteer fire fighters, police, military and paramedics across urban, rural and northern communities in Canada. Those responsible for ensuring emergency preparedness must consider the increased risks of infrastructure modernization and the resulting impact on public safety. Costly damages, from haz-mat and CBRNE emergencies, can be minimized by rigorous training of local emergency responders and by ensuring the most updated resources and local response capabilities are in place. To date, the IAFF program successfully trained over 1,570 first responders, improving public and first responder safety and inter-agency interoperability within communities. Public safety should not be subject to any compromise at a time when some municipalities have been directly affected by a weakened economy, especially when our increasingly resource-based economy is resulting in – and dependent upon - major infrastructure investments that need to be protected. This program bears no cost to municipalities, ensuring accessibility to all communities large and small. The Government of Canada contribution of up to \$500,000 annually over five years sunsets in March 2013. This cost effective program complements existing federal public safety initiatives, and can adapt to infrastructural changes. With this in mind, the IAFF requests that the Finance Committee recommend that the federal government fund a second five-year installment of this program beyond 2012-2013.

2. Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

As Canada endeavours to increase its competitiveness in the global markets as well as on the home front, careful consideration must be made to ensure that public safety measures are balanced with industry growth. Internal and international trade relies in part on a resource-based economy. The federal government has continued to invest in our natural resources industry such as oil and lumber which will contribute to a higher rate of employment. The IAFF cautions that any growth in such sectors must ensure that proper public safety measures are maintained. The forestry industry was impacted by two fatal sawmill explosions in BC this past year, resulting in hundreds of lost jobs. With many factories based in rural communities, emergency response must be carefully coordinated. Proper training and staffing is vital, as even a delay of mere minutes in response can mean a difference of lives

saved and properties or businesses salvaged. Communities across Canada should be given the assurance that they have access to first responders trained in Haz-Mat and CBRNE response, to not only save lives but also to mitigate damage to properties and businesses. This ensures to strengthen resilience to help affected workers and communities get back on their feet as quickly as possible. Providing existing first responders with additional skills such as the ability to respond safely and effectively to Haz-Mat and CBRNE incidents adds value to their roles and establishes additional economic protection to their communities due to their increased ability to mitigate the aftermath and long-term impacts of various types of disasters. Additionally, by providing necessary training to the municipality at no cost, it relieves financial pressure on the municipality allowing it to consider additional hiring to maintain safe staffing levels.

3. Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

An aging demographic presents significant economic and social implications with a correlation to emergency response resources. Modifications to areas such as health infrastructure and transportation must be made to accommodate this shifting dynamic. Fire fighters are Canada's first line of defense in any emergency situation, and are a part of Canada's critical infrastructure. As such, fire departments and other first responder agencies must also adapt to a changing Canadian demographic. This includes having enhanced emergency response capabilities to accommodate the altering landscape of modernized infrastructure. IAFF Haz-Mat and CBRNE Training will greatly assist all first responders in mitigating potential emergencies related to such transitions. Fire fighters will also be affected by skills shortages. A regional fire response system is comprised of a variety of specialized emergency response units. This includes Heavy Urban Search and Rescue (HUSAR), rope and water rescue, and Haz-Mat/CBRNE response. These teams are predominantly comprised of senior ranking members, many of whom have had decades of training experience. Over the years, highly experienced members are lost through attrition. Extending federal funding for the IAFF Haz-Mat and CBRNE Training Initiative would help minimize the gap in targeted emergency response, and retain necessary levels of trained personnel. Continued federal investment in the IAFF Haz-Mat and CBRNE Training Initiative will deliver the specialized training necessary to:

- Continue working toward having an adequate level of skilled first responders trained in Haz-Mat and CBRNE response,
- Increase the level of protection for all first responders through improved interoperability,
- Increase the level of protection for the safety of all Canadians,
- Help protect infrastructure which is directly related to jobs and the economy,
- Maintain or improve response to predominately retirement-based communities such as Elliot Lake, Ont. which recently suffered a fatal structural collapse. Retirement communities are at greater risk when emergency response funds are cut.

4. Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

Labour market challenges necessitate unique investments to develop and increase productivity in Canada. Fire fighters face a particularly unique challenge where productivity is paramount to saving the lives and property of all Canadians and protecting the nation's infrastructure. Adapting to an aging population as well as infrastructural modernization can lead to productivity challenges in the public safety industry. To maximize public safety efficiency, Canada's fire fighters require optimal up-to-date training in many emergency response techniques, including Haz-Mat and CBRNE training. In an

environment where many countries around the world strive for economic stability, Canada, for the most part, is fortunate to have maintained a stable economy. However, many regions in Canada still remain at risk due to budgetary restraints. This subsequently leads to complacency in innovative investments, and as a result, impairs productivity, leading to an erosion in public safety standards and necessitating higher costs down the road. Every Canadian should have the ability to rely on an efficient and effective public safety system. Budgetary pressures and restraints should not be the overriding factor when it comes to whether a community has the resources necessary to protect its citizens and its infrastructure. Innovative investments in training and education can positively affect productivity. Extending the funding period of the IAFF Haz-Mat and CBRNE Training Initiative program for another five years would train many more first responders at no cost to municipalities. This would ensure that every community, rural, urban and northern, will have access to valuable training for their first responders to ensure optimal public safety levels for their residents and protection of their infrastructure in the wake of Haz-Mat and CBRNE incidents.

5. Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?

Canada's fire fighters are concerned with the ability of communities to evolve without the proper resources to ensure appropriate public safety coverage. From a national economic perspective, proper Haz-Mat and CBRNE response resources aid in containing disasters that expand and impact public health and safety, infrastructure and natural resources. Costly damages and economic disruption can be minimized by rigorous training to the most up-to-date level. Smaller communities in particular may face budgetary challenges related to public safety; a major benefit of the IAFF training program is that because it is free to municipalities due to Canadian Government funding, it is equally accessible. Several smaller communities that have already received IAFF training indicated that without the program, there is no way they would have been able to afford to have their first responders trained to that level. The IAFF's Haz-Mat and CBRNE Training Initiative has proven to be a valuable resource for more than 1,570 Canadian fire fighters, police officers, paramedics and other first responders from over 135 communities both large and small. This essentially means that hundreds of thousands of Canadians are better protected against these specific kinds of emergencies. This program has received accolades from many public safety stakeholders, including fire chiefs, EMS chiefs, and police officers. A renewed funding commitment from the Government of Canada would enable the IAFF to expand the program into Quebec and other areas of the country that have yet to take full advantage of this opportunity. The administration and logistical components are already in place. Renewed funding would ensure a seamless continuation of administering future courses.