

FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW

Public Meetings

The first of a series of about ten days of public meetings. I will be traveling – my name is Gary Filmon, incidentally – I am the Commissioner who has been appointed by the Provincial Government to do the review of Firestorm 2003 throughout the province of British Columbia. In addition to meeting with stakeholder groups from various departments and agencies and organizations that have been effected by the fires of 2003 or others who have another interest in the whole forest fire situation in British Columbia. I will be meeting with those people but I also am taking this on the road to the various locations throughout the province that were effected by the fires this summer. The intent is to listen and to learn, to give an opportunity to people who have had firsthand personal experience in dealing with what was a very traumatic situation. A situation of great devastation, great destruction, and obviously I have followed it through the media, I have looked through hundreds of pages of press scans to see the coverage of what happened and now I am here to listen to people firsthand as to their experiences.

This is intended to be an independent, open and inclusive process. The intent was to appoint somebody from outside and I qualify, I don't come from this province. I was the Premier of Manitoba for eleven and a half years, spent twenty-five years of my life in public office. I am also a Professional Engineer with a Masters Degree in Civil Engineering and have had various experiences throughout my life in dealing with all sorts of situations of natural disasters and public consultations.

The review is intended to be very comprehensive. The review is intended to go from planning and preparation; through response and recovery – the entire gamut of things that happened as a result of the fires, leading up to the fires. And so it is intended to be no holds barred, whatever people want to share with respect to the fires in terms of planning and preparations, in terms of how they were addressed and the whole process of evacuation, consultation, communications and everything else.

All of this is intended to lead to a report that will be presented to the government in about mid-February. It is a very short timeline. The reason it is a short timeline is that we are early on in a dry cycle from everything I am able to hear and understand. There certainly is an expectation that this wasn't an isolated incident. Many of you saw more recently in California tremendous forest fires happening there. There are certain weather patterns and changes that are taking place. There is obviously a sense that we are in a very different time in terms of weather conditions that might lead to this happening again and again, even in the near future. And so, as bad as it was, our greatest fear is that this could happen again.

It could happen again soon. And so, I have made a commitment that we will report by the middle of February so that whatever recommendations, whatever experiences can lead to conclusions that will be helpful in the future will be there at such a time as the government can use it in preparation for this coming summer season when some people believe that it could happen again.

I look forward to your presentations. We have the names of people who have registered to present to us. Our thought was that we would try and ask you to stay within about a fifteen minute presentation and leave some time for question and answer and discussion. But, given that we don't have a tremendous number of people for the afternoon portion of the session, we certainly are prepared to give a little latitude to that and I might also say that if you haven't registered, Lisa is at the back on my left – your right – side of the room and she will take your name and also add you to the list if you haven't registered ahead of time.

With me on my right – your left – is Donald Leitch and Donald was my clerk of the executive council for my time in office in Manitoba. We have worked together for almost twenty years and so he is very familiar with my style and expectations. Don also performed the role of senior administrator for the Justice Gordon Hall Commission on Grain Transportation back in the '80s. Another administrator with the commission is Mr. Jim Sproul who has had extensive experience in government work and these are the people who will be assisting me in the whole process of the review of the fire storm.

So, without anything further, I am going to call for the first speaker that has registered to be with us this afternoon, and that is Al Kirkwood the Fire Chief of Barriere.

Mr. Kirkwood:

Good afternoon. (Good afternoon, welcome) Pleased to meet you. Thanks for coming to Barriere.

What I would like to do is I would just like to point out some of the stuff that maybe caused me some grief through the whole process. What I found is the fire department that we had; we had our own core of guys, right. What we need is an operation agreement with our other fire departments in our regional district, that if we need help they can come and help us out and vice versa. Like if someone else needs help. That is something that I would like to see implemented.

I was assured by someone in the Regional District – I am not going to point to names or name people here, but – that I would have at least six fire departments helping me out. Through the course of that I had one, and that is one truck and two people. And this was for the first two days. They went home for the first night and they came back the next day. So that is where my big thing with having a joint operating agreement, or which could probably be classified as mutual aid. I know a lot of other municipalities or other regional districts have this. So that is one point that I would like to bring up.

Another situation that I had is – we get into this, we start fighting the fire – we go at it full force, trying to figure out who the boss is. Do we answer to PEP, do we answer to the Regional District, and do we answer to the Fire Commissioner's office. Like we've got to figure this out right at the onset. We have to have a designated person at the top. At one point in time there I was phoning in requesting this, requesting that. I got put on hold and it says we are not answering this any more, it's over into this department. I phoned over there and they said well, I'll phone you back in ten minutes. So half an hour later we get the phone call and everything is the way it was. So, back into the same scenario. It just creates turmoil. When you are going at things full force, it creates a lot of turmoil.

The biggest and first and foremost in everybody's mind was 'what happened to my house?' What happened to my house. That was a big thing. Everybody wanted to know because they heard that Barriere had burned down.

I instructed some people to do a proper press release to the media. It didn't get done. There were instances that the media was trying to get in, in fact they did actually sneak in and they did get caught and apprehended by the RCMP. But that shouldn't have happened. It should have happened; it should have happened that they were informed right out, first and foremost. And my big thing that I – I tried to portray is that I would sooner have somebody's house that is burned down have them, themselves, know about it instead of have the media show it to them.

There also has to be a system put into place for something that – if somebody's house is burned up, there has to be somebody that can counsel these people, or put them in the right path to show them what they can do instead of having to find out that the ESS Centre or wherever they had found out. Because it's a real gut-wrenching thing when people have to find out that their house burned up in the media and I don't believe in that.

As far as working together, we worked great with the RCMP. The PEP people, we all basically fell into line where it was about after three days we had it pretty well going okay.

I want to come back to B.C. Hydro and Telus. I'll come back and explain my feelings on those people.

After three days we were basically informed by the Fire Commissioner's Office that we were a paid fire department. So we were working ourselves twelve hours' on/twelve hours off. That's what we were basically – and this brought a few things up that – you know, we were a paid crew – no doubt we were a paid crew. But, when you are a paid crew you should be paid and paid sort of promptly, not two months after the fact. I have had people that were under my command, and I was very fortunate I had a job that paid me and understood my needs – but there were people that were off of their own job, they've got no income coming in for two months and they are banging on my door – where's the cheque? Where's the cheque? And I go to the government and well, the government says it's this and the government's problem. It goes from the Fire Commissioner's Office over to the Regional District – the Regional District is going 'well, we are trying to get it'. I phoned the Fire Commissioner's Office numerous times and I didn't even get a return phone call. So there has got to be some better communication with the Fire Commissioner's Office as far as I am concerned.

And, while I am on this point in time with the Fire Commissioner's Office, we also have to have one person in charge. They send somebody in, we get going great guns – three days later we get another person coming in. This guy doesn't know the area, doesn't know what is going on, so he had got to learn the stuff. Basically it was all rumble jumble again and we are trying to clean the area up, get our jobs focused – get the thing so we can open the town up again. And it just caused a little bit of turmoil.

One thing I will bring forth strongly and emphasize that we had nothing but tremendous cooperation with B.C. Forestry. The people at B.C. Forestry worked just wonderful with us. They came and the third day they did an assessment of our area with a fellow from the Fire Commissioner's office and they basically told us – we are going to get you this and we are going to get you that. I didn't really believe it after what I had seen the first time, but it was quite amazing when we had fifty-odd fire departments here and one hundred and some personnel. It was just – you know – wonderful. Forestry was – they were busy fighting the fire with the forest part of it. They also had a division called structural branch which we

worked really closely with. It was amazing how we all got along and we all got the same focus and we went in the right direction as far as I was concerned. There were a couple of guys that were with the Fire Commissioner's office that kind of looked down upon the volunteers, but we kind of just sloughed that off and didn't – you know.

Another problem that we had was again misinformation. Because we had so much – what do you call it – negativity – people phoning and saying well the town burned up – no it didn't – people were saying this, people were saying that – nobody really knew. So that was – you know – the big thing there. The communication – that's got to be the biggest thing that's got to be improved in some way if this ever happens again.

On the emphasis of B.C. Hydro. B.C. Hydro worked very diligently. They rebuilt the town power lines and everything else. They never once consulted the fire department to my knowledge as to what was going on – it would have been nice to know what was happening here and there.

B.C. Tel – Telus – just were awesome. They just came in and they just kept everything – I believe we were out of cell service for two days and they had it up and – if it wasn't for guys like Telus it would have put us in a real bad, bad situation. The satellite phones didn't work that well.

My recommendation is for the town of Barriere we need a back-up power supply for our water system. After the second day of the fire we were out of water and basically had to get water wherever, however we could. And that was mainly through the river, through the creeks.

Outside of just making these points, I won't point the finger at anybody. I mean I think that it has been a learning experience for us all. It's been very heart-wrenching to see people that lose their belongings and their houses and – you know – you always wish it doesn't happen but it is one of those things. If we can improve by bringing out points like some of my bitches here –

All right, anything else – I know there is probably a lot of stuff that I will remember after the fact but – you know – there have been quite a few people who have really worked hard for us. Our MLA here has been great and the Regional District rep he has been great. It's just been – you know – that kind of thing where if we can just start rebuilding now and look to the future. And, thanks for hearing me.

GF Thanks very much. I wonder if I could just ask – I'm getting a picture of things that, in the beginning there was not a great deal of – well people weren't ready for it, is that what you are saying to me?

AK Nobody would even suspect it would come to the magnitude that it did. It's like when they wanted us to evacuate Tolko and Louis Creek. I looked and just shook

my head and said 'why would you want to do that'. I'll tell you, if somebody ever says that again, I'm never going to dispute that.

GF But, you referred on several occasions to after three days certain things started to happen, so are you indicating that as time went on people got better and they ...

AK Absolutely

GF ... things happened that should have maybe happened right in the beginning. It took a couple of days for people to react and respond.

AK Well, you could say that now, but to have fifty-five fire departments together at the snap of your fingers, it's impossible. But once we got that kind of support there – you've got to understand that Forestry has to be able to mobilize too. I mean, they weren't expecting this kind of situation either, as far as I know.

GF And this was the first really large one. We flew over it and there were some smaller ones that happened earlier in the season, but this was the first really large one and I guess, overall, it was the largest and it spread in so many different directions. It really did catch people unaware.

AK Oh for sure, there were places that we couldn't even get to. People lost their structures and we just had no chance to get there whatsoever. So, I mean even if you were – you could have had thirty fire departments and we wouldn't have been able to do that.

GF Do you think that – well there are a number of things – firstly you really do want an answer to the question who is in charge when something of this magnitude, a natural disaster of this magnitude happens, somebody has got to take charge, right? And you are not satisfied that there was somebody in charge from the beginning.

AK No, I am not satisfied with that at all. There should be somebody, the province or whoever, somebody should be right there saying okay, here is what we are going to do for you.

GF Somebody that everybody knows who to turn to right from day one, from the minute that this disaster happens, somebody is in charge and everybody knows who that is.

AK Exactly. You don't need to go from TNRD to PEP to Fire Commissioners, back around the table and then figure out what you are doing. It's got to be one unified source.

GF And you are saying, of course, that there is a role for so many different agencies involved. I mean it is the Forestry people, it is the Fire Commissioner, it is PEP, it is the local fire departments and obviously you spoke earlier, in this case I know

you lost your transmission lines for quite awhile and also your communications, your telephone communications. There are a whole lot of people involved and everybody has to know who do they turn to for answers.

AK Exactly. The public has to know these things as well. They've got to be informed.

GF On the issue of evacuations and all of that, one person has to be in charge.

AK Well, you know what I mean; it's going to have to be a little bit of sacrifice on everybody's part to be in that lineup.

GF Well, thank you very, very much. I appreciate that and I know from everything I have seen that there were a lot of heroic efforts being put in and you people were in harm's way and you are to be complimented for all the things that were done right in the process. Thank you very much.

AK Thank you, I appreciate you hearing me.

GF Can I just also add, Mr. Kirkwood, that if there are other things that you come across that you haven't thought to put into your presentation, just don't hesitate to contact us. We are going to be in this process for several months, so if anything else comes to mind please contact us.

I just should mention for everybody's benefit that all of the information that is being shared with us, all of the presentations, will be a matter of public record. We will be putting all of this into the final report. In addition to the formal report there will be a whole section in which we will attach to the report all of the presentations that we are receiving right throughout the province. So you can be assured that whatever comments are made people will take account of them. They will be read by others. Thank you.

The next presenter is Mr. Tim Hockey. Mr. Hockey you are the Fire Marshall, right?

Tim Hockey

Of Tolko, Louis Creek, yes.

GF For Louis Creek?

TH Well, for the mill itself, yes. Not for the town.

I just thought I would start out by telling you a little bit about my qualifications and why I have formed the opinions that I have.

Good afternoon Mr. Filmon and the Firestorm Review Committee. My name is Tim Hockey. I was a twenty-six employee of Tolko Lewis Creek Division. I was Tolko Louis Creek's Fire Marshall. I have extensive training including Justice Institute Instant Command Training, Firefighting, Structural and S100 certified. Maintenance and Fire Protection Systems certified. Transportation of Dangerous Goods Ticket. Dangerous bills ticket, as well as an opacity ticket. I have been with Barriere Search and Rescue for over ten years and was liaison with the Barriere Volunteer Fire Department for Tolko and practiced with them when they were on site. I helped write Tolko Louis Creek's emergency preparedness program manual and compiled the resource list for the manual. I also helped do the same for the community emergency preparedness plan. I have been involved with the community meetings on disaster plans for over five years. In May of 2003 I attended a community meeting that was called by Thompson-Nicola Regional District emergency response leader, Terry Kress. In the attendance were Rod Salem of PEP, representatives of the B.C. Forest Service, Canadian National Railway, Ministry of Highways, B.C. Ambulance, Search and Rescue and other community stakeholders.

My minutes of this meeting were burned in the Tolko Louis Creek Fire so I may have missed some of the attendees. But at this meeting it was explained to the community leaders the hierarchy of emergency preparedness between PEP, the TNRD and the B.C. Forest Service. Also at this meeting those in attendance did a tabletop scenario on wild fire interfacing our community from the north east, discussing what we would do to evacuate people and what processes would be best to save life, limb and property.

The point I would like to make of this is that government officials knew full well of the forest floor combustible load and drought conditions and were trying to put processes in place to meet the danger. But, clearly the B.C. Forest Service was not ready. Fire retardant was not used to save exlu(?) Louis Creek. The window of opportunity Thursday July 31st and Friday August 1st was not used to lay retardant around exlu(?) Louis Creek and the largest employer in the area.

I believe that all the planning on the local level does not matter if, when in an emergency all the planning overruled by higher-ranking agency people who may be unaware of plans or are disconnected from the affected area. Much more needs to be done if we are to replace the infrastructure lost when local

government services like the B.C. Forestry were removed from rural areas and were moved to cities which are disconnected from rural needs. Emergency response and Forestry response in rural areas need to be addressed locally and with local people who know the area and have access to local resources. Companies and businesses need to contribute to an overall list of resources available on an ongoing basis. In outlying areas people need to pool their resources when disasters are imminent.

It was widely discussed in Barriere gossip criticizing Gilbert Smith's mill for keeping people onsite to fight fire, but the cedar mill stands and Tolko Louis Creek does not. Tolko employees were told to evacuate along with the community by senior management. We need to learn from what happened here. In small communities with small volunteer fire departments the decision to have onsite fire brigades should not be left up to corporations. Tolko's own safety committee repeatedly requested fire response personal equipment and training and senior management turned the requests down. Tolko had in its budget to outfit our fire truck with a monitor and phone system and year after year senior management chose not to spend the money. Senior management knew the Barriere volunteer fire department needed more training onsite and wrote to the department, as I did, asking them to attend on a monthly basis.

It is my belief that the Barriere volunteer fire department didn't know the location of fire control mains after Tolko staff evacuated the planer burned, water mains remained open and fire protection systems were overtaxed. Tolko did not use heavy equipment on hand to clear a path around the site and did not follow its own emergency procedures. And the B.C. Forest service did not drop fire retardant on the mill site as we all believed they would.

I was on annual vacation at the time of the fire and was terminated after the fire. I would like to know if Tolko made a request for a fire retardant drop and if the request was made, why did it not happen? And, if the request was not made, why was it not made?

If you haven't had the opportunity to fly over Fishtrap Canyon, you can drive to the top of Skull Mountain on a nicely graded road, weather permitting, to view the progression of the McLure fire in its early days. The fire slowly burned, then raged, slowed and then raged again. I am not pointing out what the B.C. Forest Service doesn't already know.

Thursday, July 31st at approximately 11:30 p.m. I met at the mill site Dave Shanko who works for Tolko Woodlands. Together we installed Woodlands forestry pumps, pumping from Louis Creek to fill the mill's reservoir after the power outage. Dave spoke of just coming out of the Oliver Creek area. He had driven up Orchard Lake Road and down Oliver Road to rescue a fellow worker who had had a flat tire. Dave said at that time that the Oliver roadside was ablaze. Everyone in the know at that time knew the fire was coming to our infrastructure. Please find a report to the people of North Thompson why

retardant was not used at daybreak Friday, August 1st to prevent this catastrophic loss to our area.

Weakness in the community plan also showed up in CN Rail in that the train full of passenger drove through the fire zone. A search and rescue member was involved in evacuating exlu(?) and saw a CN passenger train coming into the canyon fire zone. The member, who also works for CN, called by cell phone to CN dispatch in Edmonton and to the train, telling them to back up. The train did back up to Barriere and personnel chose to wait the fire out saying that the train was self-contained. This happened at approximately 9:00 p.m. on Thursday, July 31st. The next day at approximately 1:30 p.m. August 1st, the train pulled on through the fire zone loaded with passengers. Many things could have gone wrong with this move. A rockslide, a burned off airline could have meant a further emergency situation.

I spent weeks working with Search and Rescue during and after the fire. I was shocked that the order to return people to their homes in Barriere area came as early as it did, seeing as the area was still ablaze and heavy equipment was still working in many areas. People got in the way of mop-up efforts.

On the other hand, evacuations happened needlessly, removing some home owners three times and a real danger exists in crying wolf to residents. Some refused to listen and might have remained in harm's way.

The good I would like to see come out of this disaster is – in point form here:

- 1) I believe that we should initiate a code red, or by any other name a signal common to all first responders from fire departments, B.C. Forest Service, RCMP, Search and Rescue, Highways, Rail and Government, a code red meaning imminent loss is expected from an interface fire to life, limb or infrastructure so time and resources are not spared to meet the need.
- 2) Sometimes tough decisions need to be made as is in evidence in the Kelowna fire. Code red should allow by law a mechanism to allow areas to be sacrificed to save many homes or infrastructure. I can explain this by saying during the fire I worked for B.C. Forest Service supplying water to a fire control helicopter base called the Mud Pitt by Whitewood Lake. Firefighting techniques used in this area ahead of the fire included installation of a cat guard, followed by helicopters laying fire retardant inside the guard and back burning by helicopter with drip torch to the guard ahead of the out of control fire. This technique could and should also be used in dense housing in the face of a fire storm.
- 3) All businesses and government are expected to have emergency response plans. These need to be revised to include the code red to call in help including authorizing tanker retardant drop on private land, businesses or homes.
- 4) There needs to be a mechanism in place to access manpower and resources in rural communities locally. Downsizing in the B.C. Forest Service as well as

other government agencies have removed local access that has not been replaced with any other mechanism to implement any timely actions. When the provincial government removed rural B.C. Forest Service which had the knowledge and the hands-on contact with local loggers, they lost a local wealth of information and help, not to mention that this manpower and equipment were already in many cases onsite. Forest fires, wild and man-caused, are historic. It will happen again. Many people living in the North Thompson area with equipment, knowledge and manpower were not called upon in a timely manner. Pre-plans need to include resource lists or data banks for quick access of locals who have known and worked in the area, including machinery. (tape turned)

... had not acted quickly, if not instinctively, that Barriere would not be standing today.

- 5) Pre-plans for fires need to include safe zones, a clear safe area to retreat to with people and machinery, to allow key people to remain behind and not evacuate. Examples are firefighters, machine operators, planning staff, Search and Rescue and RCMP. Many more structures could have been saved if so many people had not been forced to evacuate.
- 6) More focus and itemizing needs to be put into recovery aftermath in response plans by PEP and the TNRD. Money and help are severely lacking, or non-existent.
- 7) What good are these plans to a rural area if they are not followed. In the downsizing of the B.C. Forest Service and other government agencies, PEP and the TNRD are left lacking to fill the void. PEP and the TNRD need to find simple regulations and authority to deal with all other government ministries and agencies in the face of major emergencies.
- 8) If all of this is outlined in the State of Emergency, then these rules and regulations need to be explained to the average first responder and if not, perhaps the State of Emergency as it pertains to emergency preparedness should be re-written to include these lesser government agencies, PEP and the TRND.
- 9) Much more work needs to go into these emergency preparedness plans. They are incomplete and a work in progress.
- 10) Sizable companies in rural areas with small volunteer fire departments must be required by law to have onsite fire response teams outfitted to do fire fighting and rescue.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much, Tim. That's a very comprehensive report and we appreciate it. I assume we will have a copy of that? (Yes) Thank you.

The whole issue of local response – I have certainly been hearing about this and reading about it, but does every area have an emergency response – do you see the local response as being sort of the first people who should be on the scene and should be taking under direction, under some central direction, should be taking responsibility to get right on to it.

TH In a lot of cases they happen to be the people who are there at the time and so I think in a position like we were in this summer, where we had an incredible forest load and incredible conditions, there isn't time to waste. Whoever is there first needs to be dealing with it, immediately. That's my view.

GF And so that is a combination of local fire departments and the B.C. Forest Service. I mean they have their Rap attack groups as I understand it, and they have people spread throughout the province. And then you've got your local fire fighting crews, some of whom are volunteers, others of whom are full time figure centres and so on. But these are the two agencies or groups that you see as the ones who you want to be there immediately jumping onto whenever a fire breaks out.

TH I would agree with you there, but I also would say that in my view by air, retardant is the best means to contain these fires on their outset and it needs to be directed, I believe, like Al said, from somebody that's not passing the buck, like everything goes to one person and they make that decision on what happens and what doesn't. What I am talking about is in the pre-planning you need to have the data bank set up for that person to access. The data banks in each area.

GF There is a difference, obviously, between fighting fires out in the forest where there is nobody around, no human involvement, or structures or infrastructure versus the interface. And one of the things that we are trying to concentrate on, I think the mandate of the review is primarily to go and look very closely at how things are handled in the interface fire. And, who do you see as being the primary responsibility, or having the primary responsibility for interface fire attack.

TH That would be the B.C. Forest Service, in my view.

GF Even although they are involving residential communities that are built up against the forest, it's still B.C. Forest Service?

TH Well, I mean I know the two are going to meet, but B.C. Forest Service I believe has, or should, have an overall view of the conditions and know more of the logistics and someone has to pull this all together, locally and provincially. And I think they are probably in the best position to do that.

GF And what do you see PEP's role as in this whole thing?

TH I guess what I am trying to say is that someone has to take the bull by the horns here, whether it be the B.C. Forest Service, whether it be PEP, or whether it be the Regional Districts. But one of these entities has to be ultimately responsible and ultimately run the show. You can't have so many different levels of bureaucracy and the way of doing a job when it's in dire need.

GF I see B.C. Forest Service as having a responsibility to fight the fires, I am not sure who has the judgment, or how the judgment is arrived at about evacuations,

about whether or not the houses are at risk, these kinds of things. So it certainly means that there has got to be a collaborative effort, although it has to be understood as to who makes the ultimate call, I guess, right?

TH With the fire commissioner as well.

GF That's the way it is, is that the best way?

TH I guess it's the way it works at present. I don't really have any answers for you on how better to make the system. I am hoping that through your review of all the towns that you go to, you will in your wisdom come to that realization.

GF Okay. You made some points about corporate preparedness and responsibility versus public preparedness and responsibility for things like a mill. Can I just explore that a little bit with you? You are suggesting that somehow the government pass legislation that mandates the corporations to have a fire fighting capability onsite and that they are the first responders on the private property. Would they ultimately have direction from the government as well?

TH I would say so. I guess to explain that I would have to say that with volunteer fire departments, they mean the best and they do the best they can with what they have and they do a very good job, I'm not knocking them. But, what I am saying is that you have – being as it is a volunteer group you have people come and go. When they come onsite to an industrial site, you may not have the same people coming back all the time so things can be missed and lost. Whereas if you have people onsite that know the facility and you have them well trained to do a quick – like say you have a very smoky fire and in a lot of factories you have chemicals and things that burn immediately that are highly toxic, you may need to get people out immediately. So all I am saying is that we should have at least a few people that are rapid attack capable so they do not have to evacuate so that they are there to help the fire departments when they arrive.

GF In a state of emergency when the government has obviously extreme powers and they enter onto private property they can order people to evacuate, they can commandeer equipment from a private operator and all those kinds of things, so I think it is, certainly it is within the bounds of the government's powers once they have declared a state of emergency to do some of this. You are taking it the extra step, though, and saying that in a preparation kind of mode they should also be able to, once you have a fair-sized industry that they should also be able to order them to have permanent capabilities themselves right onsite to fight that fire before outside forces come in.

TH That's exactly what I am saying.

GF Thank you very much, Tim. (Thank you)

For our next presentation we have Denein Stanley. Is Denein Stanley here?
All right, we will keep going ahead and so I will indicate that we are going to come back this evening, because there are several people who registered this week but couldn't be here in the afternoon and so we are going to recommence at 7:00 o'clock this evening whenever we break, but at this point we will certainly welcome other presentations and will leave Denein Stanley aside for the moment and ask then for Barry McLean.

Barry McLean:

Hello, Sir, how are you? (fine, thanks). You much have a sense of déjà vu coming into this province right now, remembering the fire in your province many years ago, which was followed by a flood.

GF Absolutely. I – let's not talk about number three.

BM My name is Barry McLean, I am a resident – former resident – of Louis Creek and my reason for appearing here today is on a fairly personal basis because we did lose, my wife and I, our entire home and contents in that fire. I want to draw the attention of the Review Committee to the specific circumstances surrounding the evacuation of my wife and I from our residence on Stone Road, Louis Creek, on the evening of July 31st. In doing so, I wish to speak directly to some of the terms of references for the Committee those of command structure and communication to local residents. Al Kirkwood has indicated of the need to have a fairly thorough examination of that.

On that evening my wife, Kathy was at work at the Barriere Esso. She and I had talked on several occasions, beginning around 9:00 p.m. and we were both aware that there was a distinct possibility of an order for residents of Louis Creek to evacuate the area. I was loading personal items into our pickup and putting other items into boxes. My wife closed up the Esso at approximately 11:00 p.m. and drove towards Louis Creek. She was stopped at a police road block at the junction of Highway 5 and Agate Bay Road. The RCMP officer on duty would at first deny her access to Louis Creek and my wife explained to the officer that I was at home and was undertaking to remove some personal belongings from our residence in preparation for what could be an evacuation order. The officer responded with the following statement, and these are my wife's best recollections of what was said: You are to get in and get out. On your way out you are to check in here at this location and provide us with your name and address. My wife proceeded and arrived home. She informed me of this and we loaded up more personal belongings in preparation to leave. At approximately 11:15 p.m. we lost hydro power and telephone communication subsequent to that. We left our residence around 12:15 Friday morning and proceeded to the roadblock where, as directed, we informed the officer on duty of our name and address and where we were headed, which was to my wife's sister's residence in Glengrove, which is just outside of Barriere.

Now, early that morning we were made aware through radio reports that an official evacuation order had not yet been issued for Louis Creek. My brother-in-law accompanied me to Louis Creek at approximately 7:30 on that morning to see if we could get back in to rescue some additional belongings, but we were too late. We understand that approximately 2:30 on Saturday our home was destroyed.

After carefully considering the events of that evening and the following day, my wife and I have taken the position that we relied to our detriment on the orders of a police official who was not in a position of authority nor authorized to categorically make the statement that my wife get in and that we get out. To the best of our knowledge, an official evacuation order had not been issued at that time – a fact that we were not aware of. Our neighbours on Stone Road were not ordered to leave until approximately 9:00 a.m. Saturday morning. The lost time from 12:15 to 9:00 a.m. that morning essentially deprived us of our ability to move as many personal effects as we could without the pressure of being told to get out prematurely, in our opinion. My wife and I lost a collective one hundred and fifteen years of memories. I am sixty-five, she is fifty.

Our concern in this regard is twofold. We have considered do we have a cause for a detrimental reliance civil action suit here. I think so. I don't know. I am not a lawyer. Are we going to proceed down that road? We don't know. And I will tell you why, because it is a very emotional situation and I think we need a great deal of time to sit and think about it. And, the fact of the matter is that if we were to proceed that way, are we opening up wounds further on down the road. I mean this is our community, we are going back into Louis Creek and going to stay there. So, it causes a great deal of anxiety for us and will continue to do that. But secondly, and by far the most important is our need to be reassured that in the future we are not faced with this situation again.

Disaster comes in many ways – fires, floods, ice storms, you name it. What my wife and I want to see in order for us to feel some sense of comfort should we, God forbid, have to do this again, is concise written statements and what we have to do should it happen again. Procedures that should be initiated and put into place for any disaster and as Al said, who is in charge. We have to know who we listen to. Command, control and communication the three c's are all essential to reinforcing the comfort level of the residents of any community, be it rural or urban. We have to know who to listen to, what exact procedures to follow, and how to collectively protect ourselves and our neighbours during any natural disaster.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much, Mr. McLean. I just can't imagine the emotions that you have gone through in this whole process of losing your home. I thank you for coming here and sharing that with us. It is a very troubling situation to have gone through, and to know that you could have saved more in the process that as you say a lifetime of memories. It's got to be a very disconcerting situation for you. But clearly your wife had the impression that the police officer was giving her an order and at this point we will have to examine all the details around it. But, this is only our first set of meetings, but it is a resonant kind of theme that people have to know who is in charge. It is fundamental to any emergency procedure, any plan, anything that people – especially when there are so many different departments and agencies involved. We can think

offhand of just half a dozen that are clearly in the midst of this during a crisis. Nobody is suggesting that each one of them has a veto on it, they all have an input to it, but somebody has to make the final decision.

BM That's what we are looking for.

GF On the evacuation order, having been through a situation in which evacuation orders were given under not necessarily my direction, but under a province-wide emergency order that we had both during the forest fires of 1989 and during the floods of 1987, I know that there is ultimately somebody in charge who gives those evacuation orders. The question is, as you have said, command, control and communication. We are going to have to examine all of those issues. Thank you very much.

We have Denein Stanley here, so we welcome you and thank you for coming.

Denein Stanley:

Thank you for having these hearings here. First of all this is a piece of melted aluminum. It is part of what used to be my Dad's truck. So although I am one of the lucky ones, I am blessed I still have my home, I still have a lot of questions and a lot of concerns, so could I present them to you.

I also have questions here from people who could not attend. Mr. Filmon, what is the total cost of the review from start to finish – for this review. Secondly, do you have a staff, how many are there? And is there anyone from this area involved in the review? Will we as civilian working stiff have any input into the revisions to the existing mandates applied during this disaster. If so, who do we contact to be involved. In closing, for my questions, will all the data be made public in a clear, accessible, understandable format. If so, where and when can we obtain it. If not, why not.

We are a proud hardworking people in this area and I believe we have earned the right as Canadians to ask these questions, and more so not to be handed empty replies that do not make a sweet bit of difference to any one of us that run our lives quite well without expensive reviews, endless data, media coverage, reams of paperwork to wade through.

We in the North Thompson run on hard work, heart-driven honesty and good old fashioned facts. I hope this review does too. I accessed your website, I found it very informative and I appreciate it. Now, I would like to ask the questions that were presented to me by people who cannot ask them themselves.

The first one is John McAllister of Barriere. He is a gentleman here that volunteers for the local Salvation Army. When I first met John it was the day I came back to my home and I went downtown in search of a building who houses the Salvation Army that was operating in Kamloops. I found him riding his bike in over 40 degree weather, going uptown to the hardware store to have keys made so that he could lock the compound that they had already found to store the Salvation Army goods. He is well over eighty. He is well dedicated. He would like to know what is the total cost of all the government officials coming to our area to view the disaster, i.e. air fares, hotels, helicopter tours – while the non-profit organizations such as the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, various church groups, food bank and outside help, like the Mennonites who are still working in this area were here long before any government relief was even voiced. Even the North Thompson relief fund took less time to put into gear.

My second question comes from Mr. John Sibley and it is Mr. Filmon why you, not to discredit you in any way, however do we not have anyone in this province that could do the same job that you do? Surely the cost of this review could be greatly cut and maybe better spent by having local hands-on people involved. People like Hugh Fraser from the Agate Bay area, cattle rancher and farmer. People like Mr. Derek Stamer of Stamer Logging, Barriere. People like John

Sibley of Barriere Telus, 20 years road experience and area experience. Walt McCurdy local logging equipment operator, rancher from Dixon Valley.

I have one more part to my statement if I may have the time. The letter that I put into the local newspaper was not and is not a tool written for government bashing. It is just questions I personally have regarding how this review will help everyone impacted by this disaster in its magnitude throughout the valley. For the past few months many statements have been voiced in this town regarding forest service practices and attitudes during the early hours of what was a frightening and devastating runaway fire. The words in the winds of this valley are did it have to be runaway or are there rule book reasons that made it so. It has been said that the local people with many practical years of fire fighting experience and equipment and knowledge of the bush roads, etc., as well as residents, were treated with one general response. You and your equipment are not needed. It's a very difficult statement to swallow when a fire such as this one is threatening your town and you have the means and the knowledge to at least try to do something to save it. Perhaps more losses could have been avoided if we as a valley of loggers, ranchers, farmers, businessmen and women, country people were taken a little more seriously in the onslaught of the first fire at McLure.

Against my own gut instincts I evacuated to Little Fort, next to 100 Mile House, next to Kamloops. In all that time of not knowing, as well as being told horrible things – like the town was flattened, etc. – news reports giving well-intended, however somewhat sensational and possibly inaccurate reports of devastation. The only thing I could hang onto was, number one I never should have left town until I couldn't do anything more after all I have lived here all my life, why would I leave without even trying. Number two, I have no faith in the incoming authorities to actually fight this fire because I know they will have to actually know this area. And then I also know that over the last several years it appears that they have gotten rid of the experienced practical people in this industry because of government cutbacks. These people remember when you fought fires, not monitored them. They also lived and worked in these valleys so they know the roads, the terrain, the water sources that exist, but they don't work for the forestry anymore.

Therefore, whose knowledge do we rely on? For me, I should have relied on myself and the people around me that do know – not strangers taking over my town with an attitude of get everyone gone no matter how impractical, obscene, and in some cases downright ridiculous the actions and comments were. Yes, an evacuation was needed for those without vehicles or mobility or health and safety purposes. By all means lives always come first. No one here I am sure would argue that loss of life must be avoided. It still amazes me that in an evacuation of this size did not in itself did not cause its own disaster on one of the most dangerous stretches of highway in this province, considering the track record the highway already has. My point being, why were the local fire fighting abilities and practical efforts that were put forth by many residents of all the

aspects of this and other communities snubbed or ignored. I realize time is a great factor, however our power in Barriere, Louis Creek and exlu(?) was out by then. Why did it take so long for the evacuation ruling to reach our very capable local groups who were begging for the order long before it was given.

(tape 2)

(First short minutes of tape 2 drowned out with a buzz.)

GF based on the information provided to the inquiry.

DS And how will we access that?

GF Access which?

DS The results.

GF There will be a report which will be the summary of the entire process, along with all of the presentations. They will be an appendix to the report.

DS And how would I access this. Is it going to be ...

GF It will be released publicly ...

DS By newspaper, News Hour, news media?

GF Well the news media will certainly cover it I assume, but copies I am sure will be available and the government will make them available widely to the public.

DS Who would I contact in the government. Has that been set up?

GF I think your local MLA has his hand up.

DS Oh, all right, I hear you Kevin. Okay. I have a copy that I will leave with you. Thank you very much.

GF Thank you very much, I appreciate that.

There is a gentleman here who would like to come forward.

Horst Braun:

I live two miles north of the start of the McLure fire on District Lot 45 Westside Road at the elevation of 2,000 feet. I had a bird's eye view on July 30th of the start of the fire and from there on. I didn't evacuate.

It is my opinion the fire was started and grew to the ultimate size as the fault of three people. One, the person that threw the cigarette away. Two, by the incident commander ignoring the advice of the local people. Three, by an overstressed and inexperienced Forestry employee setting a backfire on my property without the ability to control the backfire. The cure – there is no cure for stupidity and carelessness unless stiffer fines are enforced or a bullwhip.

Two, it is my opinion that the local people know the weather, the lay of the land, the resources, and have a far greater stake in the incident than just a pay cheque and for that reason it is wrong to evacuate instead of taking their advice.

Three, you cannot terminate the employment of your old experienced employees and hoping you can call on them when your ass is in a sling to bail you out until such time that you have experienced well trained and equipped employees in place to replace them. In general, you cannot fight a forest fire starting at 10:00 a.m. in the morning. It is my opinion as an operator with forty-five years experience as a heavy equipment operator that a certain group of people, of the fire fighters, have to be onsite at daybreak in order to effectively fight the fire.

I am not too good in fancy words and I am less of a diplomat. In plain English, you cannot fight a fuddle-duddle forest fire if nobody is there.

That's all I've got to say.

GF Thank you, Horst.

Do we have anybody else who would like to come forward? Sir?

Randy Hedlund:

My name is Randy Hedlund. I work as a logistics officer at the PEP Emergency Centre in Clearwater. I just have three points that I would like to bring up, but first I would like to express working with the emergency response teams that everybody did what they thought was right. People worked from the heart, worked long hard hours and there is no question there were some mistakes made. I suppose that is what you are here for, is to ensure that people are better informed so that when they are working from the heart they can more accurately make those decisions.

We in Clearwater were without power and communications for quite some time. That was a real problem for the outlying areas around Clearwater. We became somewhat of a satellite station to the emergency response team out of Kamloops. The concerns that I would like to first bring up has to do with communication. We on the ground in Clearwater had a very hard time trying to inform the general public of exactly what was going on with any accuracy. We had a very hard time just trying to maintain communications with Kamloops.

The concern that I would like to express is this movement towards centralization of emergency response teams. It appears as though at this point in time the major centres are trying to take more power in the control of these kinds of situations and leaving the smaller centres with less power. That, sir, would be a disastrous mistake in my opinion. There is no way that people in Kamloops are going to be able to get information to people up in upper Clearwater let's say, or in the back reaches of Blackpool, or East Blackpool accurately and with sufficient time, without some form of local communication system. Again, we had a hard enough time as it was right in the centre of Clearwater. We still had people coming to us stating that they felt uninformed and were concerned – where is the fire? Should we be evacuating? Etc., etc. – a thousand questions. The questions could not be answered from Kamloops, especially in the earlier days. So the concern is, in that respect, that we somehow maintain local control of our own situation and evacuation.

The next concern was brought to me by a friend of mine in Clearwater that has some inside knowledge towards, and it reflects what Tim had been saying earlier, is the command and control structure has to be firmly set in place so that professionals within their own right are given the opportunity to have the say in what should and should not be done. It is my understanding that there were some scenarios where people could have been allowed to return to their homes as much as four days earlier than they were allowed to upon the advice of proper fire officials. That advice, from my understanding, was not taken. I don't know the situation completely myself, but the person I talked to was certainly was an authority and certainly seemed to know what he was talking about. So, again it is a command and control issue that people professionally should be making the decisions, not being passed off to, for

lack of a better word, bureaucrats who are doing their best with what they know how to deal with.

The last thing, again my job was logistics up there. We had a large demand for generators and various supplies to go to various people. When we initiated logistics in Clearwater, the initial responses that we received was that there were three or four people that were in charge of logistics at the Kamloops centre and that nobody really seemed to know who the right person was to talk to. So anyway, there was somebody there that had control and I eventually got to him. It took a while to get there. Once I got to him, he did – and believe me, they did – everything they could to help our area. They did everything that they could possibly think of. However, there seemed to be a lack of control of courier service, of delivery, of serial numbered equipment – things were going out to various places and various people, the people who should know, didn't know about it. There was in my opinion inadequate records of what equipment went where. And as a direct result of that we spent an awful lot more money, again in my opinion, than we should have. Certainly, again their hearts were in the right place, they did everything they could to ensure everybody got what they needed when they needed it. However, there was a continuous stream of couriered items coming up and down the valley from Kamloops to Clearwater that was totally unnecessary.

There also had to be some form of control as to who was allowed to order what. At what time should orders come in. You can't have a continuous communications taxation in an area where communications is at a prime.

I would like to close by again stating that without question all the people that I work with worked from the heart and did everything they could, everything that they knew to make life better for people in this valley. I think that people put in 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 hours a day out of the goodness of their hearts and often not being reimbursed for it.

If you are to come out with suggestions from this, it shouldn't include ramifications in my opinion unless there is some criminal negligence issue. It should definitely deal only with making the next time better and safer, and I congratulate those that were involved that we lost but one life.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much, Randy. Thank you for putting in perspective just exactly what I see as my role. I am not looking for a scapegoat, or scapegoats, I am looking to learn from this as to what things were done right and there obviously had to be some things that were done right and also where we can learn from the things that didn't work out as well as they should have for the next time. That is precisely what I hope to be able to put into the report. And that is – what do we have to build on, what's solid and worked, and what are the things that should and could be done better and how do we accomplish

that and learn from it. You put it certainly into perspective and that is exactly where we are headed. Thank you.

Thank you, and welcome Glenda Ritchie. Thank you.

Glenda Ritchie: (for)

I am going to read a statement by Mrs. Ritchie here.

To Mr. Gary Filmon: This is her story. Something went terribly wrong during the McLure fire on July 31st, 2003. Our family home was the first home burned by any of the wildfires of 2003. We did not get notified or warned by any officials that our home was about to burn. We were notified by telephone by several friends of ours in Barriere that had heard it on their scanners. It appeared that several people in Barriere knew that we were in danger before we did. This indicates to me that the officials did know that we were in danger and did nothing to notify us. We arrived home from work that Thursday evening about 5:45 p.m.

At approximately 6:00 p.m. our neighbours from five kilometers up the mountain came to our house. They were very upset as they had been evacuated by members of the McLure fire department and were told that the bombers were going to drop retardant on the home. Approximately fifteen minutes after they arrived, a Forestry truck pulled into our yard. A male and female got out of the truck and said that they had to drive one of the neighbours into Barriere to register with the evacuation centre. I don't know why they had to drive them into Barriere because they did have their own vehicle. I said to the female fire fighter – do we need to worry? She replied no, we just need to drive one of your neighbours into Barriere to register.

My neighbour, Jean, went to the Forestry truck with both the male and female personnel. Her husband, Herb, agreed to pick her up in about twenty minutes or so later. Jean confirmed with me that she asked the fire fighters again why we weren't being evacuated. They said that their only concern was to take her and register her at the evacuation centre in Barriere.

Me, my husband Bruce, neighbour Herb and relative Ted sat at the picnic table in our front yard for approximately twenty minutes. We did not see or hear any bombers or choppers. Ted and Herb left to pick up Jean. The time was now 7:00 o'clock. Approximately five minutes later we received a phone call from some friends in Barriere that had heard on their scanner that the whole valley was about to be consumed by fire, did we need any help. We said a Forestry truck just left here, said that everything was fine and that we didn't need to be concerned. About five minutes later our friend called back and said that on the scanner they heard that the highway on both ends of our driveway had been closed to all traffic.

My daughter Sarah had just gotten off work at seven o'clock. I started to panic as I knew she would be stuck in a line-up, watching the flames get closer and closer to our house. Bruce drove down to find her. The traffic was lined up and she was stuck in the line-up and very upset. The RCMP was manning the closure of the highway. Officer Vanderpol of Barriere told Bruce that because we had not been officially evacuated he had to park the truck and only take

one vehicle home. He didn't want anybody else in the line-up to think he was favouring anyone. From the highway, Bruce and Sarah could see how close the flames were to our house. He felt he did not have time to argue as I was home by myself without a vehicle. He parked the truck alongside the highway, Sarah and he came back to the house in our small car.

We started to try to get what we could into the car and some friends of our pulled into the yard. They said the police tried to stop them but they proceeded anyway through the roadblock to come and get us as the officer would not listen to reason and there was people in there. We gathered up photos and loaded them into the vehicle. By this time the telephone was ringing steady. Friends wanted to see if they could help us as they all seemed to know what was happening. Still, not one official came back to check if we were getting out as we were told.

I have many questions about what happened to us that night. Who was in charge that evening? How did everyone else find out before we did? I have since been told by many different sources that it was suggested on the radio late that afternoon that the three houses at the bottom of the mountain where we lived should be evacuated. Forestry officials said no, it was not necessary. I have also asked myself over and over, how could RCMP close a highway on both ends of the driveway and not come to tell us to get out? Even after Bruce drove down to the highway and officer Vanderpol just said you haven't been officially evacuated. Are the people of this country not supposed to be able to rely on RCMP officers to keep them safe? At the time he said this the flames were all around our house, on our land and in the forest. I have been told many stories regarding the fact that Search and Rescue wanted to come and evacuate us and were told no by Forestry personnel.

When we got down to the highway to leave that night the flames were right at the point of jumping Cliff Road. My guess is that if we were five minutes longer we would have been trapped. A good thing we had friends and didn't have to wait for officials to evacuate us.

I find it very disturbing that government officials and employees played Russian roulette with our lives. It is one thing that they allowed the fire to get to the point of destroying all our land, marketable timber, our homes and for many in Barriere jobs. Our neighbour who was also not advised that their house was going to burn had phoned the Forestry information line several times that afternoon, up to about 5:00 p.m. They were told all was fine in our valley and there was nothing to worry about. They had gone out for the evening. What if we hadn't known anyone in Barriere that called us on the telephone that night when they had heard – would my family be here to try and rebuild our lives – would I be here to write this letter.

I would like to mention that at no time has anyone tried to contact us to find out if everyone did make it out. I guess when you live out of sight of the public

view the old saying out of sight out of mind applies. Has anyone done a head count after the fire? Perhaps there was someone else that lived off the beaten paths that wasn't notified. Maybe they weren't as fortunate as we were to have friends that cared.

After I got this statement from Mrs. Ritchie, she told me a few other things. I hope you don't mind if I just add to her statement because I find these folks, Bruce and Glenda, continuously getting slammed by the Forestry, even after the horrible tragedy they have been through physically and psychologically. When it was requested after the fire that danger trees be removed from the adjoining Crown land, they were threatened with charges basically. When the right-of-way burnt trees were cut down and cleared by these folks at their own expense, they were told by the Ministry of Transportation that Forestry officials would probably tell them the trees had to be removed in short order or they would be charged stumpage.

Who are these unthinking, unfeeling robots we have working in these departments. It was not Bruce and Glenda that created this problem. If truth be known, it was exactly this kind of bureaucratic nightmare that allowed the McLure fire to become a disaster.

GF Thank you very much, I am sure it was very difficult for you to put all of those thoughts down and it's important for the public record that we have your story. Obviously we have no knowledge of what transpired, why you weren't given notice or any of that. It adds to the questions that were earlier asked about who's in charge and who's making these decisions and judgment calls. Thank you.

Do we have anybody else who would like to come forward? Yes?

Desmond Rice:

My name is Desmond Rice, I live in Kamloops. I wasn't directly affected by the fire but I did have friends who lived at East Barriere Lake and after the fire was all over we drove out there to see them. What astonished me was when they were warned to get out or when they decided to get out, I don't know which, they went all the way through the Barriere – which is the fire zone – they went North to Little Fort, they went west over the Sheraton Lake and then they went down Highway 98, Cache Creek and back to Kamloops. I thought that was very weird.

I used to work for the Forest Service so I knew the roads I'd traveled could have got them back to Kamloops sooner. But they didn't seem to be aware of where they were, or whether they were passable. And you know, when you look at a motel – you go into a motel, it gives you arrows as to where you should go if you are in a fire which exit you should take. And I'd have thought that maybe these people should have been warned or aware that there were other routes they could have followed because if the fire had, say, spread to the North Barriere Road and cut off the East Barriere Road, I don't know what they would have done. They didn't know that they could get out. And, if the roads are not in a suitable state to get out, I'd suggest – it's a big condominium, East Barriere Lake on the south side, or at least on the south-east side. It's huge – stretches for miles. And I would have thought they should have some – the Forest Service or something should have maintained escape routes. The roads are all there and they should maintain escape routes. I mean, why fry these people because they don't know which way to go.

Anyway that is one point that hit me and as I say I wasn't directly involved in the fire. And the other was – another thing here is I sit every day looking at the TV and trying to find out what is going on and you never could. You never could. It appeared to me that there were seven people lined up on a dais like this, except two tables instead of one. And they were remarkably uninformative and I can see why the people sitting down in the spotlight face must have been very frustrated because somehow or other they were on a trip of their own. I found that – I think it was the Fire Commissioner – to be a bit of a bully. I don't know – they seemed to be puffed up with their own importance. It had a composite map on the wall behind them about the size of that curtain there. It was a topographic map, all pasted together, and of course at the scale of the TV you couldn't read it – impossible. And they pointed at this damned thing and you couldn't see what they were pointing at. They were talking about where the fire was, well they might as well have been drawing things on a blackboard without knowing what they were doing. So I thought that they could have had a better presentation to keep people informed. Maybe others will bring this up. I hope they do. Because, just as an outsider looking in I thought, God this is terrible. Terrible. They couldn't even find out if the house had burned or not and they knew the house hadn't burned. That's

why it's so frustrating. They knew that the house hadn't burned and didn't want to tell them.

Thank you, sir.

GF I appreciate your presentation. Thank you, Desmond.

Do we have another person who wanted to present? Yes, come forward, please.

Susan Garland:

Good afternoon, my name is Susan Garland and I had not planned to speak this afternoon but I thought perhaps I would just add a couple of things just off the cuff. I am not a public speaker by any stretch of the imagination, so just please bear with me.

I would like to mention that I was not evacuated on a permanent basis out of the community as most other people were and so perhaps I have a little bit more of an insight as to just exactly what did happen.

Now I would like to express my sincere admiration and respect for the job that the Search and Rescue did throughout this whole operation, they were true heroes and largely unrecognized. Also Ed Tensor from the Super Save Gas Station who kept things going, he is a true hero in my regard. Clearly no one expected what was going to happen to happen. No one was prepared. Clearly the police were not prepared, the government was not prepared. It just – everyone was scrambling and it was very evident from the inside. The news reporting was horrendous. We were at the point where, when we wanted to know if we were in jeopardy we drove down and looked to see where the fire was. It was – the news reporting was very bad and I felt so sorry for the people who were in Kamloops who didn't know if their home was gone or not. We lost our business and our home but at least because of the fact that the road was not secured into where our property was (tape over) I know that people did what they could and the Forestry did a tremendous job but they sure had to scramble. I would really like to see that preparation is taken so that this never happens again. And I would like to feel assured that if you make recommendations that those recommendations are implemented and not just sat on.

Thank you.

GF Thank you, Susan. Again I appreciate your sharing your personal experience. I can tell you that I wouldn't have taken on this assignment if I didn't expect that whatever comes from it will be implemented and I believe that has to be the only rationale for going to all this effort, spending all of this time, and listening to everybody and accumulating all of this information. If, at the end of it, the recommendations aren't implemented then I'd be the first one to speak out against it. But, I believe that is the intent and that's why I am here.

Bob Rutten:

My name is Bob Rutten, I also didn't plan on speaking but I just thought if there's time I will just bring this to your attention.

I am Susan's spouse and we lost our business – an antique shop – and a home in Louis Creek and something came to light just the other day that I found quite disturbing. My daughter had bought the book that was published in McLure called '*The day the North Thompson exploded*'. I hadn't seen it till a

couple of evenings ago and I was flipping through the pages and there was a photograph that really made me – not angry, but – what it was, was a photograph of my house not burned, it's standing, but the photograph was taken after the sun had set and it had the sawmill in the background, fully ablaze, and it just disturbed me to think that that house survived the onslaught, the firestorm, and through the day nobody took the time or obviously if there was no air support or water bombers in the area. My thoughts that had there been air support, structures like mine and maybe others in the community could have been hit with retardant or the perimeters had been doused in such a manner that possibly would have saved other structures. I don't know if at some point and day they just thought well, we'll just give up on the community and leave it at the mercy of the fire. But, seeing that was quite disturbing. I felt for the most part that Louis Creek was deserted, that we didn't defend it. I have lived there since '74, it's pretty special to me and I thought that the town was, like I say, we evacuated and nobody stood their ground. I am not saying they made the wrong decision by evacuating the community because the fact that nobody got hurt was paramount. But I do have other feelings about firefighting.

It seems to me when you have a firestorm burning with that much ferocity and wind driving it, probably the safest place to be is behind it and once the firestorm, which was advancing they say at sixty meters a minute or something, once the storm passed through the community it seemed to me that people, structural fire men or fire service personnel could have been following the path of the fire and possibly saving structured that didn't burn in the initial firestorm – which were many, to my understanding. A lot of the homes in Exlu(?) and parts of Louis Creek were not in the direct path of the immediate firestorm, the Class VI fire that came into the community. I just don't know why there wasn't a decision some time in the day to have air support, whether it be fire retardant or just water, available to prevent the type of thing that happened to my home. I am convinced that with a little bit of effort some dwellings could have been saved. And, maybe in the big picture some dwellings don't mean anything when there is such vast destruction. But certainly everybody's dwelling is certainly important to them.

I think that's all I have to say.

GF Thank you very much, Bob.

Is there anyone else who would like to come forward? Yes, Sir.

John McAllister:

I didn't prepare anything, just off the top of my head. Denein already disclosed my age, and I don't feel a day over a hundred actually.

I am very, very upset and I don't mind saying so, of the lack of action of our senior governments. I worked in the Vernon outlet during the Falkland fire, came over here. The charities were the first organizations in here. The Red Cross, the Mennonites, the churches, Salvation Army, and I wonder why we have to do this. The money is all funded for these charities from the working people mostly. Quite fortunately the old highways buildings are empty. We had at the start 5,000 pounds of clothing come in. we had fridges, used fridges, stoves, appliances, buildings set aside – we had one building set aside for a shoe store. There were 22,000 meals served out of three kitchens.

We are now 3-1/2 months after, before we got any promise of funding from senior governments and I want to read out a list of the politicians that we have had out here at a huge expense, looking down from helicopters, and nothing in their hands.

Premier Campbell

Sheila Copps – promised to rebuild the trestles when people are living in motel rooms here, and little trailers.

Hedy Fry – coming to Kamloops – what for? Looking for more burning crosses as she did at Prince George.

Lt.Governor of B.C. went to Vernon to visit us – Nothing in her hand.

Paul Martin – who is right now a back bencher nobody, landing in Louis Creek with a big promise – he can't promise one nickel right now. He is a prime minister in waiting only. I'm talking about a terrible waste of money here.

The Governor General – the plane she had – it had no West on the compass, only East. To Russia – four wine tasters with her – a million dollar trip – when we've got people here burned out, flooded out. She is over in Europe – one million dollars right there that we could have used here.

What was the cost of all this, that's what I want to know, Mr. Chairman, what was the cost of all this useless traveling. When people like myself, senior citizens are still running a relief outlet over there, and some of them like myself in their eighties and working every day. That's not right. Charities are for the people, by the people and from the people, but nothing from governments.

Thank you very much.

GF Thank you John, I think I have your message.

JM And we certainly could have done with that \$500,000 it is costing for this hearing and I hope something comes out of it, but it's after the fact, Mr. Filmon.

Wim Houben:

Hi, my name is Wim Houben and I belong to the Barriere Emergency Social Services. My big concern was with the actual evacuation. The big problem was the evacuation of the people without any transportation of their own. Buses were ordered in and turned back. Then they got a police escort but by that time it was already too late, the order to finish the evacuation had already been received here and people had to pack these seniors into their own private vehicles to get them out, and many of them took the long way around because they had been told by the radio that the short way, through the back road, was closed. And it wasn't. That's really all I have to say.

GF This is in the evacuation phase of Barriere?

WH It was the actual evacuation phase, yes.

GF Okay, thank you.

Tim Hoffman:

Good afternoon. Tim Hoffman, Unit Chief of the B.C. Ambulance Service. First of all I want to make it clear that I am not speaking on behalf of the B.C. Ambulance Service, I am here as a crew member but I am a private citizen.

First of all, speaking of the ambulance service, I think as far as we worked everything went fairly well. I do have some concerns about the Interior Health Authority, the way they performed during the evacuation and following the evacuation. I won't speak specifically about them but I think your panel needs to look at how they performed as far as allowing the medical clinic to reopen once the evacuation was lifted and as far as the protection of the people that were still within Barriere working – firefighters, local citizens, and ambulance personnel as well.

About four months prior to the fire we had a tabletop exercise involving B.C. Ambulance Service, Search and Rescue, TNRD, a number of other local emergency services. By coincidence that tabletop exercise involved an interface fire. Part of it even involved the sawmill burning and what would take place during that fire. When this fire started that plan went out the door. The TNRD as far as I am concerned dropped the hat and did not perform the way they should have.

I am also a member of the Barriere Search and Rescue and speaking on their behalf I would like to say that if it wasn't for the Barriere Search and Rescue, lives probably would have been lost.

I feel sorry for folks like Mrs. Ritchie who wasn't evacuated by us. But we were not informed until some time about six or seven o'clock Thursday night that our help was needed. I personally was on the other side of the river at about six o'clock Thursday night and saw that fire was approaching their home, and we had a training night scheduled for that night. I headed back to be there for that training night at seven o'clock. We, at that point, decided that we needed to get out, or we were told that they needed us at a roadblock at Agate Bay Road. That's where our work started. From then on Barriere Search and Rescue and the volunteers that helped, and many community members from Barriere, One Hundred Mile House, all over the place came to work with the Barriere Search and Rescue volunteers to continue working throughout the entire fire. Some of those people worked sixteen hour days nonstop for twenty days.

So, I am here to say that if it wasn't for groups like the Search and Rescue or like the ESS people around that were in this community, bad things would have happened. And I don't know how other communities operate, but I know they are not operating the way we are, or the way we do, and I think we are very lucky here to have that type of group who support themselves – very little support from government – we flip a lot of hamburgers to pay for the things that we do in the equivalent we do. We did get a lot of support from the Pre-

Aux(?) in Kamloops once they realized that we were taking control of the situation here in Barriere. But if this same fire was to happen in another community where there was no group like we had here, or local volunteers like we had, things would have been much different – I am sure of it.

That's pretty much all I have to say.

GF Thank you very much.

Are there any others who wish to speak?

Okay, we will take a break and stay around for a while and afterwards we will be breaking for dinner and coming back because a number of people are registered to speak at seven o'clock.

Yes? Sure. I have Walt McKirdy, Norm Fennell and Lori Barsi. *(That's all?)* That's all.

I am only listening to the message. Well, tomorrow in Kamloops we have the regional TNRD and so on.

We will take a short break then, and will check again in fifteen minutes to see if there is anyone else who would like to appear. And if not, we would like to take the break until the evening.

Okay, thank you very much and welcome.

Gary Chivers

I would like to speak about the start of the fire, or the start of it for us anyhow. We were the immediate area next to McLure North.

We had no notice of this fire. We were down there at the fire in McLure but then when we went home, when the fire started to move nobody came and notified us. Because the Provincial Highways Department, the Department of Highways, had put our address up in the bush – like about a mile actually, physically, from my house. They had my address on the south side of the highway in the bush and the house is situated on the north side of the highway, a thousand feet from the highway. So, they didn't even tell us it was coming and we had like about an hour's notice. We had cows on the south side, we had to get them out when the fire was coming over the mountain at us – move them to our pasture. It was the next door neighbours who told us the fire was coming, that they were getting burned out. They had been notified but we had not been notified. They were on the south side of the highway.

Now Joe Piva, a fellow down here – I've got to mention his name because it would be like hearsay evidence, but he told me that he wanted to put a fire guard around that fire at McLure and nobody was really interested. Because he had his CAT there and he lives there, he lives on the north side too, and he wanted to put a fire guard in there is what he told me. So I mean he is not – he's a long-time resident and he's not a liar, he came in to bring me fuel. Because once this fire got going we got evacuated and then we snuck back in, that's the only reason I've got a place today. The McLure Fire Department came and covered my house with foam and my barn. Then they took off and then we didn't have anybody there, there was nobody there. There was just family and friends. So then a friend of ours and I went out on the highway; by this time you couldn't see anything. It was smoke and flame, the fire was right to our – pretty much to our yard or the edge of our ranch, whatever you want to call it.

We went and we found a guy on the middle of the three-lane passing hill, and he said somebody lives down in here, or there's people down here? They didn't know there was people down there. It's not like it's hidden, I mean everybody in the country knows where it's at, it's the only place out there actually. And he sent for some of the firefighters that were still in McLure, some of the Ontario firefighters. Eight Ontario firefighters came to our place and they put a pump in our swimming pool and that's when we got booted out. That was the night fire moved over the mountain from McLure. Then we got in the next morning. We came back in because we told an RCMP lady that we had to look after the stock that was there and get them water into the river and stuff, or get water out of the river for the stock.

But we stayed and fought – they left, the Ontario firefighters left, they left their gear behind. They said well it's eight o'clock in the morning, it's crew change time now. So a bus pulled into the yard, they left and that's the last we ever

saw of any the fire departments. That was the last, and it was locals that were running water trucks back and forth on the highway and the local volunteers around here that made sure that we had gas for the fire pumps and water in the swimming pool to fight the fire and we fought for three days. Steady. The first three days was pretty much steady firefighting. But it wasn't – it had long past being having anything to do with Forestry then. The Forestry had gone and forgot us or whatever you would call it and it was within fifty yards of the house, or five yards of some of my buildings, outbuildings and stuff like this. It was coming at us in all directions. That mountain was on fire, that mountain was on fire, it was in fire in that direction, it was in fire like in a pocket.

Now the Forestry doesn't seem to want to use local people, or they want – when the firefighting crews come along they just tell you – you're out of here. You are of no value, get out. They don't want to use any local knowledge or any local people on this stuff. And this is like about the second time in about ten years – I don't know the exact date but there was a fire in Chinook Coal here a few years ago and the people pretty near had the fire out when Forestry intervened. Well that turned into a major. It was pretty near out when Forestry showed up and told everybody 'Out of here, you are not fighting it, you don't have a fire ticket.' This seems to be their big thing, you don't have a fire ticket. They chase everybody away and then they'll make – it's almost like they make a summertime job out of this, because that Chinook Coal Fire took a long time to put out. My brother, he's not here right now, but he fought that fire for days and he was a local logger here and he had his CAT up on that job and I think he had his hoe up on the job at times. He was trying to tell them where to find water and they'd say 'no, we want you to dig there'. He'd say no, I logged here last winter, there's no water here, there's water over there. The guy would say 'no, I want you to dig down there.' They won't use local knowledge. It seems like they want to fight it from a map, whip open a topographical map and fight it with that half the time.

Like I say this is the second time in ten years that this has kind of happened, that they have disregarded local knowledge and pushed people out and then it becomes a major performance. Like that fire down at McLure should never have gone anywhere. It was pretty much to the small stage and it should have been mopped up. The wind was blowing towards Kamloops, a light breeze, and then the night it took off it just came over the mountain and – I don't know whether you have ever seen flames that are about 150 feet high coming over the mountain at you, but it is a pretty scary sight – you know.

That's, you know, that's pretty much all I've got to say is that everybody locally that could have fought – I mean there was no excuse to chase everybody away. Take the women and children, that's fine. But I mean this whole community here makes it's living logging and ranching, that's pretty much all that's done around here and I doubt if there's anybody, a man in this town that doesn't know how to run a power saw or a fire pump. It's not rocket science. But they all got chased away. Like it's outside – I think the last fire

boss on that Chinook roll(?), he came from down in Oliver some place is the way I heard it. He didn't know the area around here. That's what seems to be happening now with these fires – it seems like it's all fought from a map case or something like that. They don't want to use what people know about the country. People that wanted to come in and try and fight – my son lives in Valemount, he's a logger, he wanted to come down here – he couldn't get past the road block up here at Little Fort. I mean, that's all he does, work in the bush with a power saw that's his livelihood. He couldn't get down here and he was concerned about helping myself and my wife on the ranch. That's all there was – just two of us fighting that fire and we didn't get burned out – but, if we had have left, like they wanted us to leave, that place would not be there today I can guarantee that. Because I know where I fought the fire and it would just have kept on coming until it was the house and everything else was gone. We stopped it, cold stone peel, stopped it. And lots of the locals could have done the same thing in this country if they were used. They are just not being used to their capabilities.

That's all I have to say.

- GF Thank you Mr. Chivers. Can you just tell me about – can you tell me, is there, or who possesses, if anybody, a map that gives the exact locations of people who are outside of the towns and villages that are living, shall we say out in more rural settings. Does anybody have that? Telus is the only one? TNRD has. So those are the most accurate ones so when you say that they had a map that showed you on the other side of the road ...
- GC No, they did not have a map – other side of the road. On the topographical maps it shows my house where it sits, because we are having a little scrap with the provincial government. They had our address up in the bush. McLure Fire Department had our right address, because McLure Fire Department had requested everybody put number signs out on the road. McLure Fire Department had our right address, but anybody dealing with the provincial government had the wrong address, I guess.
- GF Thank you.

Horst Braun:

I would like to bring to your attention, because I heard it often enough, the firefighters from Ontario, New Brunswick, Vanderhoof, they mentioned 'we've never seen a fire like that. I think that what they were referring to was fir. Fir bark is full of pitch. You get a fire in the bottom, she'll climb the tree. The rest of them don't do that. So if you don't use the local knowledge, you can have a firefighter with twenty-five years experience coming from Spruce country in New Brunswick – his knowledge is not good here because he has got a different type of wood there. Plus the mountains, I mean we are not talking about the mountains and the change of wind direction and all this, that stuff that goes with it. That is why it is so important to have the locals involved.

Thank you, I've got to go home for supper.

GF Thank you, Horst. Yes, please come forward.

This is Mrs. Ruth Black, she has a statement she has asked me to read, if that's okay with you.

For Mrs. Ruth Black:

Dear Gary Filmon. Over the summer many people have suffered a lot of needless stress due to bureaucrats sitting in an office pushing pencils and not having the knowledge of how to fight a fire. The only thing they seem to understand is if you have that piece of paper that says you took the firefighters course then you are the only people that are qualified.

When the fire at McLure started (new tape) this forest service never even put one fire guard in to try and stop this forest fire. They had bulldozers at McLure when they contained it there. Why were these machines pulled off this fire before it was totally out. Why were these machines loaded on lowbeds, but left sitting. I know of other loggers that offered machinery but were told 'no thanks, we have enough iron.' Loggers, ranchers, ex-fire wardens, men with power saws should have been applied then gathered to work to contain this mess that was not only created by a cigarette, but by bureaucrats trying to play God. Many young, inexperienced personnel were used only because they had gone to school and were issued a piece of paper that did not make them able to have the knowledge of putting out a wild fire. There were many places that this fire could have been guarded. Three Lane Hill was a very good stop; again at Louis Creek at the Hay Farm. Lots of open, easy places to run a fire guard with only short notice. People were willing to stay and fight but instead were told to run. You cannot fight a fire if you are told it is against the law to stay. We, the people of Barriere, were treated as useless bodies with no brains. The Forest Service took personnel from Tolko's Woodland Division with no experience in firefighting and put them in charge of staging. What a joke. Forest fighters never showed up to work on putting out fires until ten o'clock, going to staging by eleven o'clock they were finally heading out to work. Ontario firefighters showed up, never had fought fires like this before. We showed them how to put out the hot spots for most of Sunday. You have to water it, dig it out until you can put your hands in and it is cold – not just walk past it if it's only smoking.

As for the upper Louis Creek fire and crews worked all night to get a guard around it to be able to contain only to have the crews pulled off and left to smother for three days with Friday coming. A week after the McLure fire hit burned Barriere, Louis Creek once again with fire crews pulled off the fire and put on standby in the Glengrove Upper Louis Creek. Bang! Here we go again. Once again everyone for ten miles was told to evacuate because the fire had once again jumped the guard.

As the forest fire traveled north west towards the Bonaparte Lake as the helicopter pilot crews would comment over the radio, here goes another back burn that's gotten away. As many of nine out of ten of the back burns got away. There was more forest burnt from back burns than by the wild fires themselves. There was more private land used for back burns that never worked, with these people now being told that there is no resources for relief funding. To ranchers that own this private property there is money in the bank

for that rainy day, or known as RSP, because ranchers don't have on-job pensions.

Evacuation was a farce as each group didn't know what the other was doing. We got home on the Sunday, August 3rd 2003 to find that our home was still intact. But because of the power outage on Thursday night our deep freezes were getting soft. So, we traveled to Kamloops to pick up a generator set and going to each road block we stopped, we were assured that we could return as soon as possible to take care of our problem. As we tried to return with our generator set we were told we now needed a permit and we could get this at the KXA. They didn't know anything about this. They sent us to Sport Mart's place. They didn't have any permits either, but said wait till Monday and we could get a permit from the TNRD at nine o'clock. So, once again we slept in our truck as all hotels were full. This has now been three nights sleeping in our truck.

By noon on Monday, we got our permit to travel home. The first road block was at the CNR turnoff at Highway 5. We had to sweet talk them, promising to come back if the road was not safe. Why had they not talked to the roadblock at Heffley Creek to know that the road was safe to there? When we got to Heffley Creek they thought that the road to McLure was okay so they let us go through. But now we get to McLure and they say the road is closed and we have to go back. With this we have had it and assured them that we had come through only hours before and everything that could burn had burned and there was nothing to burn. We proceeded on home and went about our business of putting out spot fires and helping repair pumps for the men working on the fire with skidders and water trucks as there was no one left in town to work on these things. The gas station was only giving out twenty dollars worth of gas to get people out of town. There should have been some gas brought in to Little Fort so people could get gas before they were running out on Highway 24. Where were our bureaucrats then? Every one run out of town and the biggest thieves left to check the doors of residents. Even the RCMP told us to watch this certain water truck as they were well known to the Clearwater police. So much for a plan.

Now, for a plan of recovery – just what we need is natural gas to Sun Peaks. I guess that Sun Peaks will be happy to hear this, along with \$18M for a road from Chase to Sun Peaks. I am sure this will help the North Thompson people who lost their jobs at the local sawmill when it burned to the ground. Bad enough now the mills want to trade cutting permits. This will hurt the town of Barriere even more. The first thing out of John Smith's, of the TNRD, mouth at stockmen's' meeting was he wanted to see natural gas to the North Thompson. The second thing was about the new road to Sun Peaks. I never heard anything about upgrading the North Thompson highway Number 5 from Heffley Creek to Little Fort, which has been an issue for many years. The highway was to have an update at Pig Corner just north of Barriere, but even that has been put on hold. For Sun Peaks to get \$38M for gas and road, I

would say that there is a very question spot that there who is in bed with who. It would be a lot more use for us people of Barriere / Louis Creek to have jobs that pay enough to support our families. I would say stop the shipment of our raw logs out of this area and make jobs for our people. Only \$4M to be spent in the Barriere area with drought, fire and now no jobs, what is there left.

Now for the Fire Relief Fund, this man George Evans – has he ever been checked out for his honesty as he seems to be holding a lot of cash that belongs to North Thompson people and not too much seems to be happening very fast. A lot of the building that has been happening is people that had insurance to get their homes back on track. Many of these people have insurance that will get them homes but no outbuildings or fencing or landscaping. This money was to help all people touched by the fire. This man has tried to convince people to wait until 2004 before starting to rebuild. What is the reason for this?

I leave you with this thought – I hope the people of North Thompson don't get a postcard from another country. A big thank you to the people who helped in time of need.

Ruth Black

GF Thank you, Ruth.

Do we have any other presentations?

Well, thank you very much to all of you for coming this afternoon for all of your presentations, for sharing your experiences and thoughts with us. We are coming back this evening for some presentations that will be given at seven o'clock and you are welcome to sit in on that as well. I thank you very, very much.

MEETING BREAK 4:23 p.m.

Gary Filmon:

We have had excellent presentations this afternoon and others of you are here to present this evening. We are a little bit early getting started. I think we said seven o'clock, it's a little before that but I see quite a few here and think perhaps we could get started early.

I will just summarize what I said in the beginning, this afternoon. Firstly, welcome to all of you and thank you for coming and sharing your experiences with me and with the review panel. We want to hear about your experiences, we want to hear about your ideas and your thoughts. Everything that you say is being recorded. It will become a part of the report that I present to the provincial government at the conclusion of this whole review process. There will be of course the review report but attached to it will be a section that says what you said to us in these public meetings that we are going through.

We will have ten days of public meetings throughout the areas that are directly affected by the forest fires and we will have that part of the process completed before Christmas and will be also meeting with different stakeholder groups, whether it is the Forest Industry or the Insurance Industry, or Wildlife Federation, or other people who have indicated that they also want to meet and present and then we will ultimately want to seek expert advice on areas in which there may be some controversy or conflicting opinions, things to do with forest management and other processes in emergency measurement and so on.

So that is what we are going through, this is not an exercise in finding a scapegoat or somebody to blame. This is an exercise truly in looking at the things that were done, saying – what of the things that were done were good things that we can build on for the future and what are the things that were done that we should be doing better and we should find better ways of doing it for next time. Because I think the unfortunate sadness that we have is that there will be another time. We only have to look at more recently and see the terrible forest fires in California, know that this is not an isolated incident. We are early on in a dry cycle and so the chances are that there will be a repetition of the interface fire experience again coming forward some time in the near future. So, for that reason alone we have accepted a mandate of getting the report in by the middle of February and in that mandate we have committed to the government that whatever recommendations that we can make will be made early enough for them to take action before the next forest fire season. So it is very, very important that we hear from anybody who has any experience advice that they want to share.

With that I will just say that we begin this evening and ask if Walt McKirdy is here. Walt, please come forward. Thank you, please sit down and welcome.

Walt McKirdy:

I really don't know, I'm not a public speaker by any stretch of the imagination but I thought it should be – one of the things that needs to be said is that a lot of people assume that the Forestry came in and saved this town and it didn't happen that way. This town would have burnt down if we had waited for the B.C. Forest Service to control that fire. We got very lucky in that the fire didn't really do anything until noon on Saturday, but – and there were enough locals to kind of hold it. If everybody had evacuated like we were actually asked to do, and we had sat and waited for the Forest Service to control the fire, it would have burned this town down. That is my estimation of it.

I saw no visible Forestry presence here until roughly noon on Saturday. I can't comment on Friday afternoon, like when they left on Friday I can't say, but there was no visible Forestry 'til – well I saw the first crews come in here about eleven o'clock. That was over kind of the Dixon Creek/Squam(?) Bay side of the fire – I wasn't all over the – you know – there may have been presence other places. When we eventually got fighting the fire there was on Saturday afternoon there was Forestry crews there but, if that fire had not laid down and just slowed down on its own, it would have been Clearwater, Valemount – who knows. It really stopped on its own and sat here and waited for us. If, well, if we had waited for the Forestry and the fire had picked up early that morning it would have gone to wherever.

Somehow we have to be more prepared to be able to get on a thing like this faster. A fire burns roughly from noon to dark and that's it – on a normal – around here anyway – our weather picks up, the moisture goes away, the wind picks up in the afternoon and that's when the fire runs and if we are not – for the whole early part of this fire we weren't – in the first week very few crews were out there before 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning and it was daylight at shortly after four. There were three or four hours of good firefighting missed. Eventually crews started getting more organized and getting out earlier, but if it would have been initially that way I don't think this fire would have been near as big. Having meetings and stuff while the fire is burning – the Forestry has to learn to think on its feet better than they have been. They also have to – there has to be in a situation like this, I think, more local input. There were people fighting fires here that had no idea of the local conditions and the local terrain and they didn't appear in the initial stages to be willing to accept advice from people that did know the terrain and conditions. The best fire fighter in the world, if he has to explore the terrain that he is going to, if it's his first time there is at a bad disadvantage. And there were lots of people here – half this town, half the working population of this town has all fought fire in the past. Because we are loggers – the whole town the main employment is loggers, that's what we do. And yet we were not initially consulted on what does this ground look like, you know, what would you expect. And there were people out there running a side of the fire that had never been there before and should have had a local that – like the ranchers that know, that range their cattle there, whatever – know that piece of ground that you are on. If one

of those people were there to say well, you know, because there are old roads that are still usable or can be opened up and be usable that aren't on the map, you know. But the local ranchers and even loggers that have been in the area for years know about those roads and it all helps to mobilize and to be active. And if on a world scale this wasn't a disaster it was just a major – compared to some of the things that have happened over the world this wasn't really all that bad, but if it had of been bad and we were as prepared as we were, it would have been really bad. If there had been a lot of people burned or killed –we weren't – and I say we as a community and we as the powers of the government, we weren't prepared, And if it happens again, and it will, maybe not right here. But if there had been a lot of people hurt seriously, they'd have been hurt seriously, they'd have died there.

There has to be a – I got – several people got away from the fire and they couldn't get back in through the road blocks. There has to be a way to – I realize you don't want a whole bunch of lookie loos and looters, or whatever running around, but if you are just going to block the roads you are just going to have to keep moving the road blocks back as it burns down. People have to be able to get in and fight and there were many of us, like on the east side of the fire to get a pass to come into the fire, we presumably had to go to Kamloops which at that point was to go around through Chase, go to Kamloops to the evacuation centre to get a card to come back and fight the fire. Well if you are going to go that far you might as well go to Calgary because if you can't get – you know, it needed fighting immediately and there has to be a way to verify you are who you say you are. Like I have no fire fighting certificates, no official status, but I am a good fire fighter. I have proved that. And, I have a fair amount of experience, but I don't have a card that says that. So if you are at a road block and say, you know, my home is there and I am going to – you know, that's my valley and I want to fight that fire and they won't let you in, who is going to fight it.

The Cavalry didn't really arrive in time to stop this fire and Barriere itself was saved by locals and they had to run road blocks to do it. Get back in here, whatever, stay here by devious means. And that shouldn't be. I don't pretend to know what the answer is but there has got to be somewhat of a solution to that. One of the things that I think needs to be considered in a rural setting like this is that, I won't say looting will never happen, but looting will never be a problem especially if there are local here. If everybody knows everybody more or less, so if I am in here fighting the fire and somebody is poking around your house, I know that they are not supposed to be there and I will probably say 'what are you up to here?' And that's a lot different in an urban setting. And it seemed to me that there was a lot more worry about looters than there should have been if the locals had been allowed in that looting would – I won't say that looting wouldn't have happened, but looting wouldn't have been a problem. And if it's all going to burn down, well looters might as well have it if you are just going to pull everybody off. But I think that it should be noted that in a rural setting that some of those problems are not as – on

the lower mainland looting would have, I assume, been a whole lot bigger deal. Here it wouldn't be because everybody knows most of the people. You know, I don't know everybody here but I know most of them and so it makes the enforcement or the police's job different than it would be in an urban setting.

When the fire initially, on Saturday, on this side there was no roadblock. I think there was on the main roads but the police were just sort of patrolling around and I thought that was really good. Now later on we had road blocks that made my job a whole lot – or me being able to help where it was needed a whole lot tougher because I couldn't go beyond this – I didn't dare get past a road block, you know, because I may not get back. You may suddenly be just well you're out of here one hundred miles in. And so in that case they are just slowing the fire fighting down and you know eventually I got a card that said I was a fire fighter, but in the initial stages it doesn't seem stopping the fire is the most important thing.

Anyway that's about all I've got to say.

GF Thank you very much, Walt. I appreciate your input and I think you have made some good points that haven't been made before and also verified a lot of the things that we have heard this afternoon, so thank you very much.

Next we have Norm Fennell.

Norm Fennell:

Good evening. (Welcome) Thanks for taking the opportunity to listen to my ideas. I made a few notes and I will pass these on to you after I read through them.

During the month of August and early September I was involved with the fire fighting efforts on the McLure fire. My efforts focused on organizing and supervising equipment and flagging out fire guards west of the North Thompson River. During that period I was involved with two other smaller fires as well which were caused by lightening strikes. The purpose of my submission tonight is to review what worked as well as what did not work, and how to improve on fire suppression efforts in the future. These are solely my personal opinions as a result of my experiences this summer and focus mainly on the operational and technical aspects of fire suppression. I used the terms of reference that you published and I made comments on several of those terms.

The first one that I commented on was the planning capabilities at the local, provincial and federal level to mitigate the impacts of fire, or interface fires, i.e. evacuation planning to assess the level of planning and the ability of the communities to activate those plans. In my opinion the second evacuation of the North Thompson Valley from Barriere to Little Fort was totally unnecessary. The only residents that were at any risk, in my opinion, were around the Boulder Mountain Road. Most people I have talked to said they would not leave again if we were told to evacuate after that second evacuation order. In the future those residents may not take the Ministry of Forests ... (tape over)

... issuing evacuation orders on how to more accurately assess the hazard, consequences and risks in wild fires situations. Those personnel should also consult the advice of local expertise to assess those hazards. Everyone in Barriere, except the volunteer fire department, was ordered out of Barriere on August first. It was appropriate to evacuate the majority of the population however in my opinion a core group of qualified contractors should have stayed and saved many of the structures that burned due to grass fires and spot fires. A few water trucks and 'dozers worker that night would have greatly assisted the volunteer fire department. With no highway or local traffic and escape route to the north on Highway 5 was available if needed. So there was little if any risk to those that would have stayed, or could have stayed. This opinion was also shared by a Vancouver fire chief who stated on Global News that there was no reason, other than lack of fire fighters to lose any structures in Barriere. The Ministry of Forests manages to less risk than we take every time we get in our car and drive down the road. The only thing that the Ministry of Forests in the fire centres are measured on is whether anyone gets hurt or not. Therefore there is little motivation or incentive for the Forest Service or the Fire Centre staff to put out a fire in the quickest and most cost effective manner.

So my recommendation is that the Forest Service and the Fire Centre policy should be to manage at a normal level of risk. The Forest Service and Fire Centre should be measured on other aspects such as how quickly a fire is actioned, how quickly it is extinguished as well as the cost.

Regarding the command structure for responding to provincial emergencies and disasters, in August the Forest Service and Fire Centre personnel were overwhelmed with the amount and sizes of wild fires. There was not enough personnel available to authorize resources on some of the fires. For instance, on August 2nd, Fire Centre personnel did not arrive in Barriere until later in the afternoon. If locals had not returned to Barriere early in the morning of August 2nd and organized what logging equipment was available, numerous more residences and businesses would probably have burned that morning. The volunteer fire department was completely overwhelmed. During the fire suppression efforts on the McLure fire the Ministry of Forests went on a 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. schedule. Breakfast in this building was not served until 5:30. Crews and operators were then required to sign in at a staging site prior to leaving for the fireline. As a result work on the fire usually did not start until 8:00 or 9:00 o'clock in the morning. The fire would typically heat up by 1:00 p.m., the incident commander would fly over in a helicopter, see a few trees candling and order everyone off the fireline. Once the fire cooled down by 6:00 p.m. work would usually resume. As a result the best time to action the fire which is from dawn to 10:00 a.m. was lost and resources were not utilized to their highest potential. I also thought there was a reluctance for the Forest Service to work at night. The only time a night shift seemed to occur was when a local person requested and organized that night shift.

So my recommendation is, in each community set up a group of local experienced personnel that have the authority to hire men and equipment to action a fire immediately. A network of fire wardens throughout the province could be one method to do this. The Forest Service and Fire Centre must have a policy to action wild fires by dawn and ensure adequate resource allocation including night shifts.

The Kamloops Fire Centre initiated a GIS mapping system based out of their office last year. This is an excellent idea. Access to orthophoto images for all fireline supervisors makes planning and communication much more efficient. However, in August the Fire Centre's mapping and plotting capacity could not keep up to the demand for such maps. The only way I managed to get copies of such maps was to order them directly through a contractor. And the only reason I knew how to do that was because I am in the business, I am a forester.

For the first week on the fire, most supervisors had no maps. As a result this required extensive and expensive use of helicopters to plan where to put fire guards as well as escape routes. In addition there was difficulty for ground

crews to community where aircraft were needed since the orthomaps did not always have the fire grid, or the lat/long grid on them.

So my recommendation is: to ensure that the Fire Centre has a back-up plan for map production, i.e. use of contractors, so that adequate maps are available on large fires within a day. Also I suggest that the Fire Centre's GIS data base is kept up to date with forest licencees, recently constructed roads and harvested cut blocks, as well as nearby logging contractors and personnel available to action fires. With such information readily available in GIS the Fire Centre could pull up the GPS location of the fire, put it on the ortho image, plot the image show on the road network with road numbers and kilometer markers. All this information is available from forest licencees and the Forest Service that shows the route to the fire as well as a lat/long grid to GPS navigate to the fire and to navigate to fire guard locations. The GIS could also generate a list of potential supervisors and logging equipment available within the shortest travel time to the fire. A phone or radio call to the contractor, or contractors, with route instructions to the fire could have equipment on the site within an hour.

Regarding the provincial structure required to deal with communications and public information during emergencies and disasters: There continues to be a communications gap between those who respond initially to wild fires which are typically forest company personnel and logging contractors along with the Forest Service. This is because the Forest Service operates on radio frequencies that are different than what everyone else uses. Access to one of these frequencies has been denied by the Forest Service numerous times – the company I work for has requested this numerous times. My experience in fires over the last ten years is that access to Forest Service hand held radios in a fire typically takes several days and sometimes does not happen at all.

So, my recommendation is: Authorized forest companies as well as designated contractors to install at least one Forest Service frequency in their truck and hand held radios so that proper communication is available. Ensure that Fire Centres across the province document industrial radio channels that are locally used, and that all aircraft on a fire have those frequencies.

There was also a lack of communication between aircraft and ground personnel. Ground personnel could not always communicate to helicopter pilots as to where or if a drop was required, and whether people were at risk of being dropped on. People have told me on numerous occasions the helicopter with the short line bucket that operated in this area probably for a month fanned and spread the fire outside the retardant line just laid. Numerous times the ground crews were unable to communicate this to the helicopter pilot and the practice continued to occur, most likely negating the effect of that helicopter.

So, my recommendation is: In future only use helicopters with a long line to the bucket. The Forest Service should set up minimum standards for these high-priced machines to ensure their maximum effectiveness.

Regarding training and exercising programs for emergency response:
The Fire Centre personnel know only a limited number of people in outlying communities whom they feel comfortable asking for assistance. If they knew who all the qualified experienced people were they could pre-authorize them to initiate efforts on a wild fire when the Fire Centre resources are tapped out.

So, my recommendation is: To ensure that Fire Centre personnel get to personally know who is available, their capabilities, where they are located and how they can be reach. This could be done by visiting and documenting potential fireline supervisors such as logging contractors, forestry consultants and forest company woodland staff during the winter months. A lot of this information is submitted annually by forest companies to the Fire Centres in the form of a fire pre-organization plan. The Fire Centres should follow these up with other contractors not listed in these plans.

Regarding the role of volunteers in responding to fires: Assess all mechanisms for involving volunteers can be supported and enhanced. For the first week of the fire, the McLure fire, there was a lack of fire equipment especially pumps and hose.

So my recommendation is: Have caches of fire pumps and hose at communities throughout the province. For instance a cache of, say, five pumps and 10,000 feet of hose could be stored at the Barriere volunteer fire haul. This would be enough equipment for local volunteers to access for initial attack of a fire in the event that the Fire Centre could not provide resources, which is what we saw this summer. They had none left to give.

Many Forest Service personnel have extensive fire fighting experience, knowledge of local terrain and equipment capabilities, have recently retired or will retire in the next five years. This loss of experience was compensated somewhat this summer by convincing some of those to come out of retirement and help with the fires. However, this will not always be possible. A lot of the younger Forest Service staff replacing their ranks do not have the experience operating equipment, supervising and organizing men and equipment, back burning or laying out roads and fire guards. As a result, Ministry of Forest fire line supervisors do not always have the confidence need to optimize crews and their equipment and will manage to a very low level of risk.

So my recommendation is: Ensure that the Forest Service and Fire Centre staff that will be supervising on the fire line have the competency and management skills needed to make optimum use of fire fighting resources. This may mean some training of the personnel on how to effectively use the

local or expert expertise available. Additional training could be done by fire fighting experts within and outside the Forest Service.

In conclusion, with proactive planning and effective use of available technology and resources in the province of B.C. we should not have to ask for external financial assistance in the future.

Thank you. Are there any questions?

- GF Thank you very much, Norm. The area of risk assessment, making decisions under great stress, how do you see developing that judgment in people?
- NF Assessing risk – you have to assess the hazard and actually what are the consequences. Hazard times consequence gives you what the risk is. In my opinion on that second evacuation, I think it was August 8th, as I said earlier was unnecessary. It was managing to zero or less risk. I know the terrain, I know the timber. Fire does not travel downhill very fast through a deciduous stand into the valley bottom and I just don't think that the people making those decisions on whether to evacuate or not properly utilized the local knowledge that was there. I am not even sure if they got in a helicopter and looked at the situation before they issued the order. As I said earlier, the only area that I thought was at risk, potentially at risk, some risk, was the Boulder Mountain Road. But anything lower down from that, when you are dealing with fields, deciduous types – very little conifer – and you've got the highway running right up in the middle of the valley as an escape route, I didn't think it was necessary evacuate probably five thousand people for thirty kilometers north of a fire that even in extreme circumstances only traveled fifteen kilometers and we must have had 50-60 kilometer or 80 kilometer winds that one night, on that Wednesday night. And it was funneled up a valley and that's the reason it went so far. So I think in the future we need to look at those situations and use better information to make sure that we have the public trust. Because, next time if they issue evacuation orders or cry wolf too many times someone might die because they won't take them seriously.
- GF Thank you. Several presenters have mentioned about fire fighters not getting at the job until 9:00 or 10:00 in the morning and certainly what you say about starting at dawn makes a lot of sense. Do you have any idea why they wouldn't have been doing that? Is there a policy issue, is there any contractual agreements about getting started at any particular time?
- NF I don't think so. I think it was purely probably focused around the Forest Service and Fire Centre people that were here and they were probably getting burned out. They wanted to run what they thought was a good time frame to do things, but you probably heard it from other people, a lot of loggers continuously asked why can't we get out here at daylight. As I mentioned you could not even get fed before 5:30 in the morning. It was daylight at four. By the time you got yourself registered and out to the fire line and fed breakfast,

like I say the earliest you could get out there was probably 7:00 and by 10:00 you have lost the best time to hit the fire with your resources. After that you are just holding your own, you are not going to gain on the fire.

Anyway those are some of my ideas. I have some experience dealing with fires over the last few years. I guess one other thing is I was extremely frustrated the first week with the situation here just because of the lack of resources, the lack of organization, the lack of planning. I was so used to being able to go to my office, get the resources I needed, the maps I needed, the photos I needed to organize things – that's was all gone. And, when you have to fall back and rely on the Forest Service, things just don't happen that quick, unfortunately. Especially in those circumstances when everyone is overwhelmed. So, I hope we can change some things so that things that will be better next time.

GF That's why we are here, to see if there aren't things that we can change for the next time. Norm, thank you very much.

Now the next name I have on the list is Lori Barsi. Welcome, Lori. Just in case Norm is leaving, we are hopeful that you would leave us a copy of your paper. Thank you. Good evening, welcome Lori.

Lori Barsi:

Thank you. Good evening to the Provincial Review Team, members of the community, I am Lori Barsi.

We need to have put in place a public education system informing us what to do in the event of a potential threat to our communities before a disaster happens. We should understand the difference between evacuation alert and evacuation order. We should be taught to alert our neighbours in case they are unaware. Imagine leaving your home for the last time with a few meager possessions leaving the rest to burn when you see your neighbours have been packing all night and never thought to alert you. We should know which radio station is the official one to tune into. I have lived in the Barriere area for over twelve years and I was never made aware that Radio NL was the official station. I wasn't even aware that there was a fire until I drove past McLure on Thursday, July 31st. Then, hearing no news regarding the fire on the radio I presumed no news was good news. I was at McLure again during the early supper hour and was told everything was under control. My plan was to listen to the radio in my car in the morning as I could not get radio reception in my home, just like many others. That chance never came as I continued to sleep well past the hour I had planned to arise due to the electricity being off. I awoke to pounding on my door, a man standing there telling me to evacuate immediately.

The communities of Exlu(?) and Louis Creek border each other. It is my understanding the Exlu(?) was given an evacuation order late in the evening on July 31st. My question is, why was Louis Creek not put on alert at this time, and I am talking about being told in person about this alert. It would do no good to announce an alert over the radio when most people are sleeping. I have heard over and over again how the fire took off unexpectedly and we were unaware. I understand that our safety comes first and for that I am eternally grateful but it is heartbreaking to know I would have had possibly up to ten more hours to contact my husband so he could come to help me and save some of our precious, irreplaceable memories, family vehicles, business equipment and records. My children literally saved only what they could carry in their small hands in one trip to our car. It's hard to make present home feel like home when there are so few familiar things surrounding us.

Two things I still have are the keys to our vehicles. I took them with me hoping to find someone to help me get them at least as far as Barriere. No one was able to help me. By that time Barriere was aware of the coming danger and was busy packing. Our company also took a huge loss. With notice, I could have had a local trucker helping me to remove what we could from the property. It will be a very long time before we can completely recover from these losses. In the meantime I have our family income to worry about as well as an employee.

When talking with someone at the Ministry of Forests I had asked why Louis Creek wasn't alerted. He had no idea. He presumed we would have been evacuated at the same time as Exlu(?). His other comment was that if you put a community on alert too early the businesses complain. What about saving businesses.

My other issue is with the registration process we went through. I was turned out of Sport Mart Place the evening of August 1st without a place to stay and only three-quarters of my family registered. When family and friends phoned to see if we were safe, no records could be found and we never received phone calls informing us of upcoming meetings or when we could return home. And this last point is quite important as we were staying where we couldn't get local news.

I do hope your committee will find it reasonable to recommend that when one community is on evacuation order, that bordering communities will be put on alert, physically if necessary. That a public education be put in place and that the registration process be improved. It would give me peace of mind to know that something so horrible in our community and family life will result in a positive change that may help other communities in the future. And, I thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion.

GF Thank you very much, Lori, for some insight into your circumstances and some, I think, very concise recommendations as to how to deal with the unfortunate circumstances that you and many others faced. Thank you.

We don't have anyone else on the list for this evening but I think there may be others who wish to present, so is there anyone else who would like to come forward? Yes.

Mr. Gary Chivers spoke this afternoon and I did say if anybody had any other thoughts that would come to them they were free to come forward again.

Gary Chivers:

Yes, one of the things that I heard discussed this afternoon outside of this room was when the fire initially started, you are looking for recommendations, the helicopter pilots had flown their allotted hours on this fire, that's why they kind of toned her down a bit towards the afternoon and the evening when the fire did jump.

Now, in this Forest Service there should be a crew of back-up pilots if you would. I work in an industry that is a transportation industry too and when somebody goes to bed, somebody else takes over. So if you can only fly ten hours a day or whatever – I don't know how long their allotted hours are – but when they are up to their allotted hours shouldn't the Forestry have a backup crew – not to bring in other helicopters, but to bring in other pilots and that should be on a registry so you can rotate those fellows. I mean if they are cleared to – if we took a magic number and said it was a Bell 217 or something, there must be more than five people in this province cleared to fly a Bell of that number and they should be used as backup crew. This should be for the expeditors of the fire. And what we have all learned here today is that this fire is like a war and you don't go to war nine to five or any of those hours – you go to war, you go to war and you jump on it with everything you've got to start with – not treat it as a yard fire or whatever. The initial attack should be hard and get it out. This fire – I don't know if they could calculate how much this fire has cost monetarily. There is probably hundreds of millions of dollars worth of timber involved here that is gone, lost forever to the province for want of a couple of helicopter pilots to stop it initially, or two barrels of gas that they didn't have, or something like that. They've got to be jumped on. This is a valuable resource. It's one of B.C.'s biggest industries is forestry.

That's all I've got to say and I think that's what quite a few of the people had to say.

Thank you.

I'll introduce myself this time, John McAllister.

John McAllister:

Well, I sat here all afternoon pretty well and this evening and everything has been pretty serious and I thought I'd lighten things up a little bit, Mr. Filmon. I haven't been in Barriere very long – a little over a year. But, through the volunteer I met a lot of people. In this area of the North Thompson are very resilient people. Independent. They have a lot of backbone, I found that out. The people that lost the most want the least.

I want to throw a little bit of humour into it. I was at an appreciation dinner the other day and was asked to comment, and I said well

Tape ends.