

FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW

Public Meetings

Kelowna

Part A

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and welcome to our public hearings with respect to the terrible fires that you experienced in this area this summer. This is the beginning of the second half of my consultation process. I am on day six and very happy to see so many of you here. In fact I know from the pre-registrations this will be the largest number of presenters spread over today and tomorrow. If by any chance people have concerns about timing that is that you can be here today, but not tomorrow. Or, you can be here in the afternoon but not the evening, if you could let us know that, then we will try and make sure that we will accommodate everybody in the presentations at a time that is suitable to you.

The times that we will be sitting will be approximately from one until five and then we will take a break from five to seven and then come back at seven o'clock tonight and sit for a couple of hours more. If we need to go a little bit longer this afternoon, it is not a problem. If we need to go a little bit longer this evening, we will accommodate that as well.

I will just say firstly that I am delighted to see all of you here. This is a process that is intended to be open and inclusive. It is intended to be wide-ranging, and yet we are focusing in on a variety of different issues in accordance with the terms of reference that the government has given me. There are eight points to the terms of reference. They are comprehensive and I can just say that they break down into covering the entire experience of the wildfires, the interface fires of this summer, ranging from planning and preparations to response and recovery. That really covers the whole gamut.

My responsibility, our responsibility in being here is listening and learning directly from the people who were affected and were a part of the fighting of the fires and the coping with the fires this summer. After the public hearings, we will be going into various stakeholder meetings at which I will be inviting response from people like the Forest Industry Association or the Insurance Industry, the people from Tourism and Wildlife Federation people, various different agencies and departments of governments at all levels who have information to share or ideas, or who have been perhaps a part of the discussions over this process of public hearings.

It is not intended to be a process of finding scapegoats or pointing fingers, but rather one in which we say what things were done well and we acknowledge that and at the same time we acknowledge that being humans we can always do things better given a chance. And so we want to find out the things that weren't done as well as they might have been or should have been, and find ways in which we can do better in the future.

And the future is also a very important part of this process because we know, for instance, just by virtue of the fact that they had terribly devastating fires in California more recently that this is not an isolated incident. That weather conditions world-wide are changing and extremes are being experienced in a whole variety of ways. If we look at weather patterns, they are generally in cycles of seven to ten years of wet and dry cycles. We are very early on into a dry cycle, probably only three years into a dry cycle, so we know that it is quite possible, if not likely, that we can face similar conditions to those that were faced this summer. Therefore we would be at risk again of having similar circumstances, leading to terrible fires and devastation.

The reason that I accepted a relatively short time line for the completion of this report – it is due the middle of February and the only reason I accepted that was that the government would like to have the report come to them with recommendations that they could act upon for the next fire season. Whether that involves money, whether that involves legislation or regulatory changes or process changes, the government wants to be in a position to take account of anything that comes forward from my report.

I would also say that everything that is said here is said on the record. There will be a transcript produced and as an appendix to the report all the things that I am being told in the public hearings and these gatherings will be a part of the public record. In that way you will know that you have been listened to and you know that others in reading the report will know the concerns and ideas that you have expressed.

So, with that I will just say that I am joined here by Don Leach and Jim Sproul who are administrators who are part of the listening process, taking notes and making sure that we keep track of everything that you tell us and share with us as part of the process. There is Andrew Yeow(?) at the back who is at the table and should any of you decide, who may not have already registered with us, but in sitting here today if you decide to come forward and make a presentation, you are most welcome to do so. If you will just give your name to Andrew then we will make sure that we fit you in the schedule today.

Thank you for coming, and we have a list of presenters and I will begin by saying that the first presenter is Mr. Ken Webster, President of the Urban Development Institute in Kelowna.

Is Mr. Webster here? Very good. Mike Jacobs and Graham Wood. Welcome.

Mike Jacobs:

Thank you Mr. Filmon and the panel.

I am Mike Jacobs. I am the vice-president of the Emil Anderson Construction and a past president of the Urban Development Institute chapter of Kelowna. We are also developers of the South Ridge and Stone Ridge neighbourhoods – two neighbourhoods that were affected by the Okanagan Mountain Park Fire.

My comments are going to concentrate on efforts that our company made actually working for the City of Kelowna and for the Ministry of Forests, doing some fire guard building in the area and then Mr. Wood will summarize some of the other wild fire mitigation efforts that have been in place in the City of Kelowna as part of the overall UDI presentation.

Emil Anderson Construction was contracted by the City of Kelowna to build fire guards behind neighbourhood number two in the South West Mission. The work started on Thursday, August 21st and we were a little surprised at that start date in that the fire had gotten quite large earlier in the week and we had in fact been contracted by Cedar Creek Winery to build a private fire guard for them, but didn't hear any comment from the Ministry of Forests or City until late Wednesday the start on the Thursday.

I personally visited the site on Thursday evening just to see what our crews and equipment had been working on and it was at that time that the evacuation notice was given to south ridge development at about 7:30 – 8:00 p.m. and this evacuation notice came without warning for the residents and for myself, who was just up there. I ended up spending four hours securing the site, helping direct people out of the neighbourhood. I give you this background to sort of tie in with my comments that will come later as suggestions for improvement.

I was back on the site at 6:00 a.m. on Friday, August 22nd, in the hilltop gravel pit where all the equipment that had been working out in the fire was now stored and, although all the operators and loggers were on-site and ready to work at 6:00 a.m., the Forestry personnel didn't arrive until 7:00 a.m. and it was quite a while before things got going.

Emil Anderson Construction – we were contracted by the City of Kelowna not the Ministry of Forests at this time and we ended up having one bulldozer and one PC 400 – a large excavator – working behind Tangier Court and we were contracted by the City to build a fire guard there. Basically to clear a 50 meter by 1000 to 1100 meter section behind 25 homes.

We started with one bulldozer and one excavator. As the work started to proceed, I arranged with the City to bring in another bulldozer and then we were just knocking the trees down. This was not going to solve the problem,

so we went back to the forestry and tried to secure some skidders so that we could drag the trees out into an open area so that they could not burn behind the houses.

It took about three hours and a number of phone calls to higher up city management to convince the forestry staging manager to release these skidders. These skidders were not doing any work and there was no anticipated work for them. Finally they were released and with the three skidders, two bulldozers, and excavator we were able to clear the swath behind these 26 homes. None of those homes were damaged in the fire, yet they were right near the front line and it was because of knocking this down. And it seemed that the forestry was waiting for direction rather than responding and acting on it and it wasn't until 2:00 p.m. of that Friday that the forestry actually sent six bulldozers to the fire guard behind neighbourhood number 2. They were sent at 2:00 p.m. and it was at 3:00 p.m. that the winds picked up and things got very exciting.

Another thing that I found interesting, and that was while the work was happening behind Tangier Court I was shuttling back and forth between the Tangier Court area and the hilltop gravel pit which is about two to three kilometers apart—conversing with the forestry staging boss and he kept advising me to look for and you will find a forestry field supervisor out in the Tangier Court/Kettle Valley area. I never did find that person but when there was a meeting at 2:00 o'clock to send these extra bulldozers out I notice on their map that they had written supervisor and the person they had written down was Mike Jacobs – was me. So I had been deemed a supervisor yet not informed of that. So it seemed that there weren't enough people there to oversee the equipment.

There were in the hilltop pit on the Friday morning 70 to 80 pieces of equipment and in my observations there needed to be more people on field who could take direction from the forestry. We were not looking to manage the work but there needed to be people who were supervising the actual equipment that was there.

When the firestorm began at 3:00 p.m. everyone was evacuated safely. It was chaotic but there were people watching the backs of the equipment operators. We were doing that for the seven or eight pieces that we had out from our company, plus the other what would be about ten pieces that ended up under our control. People were left out, we did end up leaving some equipment in a sand field near Kettle Valley but it survived the fire fine and in fact went back to work early that Saturday morning to put out hot spots.

Overall comments: it just seemed there was an overall lack of organization in equipment, particularly to the equipment operators to all the people that were in the hilltop pit waiting for direction from the Forestry. A number of them seemed quite perturbed that our company was working for the City of

Kelowna, yet they were under contract to the Forestry and weren't working. And in general it seemed that although the equipment and the crews were there very early in the morning – construction people and forestry people are very used to starting at five or six in the morning, but it seemed that the forestry operation didn't get going until 7:30. People arrived on site and it was usually later in the day before things started to happen.

There was a lack of information as to what the plan was for the next day. In our construction business, we always try to leave our crews with what the plan is for the next day. That plan may change and certainly in this firestorm that plan would have changed, but everybody seemed to go home at night, come back the next day and there was a lack of information given to the field people so that they could know, they could be prepared for what was going to happen – if you could be prepared for this firestorm.

Overall, the City was working on a fire guard; the Forestry had been working on fire guards. From our perspective there seemed to be a lack of coordination and the jurisdiction and responsibilities were confused. We were there to work for whoever would give us the direction. There needed to be one overall command.

As I have said earlier, there didn't seem to be a project manager or an overall commander who had delegates that would then oversee specific areas of the work. For the 70 or 80 pieces of equipment that were available, in our business you would typically have a foreman or somebody overseeing 8 to 10 pieces of equipment. There weren't that many people who were there to oversee and to give specific direction to the pieces that were working there.

Now certainly these comments, I want them to be constructive, this is certainly no knock on any of the efforts of the people that were there – everybody that I saw on the site was doing their absolute best to get the job done and certainly whatever fire guard had been built, a stage six firestorm would have gone over top of it unless the whole site was clear cut. But I think some more aggressive action with the feller bunchers, the skidders and the cats that were available and on site, could probably have saved some more homes.

As I said I think everybody did their best and there were many exceptional efforts and wonderful results but the overall structure and the organization if an event like this ever happens again needs to be more detailed and follow more – it's almost a military type command.

I think there needs to be better interaction and coordination between the Ministry of Forests and municipal authorities so that each knows who is responsible and who is overseeing certain areas of the work.

Graham is going to get into some of the details, but certainly for our two developments up there, South Ridge and Stone Ridge and Graham's Kettle Valley Development, the wild fire mitigation efforts that were done as part of those newer areas fared much better than the older developments and certainly I think it was part of that work which caused the fire to take the various paths that it took and fortunately saved a number of homes.

Graham Wood:

My name is Graham Wood; I am President of Kettle Valley Developments in the upper Mission. I represent UDI as well as Mike. My previous experience has been in ski resort development and operation and fire mitigation practices in those resorts.

The opinions I am expressing are observations and comments as developer's memberships of the UDI.

We feel that newer developments fared better than older developments and new forest fire mitigation measures have made a difference. Removing excessive underbrush and deadwood in areas surrounding and within the development area has and continues to be done in new developments as part of their ongoing initiatives to mitigate the fire threat. Notably, South Ridge and the Village of Kettle Valley, both in the Upper Mission areas have mitigation practices in place of moving dead underbrush.

Mitigation and buffering zones created as a result of increased awareness of the mitigation measures also assisted in saving homes. By example, in recognition there was a significant threat to the Village of Kettle Valley as a result of excessive ground fuel and pine beetle, Kettle Valley Developments cleared the area to the size of the current development area in the early spring of 2003 when the risk of accidental fire ignition was low and the likelihood of killing the pine beetle was highest. This was something that I carried out based on my experience in the ski resort development business. Phasing the clearing of this area would have resulted in a greater loss in the immediate area of the Village of Kettle Valley. F

Further, fire resistant building materials such as hardy plank, a masonry based product, and the insistence on the use of asphalt shingles as part of a development design guideline also had a significant impact on minimizing home losses in certain areas of the Upper Mission. Furthermore, newer developments have the benefit of water systems that are better designed and better capable to service the needs of the fire department. That's also partially based on direct comments from the fire crew that was trapped in Kettle Valley overnight.

Projects still under development had the benefit of support from the developer taking action to protect the property and support the local authorities during the fire – such as South Ridge, Mike's development and my own. We are still developing those projects. Mike had equipment available. I was able to secure a 40,000 gallon water truck and pump and borrowed a thousand feet of fire hose off Big White Ski Resort a few days ahead of time and positioned them strategically in the development which was utilized by the fire crew when they arrived. We were also able to lay out the hose and start soaking some of the wood chip piles we had on the property.

Further consideration should be given to the manner in which logging debris is disposed of. The current practices – one of the practices is to mulch that debris on-site and dispose of it as either selling it to other people for landscaping purposes, land fill, or fill it in. Unfortunately that leaves piles on the development sites for a long period of time and did prove a major problem during the fire.

It is the opinion of the Kelowna Chapter of the Urban Development Institute that new development mitigation guidelines had a positive effect in the fire outcome in the Upper Mission. Furthermore, if these guidelines are consistently and equitably applied it will make additional fire mitigation development design guidelines unnecessary in new developments. UDI supports further consideration being given to allowing controlled pit burning of the log debris on-site in order to expedite the removal of fire fuel and eliminate the use of landfill for the purpose of debris disposal.

Again to reinforce with our second point, reinforce the comments made by Mr. Jacobs that the coordination and the chain of command must be clearly identified. On the evening of Thursday, August 21st as my land manager and I were rolling out hoses for our own water tank, waiting for support to arrive, a number of members of the PEP organization arrived at the scene and it was 45 minutes before the fire department was able to arrive, but there seemed to be confusion amongst the PEP members as to what they should be doing.

Coordinating an operation of this scale is by nature best described as a military operation and therefore must be managed accordingly, from the top down, with clearly defined chains of command and with front line troops empowered to make split second decisions that will affect their safety and the effectiveness of their designated tasks – as long as they have clearly defined, well designated tasks from the chain of command if they need support.

Closing comment: risk management and disaster planning is not an exact science. Their success relies on the sharing and documentation of experiences that lead to processes that help those involved to better plan for potential future disastrous events. Each event is unique unto itself by the virtue of the complexities of weather, earth movement, geographical features, natural vegetation, human density and the complexity of each and every human affected and how they deal with their given circumstances. To accurately predict all of these variables and then orchestrate their dispatch with total effectiveness is unrealistic. Yet, with open and fair dialogue such as this we will be able to improve on outstanding efforts put forth by all those involved in the firestorm. Yes, there is room for improvement.

The Kelowna chapter of the UDI would like to thank this committee and the provincial government for undertaking this review. The information obtained will be invaluable to those for future planning and we will be more than happy to participate further in the process.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much, gentlemen. If I may just ask a few questions, because this first one, Mr. Jacobs, repeats something that we have been hearing and that is you say that the contractors and various other equipment operators and so on were available early on – were there at six or so in the morning and yet the Forestry people didn't arrive until 7:30. That seems to be a pattern. In fact in some cases they are suggesting that they really didn't show up until later – like 8:30 or 9:00 in other cases. And a lot of emphasis is on the need to action fires and get busy on the tasks as soon as day breaks and with the cooler temperatures and the better climatic conditions to do the work at that time, especially in fighting the fire.

So, any indication as to why – I mean was this a question of exhaustion that people just couldn't work many shifts nor many hours – do you have any idea why?

MJ No I don't. I don't think it was due to exhaustion because this was early – it was the same early in the process as it was late. My only thought would be that perhaps it was sort of that this was their standard procedure of operation that they start at this time of day. Whereas when we do emergency work for floods or for landslides we attack the problem from the light of day. We work as many daylight hours as possible and work in the best conditions. I know certainly the operators and loggers that were on site, the mumbling that I heard from them was – we start at 2:00 in the morning when logging – if there is light we will start, we will go to work and – you know – the history and the pattern in the Okanagan is that the winds pick up in the afternoon – which they do. So there was a lot of surprise and grumbling from the actual operators as to why aren't we working now because we know the winds will pick up in the afternoon.

GF If there had been plans for the next day, could your people have gotten started before the forestry people arrived? You know, if there had been a basic plan that was set as you left the day before, tomorrow we are going to be doing this and this and people could have gone ahead on their own – would that have been a possibility?

MJ It would have been a possibility. I think we still would have wanted Forestry oversight or overall management, but certainly the way we operate our construction business is that we will assign tasks the day before and we will send people out in the middle of the night and if they have been given the proper instructions they will go to work and that work will get started as soon as possible.

GF The whole issue of jurisdiction and responsibility. You are dealing in a subdivision that is with, I would assume the city limits of Kelowna, and

therefore would you say that under these circumstances that the city should have been in charge of these fire fighting operations, or who do you think should have been in charge?

MJ That's a really tough question to answer. I think that the Ministry of Forests has the expertise and the personnel to fight fire. No knock on the city engineering or operations department, but they are not fire fighters. We are not fire fighters. We are construction people, we have equipment, and we know how to do the work when we are given the proper direction. I think the Ministry of Forests has to be the overall manager of any kind of operation for fire guards and such because they have the expertise; they can deal with the terrain. And they can then delegate certain areas to the city and I think that was what they were trying to do. I don't think it was quite arranged properly. But again we were hired by the city and we did not do any work for the Forestry until after the firestorm had happened and then the city said, nope, now you are working for the Forestry. So we were working hand in hand with forestry, but we were working for the city. The other bulldozers were working for the forestry and it was a little bit confusing. I think overall the Ministry of Forests has to deal with that and when you get into an urban situation like this, then they have to work very closely and use the expertise and knowledge of the city or municipal people, but still have to oversee it because they know how to fight the fire.

GW I would like to just add to that, too. I think regardless of who would be in charge, it still needs to be one person that is overseeing the whole operation and I think that one thing that can come out of this experience is, there are now individuals within either the forestry or the Kelowna fire department that now have the collective knowledge of what happened in interface situations. So maybe that individual is capable of overseeing the whole operation.

GF I am not an expert in this but it has been said that previous meetings that we really ought to consider have cross training. That there are two very different sets of skills and training involved in the structural fight fighters and the wild fire fighters, the Forestry side. And neither felt adequate in being in the other's territory. And yet, they really had to be because it was a combination. Would you support that kind of recommendation, of cross training so that both sides have a certain degree of familiarity and comfort with the other?

MJ Absolutely, I am not a fire fighter but I had a crash course on that Friday afternoon. I never want to be there again, but I understand the ferocity of what a firestorm can do and there are certain things that could have been done better – certain things wouldn't have made any difference.

GW We can both get fire hydrants open real quick now.

GF I am interested to hear your discussion, both of you with respect to the things that you are doing in new subdivision developments to mitigate against fires,

interface fires, destroying property. Are they required by any laws, either municipal or provincial regulations or are these just guidelines that you as an urban development institute have adopted as you believe they are good practices?

MJ They are city by-laws that we have adopted as a membership, UDI have adopted, and some developers go beyond what those guidelines are. But they are by-law.

GF They are required now by city by-laws. So the new subdivisions are better prepared to meet the onslaught of the fires because they have had these mitigation things built into their developments.

MJ Interface they are following the guidelines and implementing them, yes.

GF I was interested in your discussion of risk management and not being an exact science and of course all of these things take place in an atmosphere of crisis and it's like anything, great, great leaders are born in a crisis because they rise to the challenge. But also, you have a whole lot of ordinary people who do extraordinary, often heroic, things and they don't always make the right choice, but somebody has to act and somebody has to make what appears to be the best choice under extreme situations. So I think you have characterized it very well.

Thank you very much for coming.

MJ/GW Thank you.

Our next presenter, we have Ken Winn. Welcome.

Ken Winn:

Good afternoon. I initially just came to observe the goings on, however sitting here and thinking about what happened, I thought I have one specific question that I would put to you gentlemen.

I preface that by saying that I am a homeowner, I lost my home in Crawford Estates, specifically on Westridge Drive which overlooks Bellevue Creek. I have the utmost respect and admiration even so far as to say love for the fire fighters that risked their lives to save our home – be it Kelowna fire fighters, the volunteers in the Valley and the fellows that came from all over Canada to do this. I wanted just to preface that.

However, I have one question that I would like answer if possible. And I know a lot of us up in our area are hearing a story that I would like to put to rest if it can be. That a back fire, if that is the correct term, that was started at the bottom of Bellevue Creek, which is the ravine that runs up behind probably two dozen homes – the fellows who started it for whatever reason, control of it was lost and that was the reason that the firestorm came up through Crawford Estate itself and basically destroyed the 68 homes that were there.

We are just hearing it as a rumours. I would like it to be put to rest. If it is a rumour I would like it to be put to rest because, as I say, I can't say enough for the fire fighters that were here, be it wherever they came from. If they weren't here and doing what they did we would have lost a lot more homes. We lost ours; we lost everything as a lot of people did. So that is just the one point that I would like clarified if possible. If it could be answered at some point in time during the course of your hearing and your session.

GF Thank you, Ken. I don't have the answer to that and I am very sorry about your loss. Obviously there has been tremendous devastation for people throughout this area. Our process is going to be one that is leading to, shall we say global recommendations, having arrived at conclusions about all of the various things that were done. But there are a lot of things that are individual questions like this that are legitimate and obviously of concern. I am hearing them both through the media and through public representations and so what my intention is that I will find the answers to questions like this if I can and try to get them to you directly then. Or, if it is something that affects many people in this area, maybe through the media. So where there is an individual question about a specific incident and how it played out, I will try to get the answer from the experts who were are on the scene and get back to you on that.

KW Thank you.

GF Can you leave your address as well with Andrew at the back so that we can get a response back to you?

KW Certainly.

GF Thanks, Ken.

My next presenter is Milton Wilson. Welcome.

Milton Wilson

From Kelowna. It is somewhat of an honour to be in your presence Mr. Filmon. Over the years I have followed your record in Manitoba as Premier and I think you did an admirable job. And you are up to the job here I notice by your resume.

What I say today is without prejudice or bias. For weeks we have been exposed to the – for lack of a better word – chatter of mutual admiration groups and that's the way it should be. We were fighting the fire war and just as in time of real war, as in the Iraq war today, we are to keep our criticism I think to ourselves and support both the troops and the generals.

But now, the war, the fire war is over and we are facing the aftermath of the reality of it, of the war. As the previous speaker said, I too have the utmost admiration for the fire fighters. Two of them are close neighbours of mine. There is, however an old cliché that there is enough blame to go all around, but I would rather talk about responsibility rather than blame. Even though they in some ways basically mean the same, responsibility I think has more of a positive and good ring to it and tone to it. I am not going to be talking today in specifics as some have, because I wasn't out there on the battlefield even though I wasn't in the evacuation area. But I am going to speak somewhat in generalities on a specific subject, though, and that is responsibility.

As a critical watchdog of the Lethbridge Alberta city council for 17 years, I learned a lot about, I think, responsibility. And responsibility lies first with us as residents and citizens, and we elect city councils to act on our behalf and we have a responsibility towards the city council, just as the city council has a responsibility to the people that it serves. And here we are bordering on blame, but I believe that city councils, as I observed in Lethbridge, had the responsibility of making sure that the lots that they sold to citizens to build their homes upon were safe. We didn't have a problem there with fire, but there along the 'coolies(?) we had a lot of trouble with building homes on sandy soil and then people would start watering the soil and building lawns and pretty soon the base – the whole basement was exposed on the side of the hill and some of them even tumbled into the valley, as happened here a few years ago.

So I believe that the city council had and continues to have responsibility of making sure that when they gave a building permit that that land is safe to build upon. And, I think the citizens have a right to feel, because they are not themselves engineers, they don't have hired engineers. The city has engineers and should know what they are doing. And it's not sand slides as we had in Lethbridge, but here when you go and build something out in the middle of the woods, you are to expect some difficulty I would think.

And, as in Lethbridge, we put the screws on our fire chief and he in turn put the screws on city council and he at one time I remember advised us against

building any high rises more than eight stories – he says I can't get my ladders beyond there. I can't be responsible for people that are living nine stories up and above. And so too, out here in the woods, I think that maybe our fire chief could have – maybe he did, I don't know, I haven't been attending council meetings here – I had enough of it after 17 years. But, he probably should have been advising the council about the danger of fires and letting out these permits into these areas.

And I am not speaking on behalf of the insurance companies, but insurance companies now are kind of whining about that – well somebody should have been responsible for this and we are going to be a little reluctant about paying. But I would say to the insurance companies who I have had some dealings with in reference to getting insurance on rental that they too have the responsibility of not insuring something, or making it clear that this is in a dangerous position. Just like now a lot of people have riders on their insurance policies that you are not – if you knowingly allow marijuana to be raised in your home or in a rental, your insurance is void.

And then too, the poor provincial government and specifically I guess it's the Forestry Department has been taking a lot of blame and I think the provincial government should take the responsibility to stand up to special interest groups and probably the one that pops into my mind is some of the environmentalist groups – some of these environmental groups should be objective in the pressure that they put on the provincial government. And they probably should not have, as I have heard, stood in the way of responsible selective logging of some of these areas that were so exposed to fire. I have heard that some of that underbrush and whatever there is, peat and so forth, is as much as three feet deep or so. Well, that's a very troublesome thing. As a layman I am not a fire fighter nor know much about forestry.

In closing I rather humorously plead with you, Mr. Filmon, not to exceed the very generous budget that Brother Gordon has given you to conduct these hearings. Some of us think it was very, very generous and I am sure there are a lot of would-be people envious of your position of would-be conductors or whatever you want to call whatever you are. But, I thank you for this opportunity and as I said in the opening, my remarks are without prejudice but hopefully that they may be helpful in the future because what is past is – they are using a cliché, a well-worn one – that's water under the bridge now.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson. I appreciate a number of your comparisons. The reference to war is not all that far off base when you look at the pictures of the devastation. They do have an eerie reminiscence to the war in Iraq in terms of all the explosiveness and fire and destruction that was taking place.

I do appreciate your referring to it as responsibility rather than blame. I think that is a fair way to put it. Are there subdivisions from the way in which you have looked at it and the comparisons you have made to Lethbridge are there subdivisions here that you believe are unsafe because of where they have been allowed to develop?

MW Well, I was evacuated. I heard later from a fireman friend that we were evacuated from our particular area not because it was so unsafe ...

(tape over)

... east of the Mission Creek was to be evacuated. I was one who reluctantly left, but when he got his pad out – this policeman or whoever he was and started writing my name down, I said, yeah I'm ready to go. But I hadn't seen any need immediately of it and it turned out we were. But the fire could have gone around behind us and down the creek and come in from behind us and our subdivision would then have been in much danger. To the south and east of us there was golf courses and orchards and stuff which I don't think was an endangerment, but had fire – so much of the fire was determined by the wind, I think. And if that wind had kept blowing eastward and then turned north toward – one fellow was afraid it was going to go as far as Vernon if it got up on a bench area there and headed north. If it had done that, it could have come down Mission Creek and taken out much of our area, because we have a lot of big pine trees there. I think the city should be looking at these big pine tree areas in the city and taking the responsibility now that this has come up of cutting a lot of those big trees down. It's not the regular trees that cause the fires but I think it was the Ponderosa Pines and if those could be cleared out more and not become a nest for fire starting, I think it would be very advisable.

I only went once and that was two months after the fire was over up into the fire area because I didn't want to be accused of being a lookie louie I think they called them. And even after two months, over two months, somebody gave me hell for going up there. And stepped out of my car – I don't think I was even on their property and chased me off. They just hated lookie louies even two months after the fire. And I suppose it was a very emotional experience.

GF I think you are right – it has been a very emotional experience and it is pretty difficult to put yourself in their shoes, I am sure.

Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson.

I now have Mr. John Woodward. Welcome, Mr. Woodworth.

John Woodworth.

I am working from notes I made this morning after a phone-around to see if someone was likely to be here and make a presentation with regard to Okanagan Mountain Park. In one way or another those of us who got the park in the first place have been at this for 30 to 40 years and so I find cripples, and people who are away south for holidays and so on. And, as happens to most of us in our lives there comes a point every once in a while when you look around and say 'why me?' And I am 'why me' at just about 80 and my wife saying 'don't go, you don't have to go' but I did.

I was raised in the Okanagan Valley. My earliest memories are the Okanagan, Kelowna, on the beach down at Manhattan Point which is practically downtown Kelowna – and in the south Okanagan in Oliver in my teen years and in the teen years particularly I roamed the back country a great deal. I camped out, went with my dog and my 22. I was a very poor shot and I am not responsible for the fact there are no more jackrabbits in the valley but I sure tried and they are pretty tough target when they come out of the greasewood and they are going like that.

I was a general reconnaissance pilot in World War II and that was wonderful because I loved to fly, but it became rapidly an education in looking down and seeing the land in the larger sense. When I got back and somehow fell into training as an architect they had just established the planning school at UBC and so we were exposed as architects to training in regional planning. And we just happened to have a professor who did work in the Okanagan, which is my home. And he talked about the Okanagan as a unity that started on the plateaus, way above the valley bottom and that the real Okanagan started with the water arriving with the deep snows up at 5, 6, 7000 feet and it ended down at Osoyoos where the Okanagan River and Osoyoos Lake run on down to the Columbia River system. And that, as such, we should be thinking of the Okanagan as something that needed some kind of regular overview and some kind of perhaps overall general management.

The water basin study that was done and many, many citizens including myself were involved in, came up with that view overall, but it never seems to happen. And, listening to this gentleman previously, I saw one of the examples showing up because the reference to just the City of Kelowna having a jurisdiction, I think doesn't draw to your attention, but I hope someone else has, is that you have the City of Kelowna with its boundaries and you have the Regional District of Central Okanagan and you have alongside that land that is managed by the Ministry of Forests or the responsibility of the Ministry and you have this very large Okanagan Mountain Park. And so there is not really clear jurisdiction over all and I could see this contributing almost at the very beginning. Anyway I happened to – well I was one of the founding directors of the Okanagan-Similkameen Park Society which is 35 or 40 years ago. I don't remember exactly, but I did happen to be the president at the time we got Okanagan Mountain Park which was 1970 and I have all the files on all of

that. We don't need to go sideways into it except that my phone started to ring immediately the fire got out of hand. I also happened to have been down the valley that day and when I came back from Westbank about 9:00 o'clock at night, what had been a fire at Okanagan Mountain Park was suddenly, to me the whole of south Kelowna, burning. And it was just one terrible experience. So it has weighed very, very heavily with me because we're the people who went out and got the park in the first place. There has always been a subtle and sometimes not so subtle bit of friction between the people who wanted the park and the forest industry and I guess, I don't think we can be responsible for getting the park, because that piece of wilderness was always there. All that ever happened when the park was officially established is that we put a label on it – we gave it a name. But there never was and never could be the amount of money that would be necessary to groom that whole mountainside and those canyons to groom them in such a way that they would be fire resistant or easier to fight fires. And so, I am not sure how responsible we are for a fire that got out of hand. I do think, though, that – what do I think – well I've lost my thread as usual in these years.

Anyway I was very disturbed the morning after the fire jumped and became this wild fire that just soared over the whole of that south Kelowna area. Because, in the paper was a presentation by one of the Chief Foresters and the forest industry implying that perhaps if the forest industry had been managing the parkland then maybe the fire would not have got away and maybe they would have known how to manage it so there would be no reason for a fire, or a fire to get away at least.

That bothered me very much because I guess the note that I made here is that it is kind of like showing up at the funeral to say a few – or at the funeral wake, and then bad-mouthing the deceased at the same time because you didn't get along with him. But anyway that's beside the point.

Anyway I was the president at the time the park was established and I felt that I should be here. I think it is probably valuable to let you know that this park society was founded by citizens who were aware that the Okanagan didn't have any class A parks. What they had were roadside parks, picnic areas and that kind of thing. They were labeled class A parks, but they were not class A wilderness parks. And at the same time these citizens who formed this society felt that somebody had to speak up and speak of the values of preserving those beautiful areas that you see either side of the Okanagan Valley and that make up, or largely make up the great appeal of the Okanagan as the place to be.

I live on the edge of the cliff out at Knott's Mountain Park. When we saw the fire there, we know we are vulnerable, we have seen the improvements that have been made to clear out the underbrush from the big Ponderosa Pines that are there and it has survived all that new improvement and it still looks pretty doggone good and it's a wonderful place to be. But I look across the

lake where the fire got under way the day or two later at the log sorting yards of the mill, and we thought we were going to lose the whole west side of the lake. So it isn't even that there is a clear distinction between fires and parks and fires in managed forestry lands and valleys.

I will tell you also that I, having seen that story, phoned and had a talk with the mill owner and manager, a part of that family team and I said I feel terrible about this fire in the park and he said – you don't have any idea how badly I feel, I was brought up right across the lake from Okanagan Mountain Park and that's my park. I swam there, I've fished there, I've hiked there, and I've slept in the park. And I said, so have I. And you know, in the canyons there you can see the stars at night and you can't see them anywhere else anymore in the Okanagan. So we had a wonderful talk and he said the policy of our company is that that park is extremely important. We are glad it's there, we are not critical of anybody about it. It happened, it's done and he said I have some optimism that the park is not really as badly damaged as it looks, that we will be back to using it and it does get a tremendous amount of use.

So, to let you know also about the Park Society, the Okanagan-Similkameen Park Society is that over these many years we now have class A provincial parks at Silver Star. I was an advisor to how we could have the ski area and the park – at Kalamalka Lake that beautiful view you have from the viewpoint at the north end of Kalamalka Lake, looking east across the valley, Okanagan Mountain Park, Cathedral Lakes Provincial Park, I think you heard little bit of that down in the south Okanagan and the purchasing of or being involved in the purchasing of quite a number of conservation acreages in the valley – anywhere from marshlands to the Ponderosa Pine bunch grass that are unique in the country of Canada. These things came about because of the work of citizens such as the directors of the Okanagan-Similkameen Parks Society and other respectable agencies such as the Nature Trust of British Columbia – I am a founding director appointed by Ottawa, and I did 25 years of it, and the Nature Conservancy of Canada. We have been so aware of the Okanagan. We started promotion 40 years ago of the south Okanagan as Canada's best pocket desert.

So these things are important and the progress that has been made I think has been done by very responsible people and so we are not to be brushed aside. We have a responsibility we feel to the community and the valley and we are just sick that somehow the organization wasn't there that had the authority right at the beginning to say – we don't give a damn if it's in the park or not, it's endangering the whole side of the valley and we'd better get the thing out fast.

This is not a criticism. I don't know what happened, but I don't think among the serious people who have been involved in this conservation work you will find any of the really serious ones would say – don't put the fire out because that's natural. Well we all know, we know the back woods and we know that

all of these mountains have been burned at one time or another. I lived in a log pole (Jack pine, I guess we called them), cabin as a kid in the south Okanagan in my teens down in the river bottom and I have forgotten what that's got to do with the point I am making. Anyway, I'll keep on because I'm half-way there.

There is a recently announced national government desert park reserve for the south Okanagan. All of the work there was really built on, or getting it recently, was built on the work that was done earlier. Field work and presentations to senior governments by the same kind of citizens who founded the Parks Society and other similar organizations – and it did not come about and it never does by a government, with due respect, Sir, that voluntarily takes the lead and gets the job done. It comes about by smart citizens who know how to get the job done and know which government to go to and how to get behind the scenes and help the politicians and help the civil servants who are going to have to do the donkey work. And, if you can get on the right threads there, you can get a hell of a lot done and I know it from my own background.

So, what are my thoughts today about this great central Okanagan forest fire that began in Okanagan Mountain Park – I think first of all and I think I have really said this, that where parks are adjacent to wilderness – jeez I can't read my own writing – where parks are adjacent to – yeah, wilderness parks are adjacent to growing city settlements that there should be respect from both sides. In dry seasons, a fire start-up in the park should be wiped out fast as part of a system of district forest fire management. And we know as I said earlier that the forest fires are natural to these southern interior forests.

What the hell! This couldn't possibly happen that number four has got lost. Damn, damn, damn, bloody hell. Where the heck did it go? On the ground? No. Well, I'll just have a shot at it –

I think the first thing as I say, there should be clear understanding if there is a hazard there it should be part of an overall fire management system for the whole valley, or the whole region. That you go in and put the thing out because it is too darned close to civilization. I think the second thing then is the other side of it – if you are going to have these subdivisions pushing, as I think I said in my notes – there bums into the back – into the forests, then – and nobody does anything about it, then those bums are going to get burned good and I guess that's what happened this time.

I live on the edge of the woods and I love it too so I see both sides of it.

The New Yorker Magazine used to have a set of little bits called the Department of anticlimax, so I am doing the anticlimax thing for you at this point. So, I did have a stroke years ago so my memory is not good.

If there are questions from the audience, I would be glad to offer my comments and if you, Sir, have questions, I would be glad to do what I could to help. But I have, like the others, great respect for the fire department for the work that was done. And, because I am interested in long term management, I am glad to see management questions coming up here at this hearing.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much Mr. Woodworth and we do appreciate your coming and sharing a lot of the history and experience of the area. Is it your impression that there wasn't an organization who was in a position to order the actioning of that fire that started at Okanagan Mountain Park and that people were waiting for some direction, whether it was from the Parks branch or whatever?

JW I would have to say I am not close enough there. There is a grey area somewhere with me that the fire started and there were people who reported the fire and nobody got to the fire fast enough. And my own feeling is – was there something within the fire authorities, the provincial ones particularly – was there something in there that said, gee, it's a provincial park, we don't fight fires in provincial parks because, as you know in the larger part of the province, there are some areas where they let the fires go because the fires are natural and it is the process of forests, wherever the fires can burn that they do periodically. So, was there a hesitation there that I don't know? But that has concerned me because I just want to assure you that the people I work with in this kind of conservation work, we are not stupid. We realize that if they are close to where people are building, then you'd better be prepared to fight the fires in the park and fight them fast.

There is a comment about Okanagan Mountain and that is that – because I have slept in there and hiked to the top back and forth and so on, and got very nice trout off the shoreline off the rocks – but the rocky nature of that land – First of all you couldn't easily and cheaply prevent fires from going to beat hell if they ever got started in there and it is foolish to say anything else. But, also it means it is not really good forest land in the sense of commercial forest and so I guess the other thing is that as the valley has grown, we have realized more and more that these parks that we did get are just extremely valuable for the economics of the valley, of people's livings because they are part of the tourist industry. They are a part of people's choice in deciding to come and live in Kelowna, for example, because they can live on the mountainside and they have Okanagan Mountain Park, this lovely chunk of preserved land between spreading out Kelowna and spreading out Naramata. And so I think they have a legitimate position and I think with Forestry, whether its forest industry or forestry civil service, we've got to be nice to each other and most of the guys are really good. They accept these parks are very valuable and I wouldn't want to see them condemned because this one got away.

GF I don't think there is any question that the parks are considered to be of tremendous value and I think you are right – my understanding is that where there are resources being called for in a whole variety of different areas to action fires and so on that if a fire breaks out in an area in which there is little commercial value to the timber, and no structures or persons at risk of being destroyed, that they don't action those fire. But that certainly wouldn't be the case in the Okanagan Mountain Park where you are adjacent to some significant property developments.

Having said that, though, there is a whole host of issues that it is my impression at this point prevented good forestry management practices from being undertaken. So when you said earlier that fires in parks and fires in managed Ministry of Forests lands are treated differently, that is not my impression, I think there are a whole lot of interests out there who don't want to see controlled burning or prescribed burning as it is called because of it's impact on the tourist industry or environmental interests or parks interests or all of these other things. So there are reasons why these normal good practices have not been allowed to be carried through.

In any case, I appreciate very much your comments and as I say sharing all of your experiences with us Mr. Woodward. Thank you.

JW Thank you. I am very pleased to be here.

Next we have Mr. Bill Cameron. Welcome.

Bill Cameron:

Thank you, Mr. Filmon and your panel. I am not here on any official designation or anything, but from my observations and having lived here for a long time, also I might mention that people around here worry about a little smoke. When my father came here a hundred years ago, the smoke was so thick a lot of the time in the summer that the sun was merely a red ball up there from the fires that were burning down in the Princeton and Hope areas and the smoke coming up here. That was quite common then because there was no fire suppression in 1903.

Anyway, where I was involved in this, I was on the communications – helping with the communications and the evacuation centres and so on here. And, I am involved with amateur radio and we were in several groups of us and operating on three eight-hour shifts so as to get the full twenty-four hour coverage from the various reception centres and at the main centre at Parkinson Rec Centre and also at the fire hall.

It was quite noticeable to us. We were able to make radio contact between the various places – various posts – whereas the telephone system completely broke down and so did the cell phone system. They were pretty well useless because of the overload. And people, of course, cause a lot of this on the telephone system because they will pick up the phone – they've got no dial tone so they start flicking the button. Each time they do that they energize another circuit – they can't get dial tone there either, but they also occupy two, three or four circuits instead of the original one if they had waited for a minute or two – but that is merely the telephone problem.

The other thing is that in Penticton after the Naramata fire hall, which was the centre there when that was evacuated there was some very nice equipment sent up from Vancouver – I'm sure who the agency was that supplied it – it was a repeater station and a bunch of hand-held radios that could be used with this new repeater station. The only problem was the repeated station has a different antenna connection – it's a Motorola and there didn't send any cables with it so it could be connected to an antenna. So that it was a little bit useless the way that it was. Also the hand-helds apparently they were used mostly, from what I gather from one of my friends there, they were used mostly to find out who went to coffee where rather than being kept for emergency. Anyway that's just an aside.

I think we did – while we were not tremendously experienced in this of our own communications between various stations, but I think we were able to pretty well keep it working. We didn't have a lot of traffic, but any we did have I think we were able to make good use of.

The other thing is I believe there was a problem at Beaverdel(?) of qualifying for a fire fighter. There was a campfire there – this is not my own experience, this is second hand from a fellow living there. There was a campfire there that

got away and a neighbour – this is on private property – a neighbour had a truck with a pump and a water tank on it. He went to help where the bush had caught on fire, he went to start working on it and a forestry officer came in there and told him – asked him if he had a licence from the forestry to fight fire and he said no. So he said you can't do that and he sent him home. So I mean this fire ended up with about forty hectares and they had to get in the water bombers and so on, whereas it could have been stopped immediately but the guy was not allowed to do it. So, I think there has got to be a little bit of something changed somewhere.

I have a log cabin at a lake here, about fifteen miles above Winfield, right in the bush. I should be worried about it, but I've got trees growing right against the cabin. My neighbour and I have our own fire pump up there for fire protection, but I guess we are not going to be allowed to use them. But we'll find that out if we ever have to use it, we will.

Another thing I might mention, this was years ago, coming down there one day – this will add a little bit of humour to my talk. Coming down there one afternoon from Beaver Lake after spending a couple of days up there, we noticed there had been a lightening storm and we got down a ways and we looked back at the hill and there was smoke coming out of the bush. So we turned around and went back to it, my wife and I climbed up a very steep bank. I had a shovel, she had a wet gunny sack and here the lightening had come down a tree and set the ground on fire. And it was probably about twice the size of this table top, and it was just starting to burn, so we worked at it for a little while with the shovel and the gunny sack and a short while later a couple of forestry fellow came with back packs and climbed up the steep hill to finish off the fire. So we walked down to the road to go home and the forestry foreman was there and he wanted our name and address and I said why – well, he said you worked on the fire. I said well I just didn't want the bush to get burned. Oh no, he said, you worked on a fire you're going to get paid. So he wrote our names and address down. We each got paid for two hours and one meal – a total of \$7.50 cheque came two weeks later.

So with that, are there any questions, Sir?

GF How long ago was it?

BC That was 35 years ago.

GF I had a similar experience, called into a land fill between Radium Hot Springs and Invermere back about 35 years ago, maybe a little longer, maybe 40 years ago. Anyway thank you for that, Mr. Cameron. I understand that the amateur radio people did do a real service when a lot of the telephone and regular communications were broken down so that is an important service that you played and I thank you for that.

The gentleman that didn't have a licence to fight fires – there has been, especially amongst many in the logging and forestry community, a good deal of mention of this. People who have lived in and worked in the forestry industry all of their lives and certainly have spent a lot of time dealing with fires – either doing selective control burns themselves, or just simply actioning them because they were there when it happened and it was the right thing to do – say that they weren't in a position to help so I think it is something worth looking at at this point. Thank you for that as well.

BC Thank you.

GF Thank you.

We now have Samantha Johnson. Welcome.

Samantha Johnson:

Thank you. Unfortunately by bad luck and the 'flu I have been sent down here to read a story that is mine alone and directly from my heart on behalf of all of the neighbours on Buck Road. And, if I shake a little bit, it is really because I am nervous, I should have some buckets for my arms to catch the drips. So I hope I don't go too fast for you.

GF I am nervous too, so just go ahead.

SJ I recently moved to Kelowna from the lower mainland and have resided on a wonderful piece of property in the Lower Mission since May. The previous owner developed and propagated, I understand, world renowned lilies and I am blessed to be able to tend and care for that property. Further to that, I am joyful to be able to live a short five minutes from a child whose parents, with my prejudice removed, have raised to be a polite and full of wonder and amazement in all he sees. I was babysitting in Kettle Valley the evening the fire broke out near Snake Island. It was actually a wondrous sight to see the orange and yellow glow over the mountain on the horizon as the evening approached. I use the word wondrous because I have faith and trust in our fire fighters. However, as the fire spread and grew closer to Kettle Valley and I name that community only because of the precious little four year old, I started to count the ridge that it had to come before I reached Kettle and I was not the only ridge counter in Kelowna. Our radio station had call after call after call. Every call had something to do with the fire. Gentlemen willing to fight, the ladies willing to donate, concerned people with unofficial status in fire fighting gave their best. All were willing to do what was needed to be done, but all we heard is – the park is a hard place to fight the fire.

As smoke layered our community day after day, embers burned our lawn furniture and ash and debris cluttered our driveways and yards in increasing flows so thick we could not see across the street in the day during hours when the wind had died down, and the fire marched toward us. We watched, read the newspaper and listened to open line radio callers. And a buzz started in Kelowna. The buzzword was Martin Bomber. An open line host had our local MLA on his program. We heard the following. The bomber was not available, it must be kept on Vancouver Island to protect its forest stands. The bomber was very old and hard to repair. Only one bomber was available, the other was broken. The bomber costs were too high on an hourly basis. There was no place to refuel in the Okanagan. No place to pick up water safely around Kelowna, and the provincial government had contacted the owner of the bomber and it was not available.

As we continued our daily chores one could not go into a pharmacy, dry cleaners or stand on the corner of a walk/don't walk corner without a comment being directed towards the Martin Bomber. Our radio station continued to field the solutions directed towards the difficulty of bringing in the Martin Bomber and callers were well informed. Pilots of the bomber itself

called in and offered solutions, researchers called in with facts and history of the bomber while we listened and watched the smoke descend and the smoke grow closer.

One afternoon, seven little yellow planes flew over our neighbourhood every seven minutes. They picked up water off the lake and flew back to the fire, flew back and picked up, flew back and dropped water over and over again. Those of us on the corner watched, waved, gave our thumbs up and prayed for their safety. And then, our open line hose called the owner of the Martin Bomber, and we heard. Both planes were available, the cost was \$13,000 per hour, the bomber could pick up on our lake, the bomber could make numerous drops before flying back to the island to refuel as our airport was not equipped for re-fuelling and then the bomb. The Martin bomber owner had not heard from anyone in our provincial government.

Wednesday night the fire crested the last ridge. Thursday was clear and sunny and there was very little smoke. Around 7:00 p.m. fire sirens, helicopters and little bomber sounds were heard in one simultaneous second. As I drove up Chute Lake Road to assist family and friends to evacuate, I saw the flames. I saw the sparks flying through the air and trees igniting. I saw the fire light up the sky and touch the stars. The fire was jumping like a frog from tree top to tree top and a large evacuation occurred.

I cannot say enough to honour the commitment and the workload that our crew and people in charge in Kelowna did to evacuate and aid us in a timely and safe manner. Our police, fire fighters, and evacuation volunteers performed to get huge numbers of people to safety. All of which they did without giving out false details or information. We could believe them, they did not sublimely use the word loyalty in their messages. They simply said what had to be said and depended on us to be at our very best.

Friday came and my neighbourhood knew it was time to go. We knew at 1:00 p.m. because the smoke lifted, and by 3:00 the smoke had returned and it was orange and yellow and burnt our nostrils. We could hear the fire and we prepared to do as we were told. We evacuated.

That Friday evening I had to drive to our West Side to drop off some important articles, and the threat of the fire as I recall it was sickening. As I traveled north to the home I would be staying in during the evacuation period, I marveled at the strength of the fire, at our volunteers and at the dishonesty that I witnessed at the volunteer registration centre.

And I need to get this off my chest. A man who drove into a parking lot in a large motor home was followed by his wife in her BMW. The vehicle was packed full of suitcases, boxes, plants, pictures, and the motor home was full – how do I know? I heard him yell at his children to be careful of the computer and of his books and other articles. And we all proceeded without speaking

into the centre. I arrived back to my vehicle to gleefully hear him laughing as now he could afford to buy each of his children, himself and his wife brand new leather shoes because they had food vouchers and emergency clothing vouchers for each of them.

The food they would use to purchase soap, tooth paste and paper products for next summer's holidays. My neighbours who are on a pension, support 14 members of their family in Rutland without assistance. Another neighbour on a disability pension took his tent and drove to the lower mainland. I spent over \$500 to get my grandson out of the tension in the area by taking him to the lower mainland and used my credit card to do it. Every single person I have spoken to has a story surrounding the abuse of the emergency funds by people who well could afford to see themselves through a tragedy such as we faced. Communications surrounding emergency funding needs to be fully addressed by our provincial government to ensure that those abuses do not continue.

As I stated, I left Kelowna. I left on a Saturday morning and I understand the Martin bomber arrived about the time I left. My neighbourhood was allowed to go home the following Wednesday and I watched and applauded the Martin bomber as it tediously lifted into the sky to dump its load and came back to the lake to reload.

The weekend brought new fears, Gallagher's Canyon and June Springs were in danger, and so was history in the canyon above our neighbourhood. Fear prevented a few nights' sleep for all of us and during those intervals we would take cameras and drive down Gordon for a viewpoint of the flames. And what did I notice – flames and sparks were shooting off the tops of the trees, however the canopy seemed to put them out. They did not start an inferno such as was witnessed on the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Could it be the wind, could it be the clear cut up there with no fuel for the fire, and I asked. The Martin bomber had done its job. The loads from the bomber had wet the canopy and those sparks did not produce the energy it needed to fuel the gasses that fire needs to spread in a firestorm.

Why was the Martin bomber brought in after the damage? Why was the Martin bomber not here on Wednesday evening when the fire crested that last ridge? There was nothing but fuel between the populated areas and the line of fire. why were our ...

(tape 2)

... our city did not at any time during the entire process tell us anything but the truth of our situation. Why? Because they knew what they had to do and they did it – and often using humour and thank God for that humour. I wish it had been there on the morning that I watched California's fires on CNN. I ended up bolting my chesterfield and landing behind the dining room table to get away from those flames on the TV screen.

Kelowna did what needed to be done with pride, commitment and caring. We will never know whether the Martin bomber could have prevented the devastations that our citizens now face long term, but we should have had the opportunity.

I speak for my neighbourhood when I say this – we need some guidelines for the emergency funds as they need to be defined.

GF Thank you very much Samantha. I have heard questions about the Martin Mars bomber and I don't have an answer on it. So, as I indicated earlier I will seek answers to these things and try and get them to you directly, but I think it is probably a question on the minds of others so hopefully this will be something that we can put the answer out through media channels so that everybody will know. And, with respect to abuse of the emergency funds, as I said yesterday in Penticton, the one thing that I hadn't heard was that at any time has anybody suggested that money was being withheld. In fact it appears as though the government made it very explicit that whatever money it took to fight the fires and to assist people would be there. And the result of that, I have been through some of these civil disasters myself – is that they bring out the best in human nature. That people operate heroically, above and beyond any expectations, sometimes putting themselves in harm's way and in other instances people operate with the worst of human nature. So it's not a very pleasant thing, but it goes with the territory I think.

SJ It was the best of times and the worst of times but it is up to us to make the changes. Thank you.

GF Thank you. Sorry, you have a written presentation, could we have a copy of it?

SJ Do you really want it? I scribbled all over it.

GF That's even better. Thank you.

Mr. Premier, could we ask that the speakers speak more into the mike, we octogenarians have a little trouble hearing. We heard very little of what she said.

GF Okay, well we'll try and get our system working better, Mr. Wilson. I'm just organizing my time and your time so that we can have just a brief break because we are going to be going through until five and I was just wondering if there is Beryl Itani here, if she is prepared to speak at the present time before we have our break. Thank you.

Beryl Itani:

Thank you very much for the opportunity. My name is Beryl Itani and I am the emergency social services director for the Central Okanagan Regional District and my team of nearly 1100 volunteers was responsible for the feeding, the clothing and lodging of nearly 30,000 of our fellow citizens during firestorm 2003.

My purpose for being here, I have actually sent you an e-mail sort of explaining all the things that we did, but my purpose for being here today is just to recommend and hope that in your recommendations that you give to our government that the contribution of volunteers and the contribution of the emergency social services program in our province works and we hope that this program will continue and continue in the way that it has in the past, of course with a few recommendations that we all have because of things that have happened. And in response to the previous speaker, we know that there were a few abuses to the system, but when you consider that we safely evacuated and looked after nearly 30,000 people, we can probably count on the fingers of both hands the number of people that might have abused the system in some way, and it's not anything that we like to talk about but we know that it did happen.

But my main purpose today is just to say that it was an awesome experience. It's something that we have trained, practiced, exercised for, I have been part of this program in this Regional District for nearly 20 years. We have at the most evacuated and taken care of 500 people and on the 3rd day when we were told that after one day of evacuating 12 and then 50 people that the next group would be 7,000 – without the batting of an eye my volunteers opened up a reception centre, looked after those people, opened a second reception centre when we were told the next group coming out was 10,000 and then 12,000 and after that it was just in groups of 1,000 or 600 and they were all taken care of once they were evacuated.

So I just wanted to make sure that in your recommendations that the excellence of that program will be continued.

Thank you.

GF Thank you Beryl. My wife would not forgive me if I didn't say that she has regarded herself for 40 years now as a professional volunteer and she says volunteers are the gold of this earth and I am sure your words would make her heart warm. So thank you very much.

BI That's great and I know that this program, in most areas of the province is totally run by volunteers, and it is an excellent program. And I know the director is sitting behind me and I just want him to know that it is an excellent program too.

GF Thank you Beryl.

GF Because that was a short presentation, I want to ask if Mr. Ross Gorman is here and would like to present before the break. Welcome.

Ross Gorman:

Thank you. I really didn't intend to speak. But I just couldn't help myself. I had to come up and express a few things that I feel very strongly about. I have been in the forest industry for over fifty years and I have fought dozens of forest fires. I have attended dozens of them, I have personally put out a number of lightening strikes by myself, or with another two or three people. I went down early in the morning when the Okanagan fire started. It was so small that I said to myself, well they won't have any trouble with that. They'll get that out soon.

I was absolutely amazed at why they didn't stay up on the job, stay there and put the thing out. If they had been there at 2:30 in the morning when the thing started, probably one person could have put it out, let alone a crew. And I just can't express strongly enough how important it is to get at the fire immediately and get the thing under control. I have been on fires that if we hadn't got there with our crews immediately, we would have had huge forest fires. And I think it is just common sense that we have to get on those fires immediately.

I don't care whether it – like we used to be told by the forest service to get out there and get on the fire immediately. And when we get there, we take over. I remember numbers of fires we did that on. And we got the things out. They could have been major conflagrations.

And the other thing that really bothers me is the fact that experienced contractors, loggers people that work in the bush all the time, and have put out many fires on their own because perhaps they started them or somebody else started them, and they got the fires out.

But this, I heard earlier and that was what really upset me, was that – tell the fellas to go home because they weren't trained. Nonsense. Who knows better to put a fire out than those people who are working in the bush every day.

Really I don't have any comment about how the fire was handled afterwards, I don't – there were probably mistakes made, but there always is when it gets to be the huge conflagration that it turned into. But I just, it just upsets me so much and I have lived here for over eighty years and I've seen hundred of forest fires throughout the Okanagan and many of them weren't attended to because they were so far back in the early days you couldn't get anybody in there to begin with. But when a fire, and modern equipment and communications that we've got today – it's just absolutely ludicrous to think that that fire got away.

I guess maybe I just get excited about it – I feel so strongly that the power that be have really gone astray in not letting the people – residents and contractors that know how to put a fire out – I think that's really all I have to say.

Thank you very much.

GF Thank you, Ross. I was just going to ask or at least have a bit of a discussion with you on that. Certainly I am not here defending anybody and I am simply in an information gathering phase and I can say that having read an extensive review that was done of the forestry branch, the Ministry of Forests – it's less than two years ago by Price, Waterhouse Coopers – they indicate that it is a standard rule of action of the Ministry of Forests, the four hectare rule that their objective is to get on to the fires and put them out while they are less than four hectares, believing that they can be controlled if they are limited. Once they are beyond that, there are serious issues of control and of course this summer we had many of those. I believe that over the course of the last decade or more, the record is that over 90% of the fires are contained to less than four hectares and even this year they contained over 90% of them to less than four hectares, so there must have been something unusual in the circumstances, or if there wasn't we will certainly find out for you and that will be one of the issues that we will be looking at.

The other thing, too, with respect to – although I am certainly open to the thought and believe that people with experience ought to be a part of this process and their skills and their talents and their knowledge should be utilized and there appears to be questions about that. We can certainly look at that too, that has to be combined with the issue of not putting anybody at risk. We have to only look at California to know that 15 people lost their lives in a variety of ways and risks were taken that I think we are all glad weren't taken here. The question is whether or not zero risk is an achievable circumstance or whether or not people could have been better deployed under the circumstances. Would you agree with that position?

RG Pardon?

GF That we certainly don't want to put lives at risk in the process?

RG I would just make one comment. During this when the fire was on the way – on the go, there was a lightning strike just above where I live, or above the sawmill and our fellow went up there and they put it out in about half an hour. So it could have been a huge conflagration on one side of the lake.

GF Okay, thank you for your comments and your presentation.

RG Thank you.

GF We will take a very short break and be back in ten minutes, and will resume with the presentations. Thank you.

GF Welcome back everyone, I will just ask you to please take your seats and we will resume the presentations.

We will begin with the next presentation from Mr. Frank Hilliard. Welcome.

Frank Hilliard:

Thank you Mr. Chairman and good afternoon everyone.

My name is Frank Hilliard, I am a resident of Kelowna, a former Journalist, now semi-retired. The reason I'm here today is to make the case that none of the damage and dislocation that occurred in Kelowna as a result of the fire of 2003 need to have happened.

It is my belief that failures in philosophy, strategy, tactics and management on the part of the office of the Fire Commissioner and the Ministry of Forests Protection Branch were the primary cause of the crisis. Certainly there were other mistakes made and by now you will heard of many of these but these two agencies made the big mistakes and must therefore shoulder most of the blame. I would like to explain how I came to these conclusions, what the conclusions are in detail and offer some recommendations.

I first realized there was something wrong with provincial fire fighting when I saw the pictures of the Barriere and Louis Creek fires. News reports said a firestorm had swept through the area, yet the pictures showed unburned homes and shed and trees still standing with their pine needles intact. Obviously there had been a fire, but just as clearly it had not been a firestorm. Whatever the Ministry was telling the media didn't jibe with the facts.

The second piece of the puzzle was when I heard an interview with Barriere Fire Chief Al Kirkwood who you have already heard from, who said emergency officials had tried to force him and his crew to evacuate, but that they had refused and had stayed to fight the fire. At one point he described the blaze going right over his head. Despite this, the Barriere Fire Department did not leave the scene and saved many homes. It was at this point that I twigged to the fact that the Ministry had not stayed, had not fought the fire, but had simply left Barriere and Louis Creek to their fate. The reason their description of the fire was wrong was that they weren't there at the time.

I was personally so concerned about this radio report I went to the Kelowna Fire Department and talked with two officials about what had happened at Barriere, one of whom who had been there. They confirmed to me that Ministry crews did not fight the fire once it had entered the town, and in fact had no equipment to fight the fire. These two officials and I am sorry I didn't take down their names at the time, gave me the impression they didn't think much of the Ministry's fire fighting capabilities.

When the Kelowna fire started on August 16th, residents of Peachland had a ringside seat. What they saw was a raging wildfire with trees candling every 15 seconds – I know, I counted them – and nothing being done about it – nothing being done about it. I am sure most of them had no idea the Ministry of Forests Protection Branch had the bizarre policy of not fighting forest fires at night.

What followed was both amazing and unique. It was amazing because despite the best efforts of the Ministry, the fire simply kept going. Every day it was closer to Kelowna. In fact we now know that everyone in authority knew on the Monday the fire was going to Kelowna, because using their existing techniques they couldn't stop it unless the wind changed, and the forecast was for no change in the wind. The reason that it was unique was although we have hundreds of wild fires every year in British Columbia, we never get to see how they are being fought because they are mostly in remote regions. This time, the Okanagan Mountain Park fire was fought in front of thousands of witnesses. What they saw shocked them because so little was going on. Trees weren't being cut, pumps weren't being put in the lake, hose lines weren't being laid, CAT lines weren't being cut, sprinkler lines weren't being set up and nothing was being done at night.

Ministry officials said they were doing everything they could but the evidence through binoculars was to the contrary. What was happening was that thousands of people now knew for the first time the Ministry pronouncements were a sham, just dissembling – The ministry was not fighting the fire.

I said earlier that the Protection Branch and the Fire Commissioner failed in their obligations. The Branch failed in philosophy, strategy and tactics and the Fire Commissioner's office failed to properly manage the fire. Let me start with philosophy. By controlling most fires, not conducting prescribed burns and blocking selective logging of provincial parks the Ministry has broken the natural regeneration cycle of British Columbia's pine forests. The result of this philosophy is that British Columbia's forests are now filled with fresh dead fall and diseased trees and thus are more fire prone than at any time in their history. This was especially the case in Okanagan Mountain Park prior to August 16th and continues to be the case in Cathedral Lakes Park and in Manning.

From a strategic point of view the Protection Branch has with the exception of air bombardment never really believed it could put out a forest fire by direct action. As a result, it has not wild fire fighting vehicles, no self protecting caterpillar tractors, no tracked hose laying equipment, no palletized air droppable pumps and really no interest on taking on a fire on the ground. It's happy putting up so-called control lines, but if the wind changes any of these barriers is quickly ignored by any forest fire. Even the one offensive tool it has, air bombardment has been so inefficiently used it only works in the very first stages of the fire. It is true the Protection Branch has a number of 4X4 trucks with pumps, however these appeared to be of no practical use for anything other than small grass fires. No one of these vehicles or a combination of these vehicles would be sufficient to take on even one house fire, much less a forest fire.

From a tactical point of view the Ministry tries to fight forest fires with water bombers and then by circling the fire with fire guards on the upwind side, followed by the active side of the wind changes. It then sets a backfire to use the available fuel in the guarded area. This system can work – has worked – in remote regions, providing the weather cooperates. However, it is of no use in an interface fire if the weather stays the same as it did in Kelowna.

On the management side there are many factors that play. The most important is to recognize where the greatest problem lies and to concentrate forces on that front. A review of the deployment of ministry resources by the office of the Fire Commissioner on the afternoon of August 22nd will show, I am sure, that the majority of available resources were deployed elsewhere in the province at the very moment a fire was threatening the province's third largest city. This was a mistake of colossal proportions for which somebody should be held accountable. Not only were inadequate resources deployed to the province's interface fires, those that were deployed were routinely withdrawn just when they were most needed. This happened in Barriere where Al Kirkwood was left prematurely, in the Falls Road area of Kelowna where Rick Perscuto(?) and a group of volunteers was abandoned, and on the lakeshore where fire crews left Ed Fenwick and others to fend for themselves. In each of these cases volunteers showed terrific determination.

So to summarize the status quo, the Ministry's philosophy creates larger, more dangerous fires than those that would occur normally. Its strategy is one of passivity, not to say defeatism. Its tactics are effective only with the cooperation of the weather and the management of the office of the Fire Commissioner is both timid and inept.

I would like to turn now to my recommendations, and first a word on why I am making them. It is generally the Canadian way to leave things to the experts. That is certainly true of fire management and emergency measures. However in the case of the Kelowna fire the experts failed us. This is a point that really shouldn't be forgotten. Their expertise was useless. At the same time that the common sense of people like Rick Perscuto and Ed Fenwick was shown to be useful. It is in that light that I am going to make some recommendations.

Let me start off by saying the very fact there is a forest interface fire means that there has been a failure in planning. Nowhere in the part of British Columbia of which I am familiar has there been any planning to separate communities from the province's pine forests which traditionally burn every 80 to 200 years. The first step to preventing interface fires is to eliminate forest interfaces.

So my first recommendation is the virgin forest should be cut down and replaced by grassland for a distance of 3.5 kilometers upwind in the direction of the prevailing wind and one kilometer in all other directions, and this area should be moved forward progressively as the city expands and cull the city

fire break. The distance of 3.5 kilometers has been chosen as the maximum observed forward fire leap in the Okanagan Mountain Park fire. Having pushed the forests back as it was pushed back from New York, Montreal, Toronto, and every other major city in North America, excluding Vancouver, laws should be enacted to prevent the creation of a pine forest within communities.

Recommendation two: Coniferous trees should be banned around homes in a 0.5 kilometer strip from the edge of the fire break area towards the community proper. This would mean that in smaller communities all coniferous trees would need to be replaced by deciduous species.

On the other side of the equation, there are the homes themselves. These need to be made much more fireproof. I've got three recommendations in this area: all new homes in British Columbia Forestry interface areas should be required to have fireproof rooves such as slate, cement tile, ceramic tile or steel. All new homes in B.C. forest interface areas should be required to have kicker sprinklers on their rooves attached to the house plumbing system ahead of the pressure regulations. And three, all new homes in B.C. forest interface areas should be required to have fireproof soffits. The Okanagan Mountain Park showed the current soffit design is the weak link in preventing structural damage from forest fires. The fire just goes up the side of the house, straight into the attic – boom – you're done.

These three regulations would harden houses sufficiently to protect them even if the city fire break were not yet built. Of course there still will be interface fires so I've got four recommendations there.

One, the new Provincial Fire Department should acquire a minimum of twenty OshKosh Rosenbauer Rough Terrain Fire Trucks from the manufacturer or through Safety Boss in Red Deer for deployment to threatened areas as required. I believe these vehicles should be placed in medium-sized cities in the province, such as Penticton, Kelowna, Vernon, Kamloops and that they should be integrated into the local fire departments, and that the acquisition costs and the manning costs should be paid for by Victoria directly.

Two, as an interim measure the Provincial Fire Department should have the legal power to shut down airports in the province and use airport fire trucks on an emergency basis for forest interface fires where warranted. This would certainly have been helpful on the afternoon of the 22nd – we could have shut down the Kelowna Airport for six hours and used the trucks up there up on the front line with their foamers.

Three, new innovative techniques should be explored to fight forest fires including the use of jet turbine powered pallet mounted five inch pumps capable of throwing water a distance of a quarter mile, helicopter laying of water hoses and the use of explosive.

And, finally, since it is clear the Ministry of Forests Protection Branch can neither protect the forests, nor the public who lives near them, the Ministry of Forests Protection Branch should be disbanded and the funds recovered as a result used to pay for the projects and programs noted above. The Junior staff of the Ministry Protection Branch should be removed to the Provincial Fire Department.

That's it, that's my oral presentation. I have also submitted some written documents. I would be happy to answer any questions.

GF Is it your impression, Mr. Hilliard, firstly thank you for your presentation. Is it your impression that the municipal fire departments who are trained and prepared to deal with structural fires would have preferred to have the forestry wild fire fire fighters working amongst them in these circumstances?

FH No, I don't think the municipal fire departments – they can speak for themselves of course – but from what they told me I gathered that they are not terribly impressed with Ministry fire fighting techniques or equipment. So, to answer your question about what I think should happen, I think the new provincial fire department should a) acquire the appropriate vehicles and facilities and b) should acquire the personnel from the protection branch and that that should be the controlling function over the municipal fire departments in cases of forest interface fires.

GF From what I have heard in other places, from other presentations, at no time does the Ministry of Forests suggest that they are competent to deal with structural fires, to buildings in residential communities, vice versa the fire fighters whether they be volunteer or full time who deal with structural fires in communities, in residential communities, agree that they don't have the equipment nor the training to deal with the fires in the wild fires scenario. They say they are two different things and although there is an argument for cross-training, there is no question of recognition of the special skills and training of each other. So, do you think that the municipal fire fighters, structural fire fighters want to go in and start to fight the wild fires in the bushes around.

FH I think if there was a functioning Provincial Fire Department which I understand was set up legally this year, and if it had sufficient personnel and if it had a sufficient number of this specialized rough terrain fire fighting vehicles that I just mentioned, which it current has none, if that were the case then they could develop the expertise for forest interface fires and that the municipal fire departments would, if they demonstrated their capabilities, would be prepared to work under that organizational structure. I do not think they are prepared to work under the structure of the Ministry of Forests Protection Branch.

I did hear what you are saying, but I don't think the existing fire groups can work together.

GF I am not suggesting that the municipal fire fighters ought to be working under the direction of the forestry branch, and I don't think they are. The issue then is what is the role in your view of the Fire Commissioner's office currently?

FH Well, I think he is probably wondering that as well after this. Clearly the roles were inadequately described and were misunderstood at every level. Everybody that has spoken to me and has spoken to you I am sure is mentioning the lack of orderly command structure. So, it's a problem.

GF My understanding is that the provincial Fire Commissioner's entire budget was said yesterday by one of the presenters is \$1.5M a year.

FH Wow, he needs more money.

GF Well it depends on what you expect. I mean if Chief Zimmerman, who is going to have a chance to speak, believes that the office of the Fire Commissioner should have a huge budget and personnel so that they can come in here, take over his job and his responsibility, I don't see how it works.

FH I'm sorry, I may have misspoken myself – what I meant to say was that there should be some group that develops interface fire fighting capability. It is clearly a unique issue. I believe it should be a provincial responsibility because there are other communities besides Kelowna that have the problem. So, I am just saying the leadership should be from the province and I am sure that if it was done professionally, the professional fire fighters should want to be part of that.

GF Well, I guess we will hear more, but my assumption is that every one of the fire departments of the province that interface developments has to be trained and has to have the capability to fight those fires. If they can't then we are all at risk, right?

FH Indeed and I believe the province should buy them the correct equipment so that they can take on these fires directly. The current do not have – no municipality in B.C. has an eight-wheel drive specially designed forest interfaced fire fighting truck.

GF Okay. Thank you. I hope we can have a copy of your presentation.

FH You do have a copy of it, sir.

GF Oh, we do. Thank you very much Mr. Hilliard.

Next, we have his Worship, Mayor Walter Gray the Mayor of Kelowna and I understand appearing with him, is Robert Hobson, Chair of the Central Okanagan Regional District. Thank you. Welcome.

Mayor Walter Gray:

Thank you very much Commissioner Chair Filmon and Commissioners.
Welcome to the great City of Kelowna, the city with citizens of courage and resolve.

With me today is my Council calling Robert Hobson who is also the Chair of the Regional District of Central Okanagan, and I am the Mayor of Kelowna, Walter Gray.

Kelowna is a city of about 100,000 population and we are located in the middle of the Regional District of approximately 150,000 population. Regional Chair Hobson and I are going to divide the duties in our presentation today, the bulk of which will be presented by Mr. Hobson and I will conclude the presentation with comments and recommendation about media and communications.

We also have with us today Ron Mattussi, City of Kelowna Director of Planning and Corporate Services. He was the person fortunate enough to be the EOC director throughout the 3-1/2 week emergency that affected our city and our region and he will be available for any questions that you may have. He has had 24 hours a day for many days to think about them I am sure.

So I will turn things over now to my colleague Robert Hobson for the first part of our presentation:

Robert Hobson:

Thank you Mayor Gray. Good afternoon Commissioners and Ladies and Gentlemen. It is a pleasure to be here and good to have the opportunity to talk to you about the Okanagan Mountain Park wild fire. We are grateful for the efforts of all involved given the nature of the fire, although we suffered incredible loss we are very glad to say we didn't lose a single life and that is one thing we focused on a great deal during and after the disaster.

I would like to talk first of all about roles and responsibilities of levels in governments since that is the first question you are dealing with. At the regional level I would like to say that our response was excellent because of a strong, well-practiced emergency plan created under the B.C. Emergency Management System, with a full-time emergency coordinator. That is Sid Lebeau(?) and Sid is in our audience as well.

Sid was really instrumental in putting together the components of the emergency plan that allowed our emergency centre to operate so efficiently during this unprecedented disaster. In addition staff and the City of Kelowna, the Regional District of the Central Okanagan, all local governments and their respective Fire Departments worked together very well. This was in large part due to strong local ties and to an up-to-date mutual aid agreement. Very little would be changed from the local perspective if such an event were to happen again. But I have to emphasize we had tremendous volunteer support from elected people and staff and volunteers in the community throughout the emergency.

I would now like to turn to the provincial roles and responsibilities and Chief Zimmerman will be saying more things about this later, but I will give a general overview. It was very evident that the various provincial agencies involved with forest fires had never run into a situation where a larger city or region had been threatened in this matter. The provincial agencies involved were faced with a well-organized regional response team, the EOC and the fire departments who would not abdicate responsibility for their community, nor did they need the type of support normally provided to smaller communities. This created problems early on in the emergency. There were situations when consultants sent to help us were of little or no use while vital information on the fire situation was not forthcoming in a timely manner. It is fair to say that when it was realized that the situation was different in Kelowna, the provincial agencies quickly changed their approach and began to work more closely with the regional response.

By Saturday, August 23rd, our approach to media relations was accepted and most of our requests for assistance were being met and support in the Pre-Occ(?) and Forestry had been approved. We would recommend that provincial emergency response procedures be revised to allow for true partnership role with local government in responding to emergencies.

I would now like to turn to the area of risk assessment. Risk assessment is a costly undertaking for local governments. The City of Kelowna through which official community plan has taken steps to identify wild fire hazard areas. The Regional District of Central Okanagan was the first in the province to do this and the City of Kelowna and the Region both have policies ensuring that upon sub-division or re-zoning of property within interface areas, a wild fire hazard assessment must be done by a qualified professional, experienced in fire abatement. Fire risk must be reduced and a notice on property title advising that such an assessment has been done is also required.

Once more detailed analysis of the fire is undertaken existing policies may need to be amended. What is more critical however, is determining what risk assessment processes are in place at a provincial level to deal with Crown Lands or provincial parks. For example, were any of the recommendations in the 1997 wild fire assessment report for Okanagan Mountain Park implemented. A report was done in that year, it had a number of recommendations and I will just speak extemporaneously to those since they are not in my report. It recommended control burns be done in the low elevation Ponderosa grassland areas. It recommended thinning of dead materials in the upper elevation where there was too much material to do control burns. It recommended the placing of helicopter landing sites within the park. It recommended a cleared separation area between subdivisions and the park. As was evident in this case, the Okanagan Mountain Park was out of control long before it moved into the Regional District. We can't honestly say whether the recommendations of the 1997 report would have made any difference given the fire conditions, but I think it is important to go back and take a look at what was recommended and what was put in place.

We would certainly recommend that the B.C. government immediately begin to undertake a wild life risk assessment of parks and Crown holdings with adjacent or near communities. The local government act should be amended to include wild fire hazard assessment as a required content within official community plans. I would add that it would be helpful that if parks like Okanagan Mountain Park and Myra-Bellvue(?) provincial park had a provincial staff presence during the fire season. Up until two years ago Okanagan Mountain Park had a caretaker who lived right at the edge of the park but the province decided to change its procedures for managing parks and to contract out a number of South Okanagan parks to a single contractor. The person who lived next to the park didn't win the contract, so there was no longer a presence directly adjacent to the park. We have had over the last number of years considerable problem with people doing things in provincial parks to create hazards. I have personally put out campfires in Myra-Bellvue provincial park during fire season, and other people have had problem with illegal camping, all terrain vehicles and fires within those parks. Routinely there is no public presence within those parks from the Ministry of Parks.

I would like to turn now to the area of mitigation strategies. While new developments can and are being designed to mitigate against wild fire, large tracts of land either previously developed or currently untouched as holding properties remain in private hands. There is limited ability under current legislation for the local government to force the wild fire assessment and mitigation of private land. In addition there is little incentive for private land owners to undertake costly wild fire mitigation prior to development. We would suggest that incentives be explored, or legislation brought in place to ensure mitigation of wild fire within the urban interface areas. Wild fire does not respect boundaries and mitigation is costly. Without some form of incentive and changes to legislation very little will happen. We will talk more about compensation in a few minutes.

Turning now to the planning capabilities of various agencies, I would like to speak first about mapping. GIS systems are vital to the operation of EOCs. Unfortunately ... (tape over) ... in having actual evacuation orders approved. Precious minutes were wasted checking and amending orders due to mapping error caused by the use of different bases. We would recommend that the various agencies involved should have the capability of sharing geographic information. The region and the City of Kelowna will be taking steps to ensure a single seamless base exists for the city and the RDCO interface. The capability for data sharing between Forestry and Regional District is a must and protocol should be in place before an event takes place.

Boundaries – there is no consideration of emergency planning in the delineation of boundaries for the various emergency agencies and the regional districts in which they operate. In particular, this means confusion can arise when fire-impacted areas cross regional district boundaries and first responder boundaries which do not necessarily match, and when the relationship between PEP boundaries and the boundaries of the various EOCs and Pre-ops is not crystal clear. We would recommend that a review of the various agencies and their boundaries should be undertaken with emergency preparedness as a consideration.

Turning now to the command structure for responding to emergencies – I would like to deal first with the area of evacuation. The process for enacting evacuation orders was slow and cumbersome. Although at least three or four people in Kelowna were assigned senior positions by the Fire Commissioner and these same people decided on areas to be evacuated all orders had to go from Kelowna to Kamloops to Victoria and back again. It is our understanding that in other areas this could take up to eight hours. The matter was made worse when critical time was wasted due to the fact that different mapping bases were used. In most cases the actual evacuation plan was formulated and implementation proceeded long before the ground checking and amended official order was issued. We would recommend that in large-scale emergencies evacuation orders should be issued through the EOC. This point cannot be emphasized enough. Local knowledge is critical to effective

implementation of the evacuation. Representatives of the Fire Commissioner office are empowered to make those decisions and must therefore be in the EOC.

Now dealing with rescinding evacuation orders and re-entry – another area we worked hard on. Decisions on lifting the evacuation orders were poorly coordinated. Despite protests from the EOC evacuation orders were lifted with little consideration as soon as the provincial agencies deemed that the wild fire threat was over. This occurred despite the fact that the neighbourhoods contained potentially life-threatening hazards. It was only through intervention by the local representatives of the Fire Commissioner's office who put a public safety order in place through the director of emergency coordination centre after the wild fire orders were lifted that an orderly re-entry occurred. The actual implementation of the re-entry also required the RCMP to use their powers of restricting access to areas to allow local residents a few hours to return home in an orderly manner. We would recommend better coordination of the rescinding of evacuation orders and re-entry to ensure lives are not lost in the aftermath of an emergency.

And now turning to the coordination of resources. Much of the major equipment in the Okanagan Valley was taken over by Forestry, leaving very little for local use. At times much of the Forestry commandeered equipment sat idle and would not be released for city use, and the opposite may be true. We would recommend that more work be done by everyone to develop roles, responsibilities and strategies allowing for the efficient use of equipment between local government and provincial agencies.

Now turning to training and exercising programs for emergency response. Currently municipalities are required to have emergency plans, but Regional Districts are not. This will create problems as disasters do not respect municipal boundaries. PEP should provide a provincial template and training to all Regional District so these plans are easier to create. In this region the responsibility for formulating the plan is regional, however the coordination and staffing is provided by the City of Kelowna fire department. This arrangement works well in the Central Okanagan. We would certainly recommend that all Regional Districts be required to have regional emergency plans covering all of their territory. There are other Regional Districts in the province, Mr. Commissioner, which have regional emergency plans only in part of their regional districts and there are areas that are not planned for. Of course forest fires don't recognize where those little dotted lines are.

Now I would like to turn to the role of volunteers. Volunteers played a vital role in many aspects of the emergency. Clearly emergency social services and search and rescue to name two could not function without volunteers. In fact it is fair to say that if it wasn't for the outpouring of help from the community in a wide variety of areas, the people evacuated in Kelowna could not have been dealt with in a timely manner. And I do want to recognize Beryl Itani who

was in charge of our volunteers in this area and who did a fabulous job during the emergency. While volunteers are vital it is important that they are properly trained for the roles they are able to fill. It is often difficult to keep volunteers involved and interested in the absence of situations which allow them to use the training. This year of course was an exception. It was noted in the media the trained wild fire firefighters were not being hired by Forestry to fight this summer's fires. Assuming this is true, which may be a big assumption, many of these issues should be sorted out prior to any emergency. In the middle of a firestorm when lives are at risk it is not the time to train recruits or to find out that someone overstated their qualifications on a resume. During an emergency no one has the time or resources to deal with these claims. Trained personnel and professional fire fighters were needed who could operate in a coordinated manner. We would suggest a centralized roster and screening system be put in place for qualified forest fire fighters, if not in existence now. That should be available prior to the fire season.

I would now like to turn to compensation and assistance and talk first about the Disaster Financial Assistant Program. This program is outdated and should be renegotiated between the province and the federal government. An example is the difficulty experienced by people who recently suffered from the flash flood and debris flow in Kelowna. This debris flow occurred in a one in two hundred year storm event which was exacerbated by the wild fire leaving the slopes hydrophobic and void of grasses, bushes and trees to absorb the rainfall. Forest fires do not fall within the DFA guidelines for individuals and flooding is a separate response, despite the fact that it is often exacerbated by a fire. DFA does not, but should, cover costs for mitigation works. It is also felt that the \$100,000 limit per household is too low and should be reviewed.

Now I would like to deal with private forest land rehabilitation. The Okanagan Mountain Park decimated a huge area, some 7500 hectares of private forested land which had a huge impact not only on the land owners, but also potentially on the surrounding public and other private lands. The inability of private property owners to rehabilitate their properties due to lack of capacity to do so leads to a number of potential effects.

1. Continuance of fire hazard potential due to dead debris accumulation;
2. Increased potential for erosive conditions and property damage caused by mud slides;
3. Water quality impact due to silt and mud;
4. No restoring of planting or ground cover leading to a prolonged time frame for normal hydrological conditions to return, which in turn leads to the potential for flooding;
5. Loss of habitat without doing restoration and rehabilitation of the land;
6. Social and economic loss to individuals in community – i.e. no ability to use or develop the lands; and
7. This is an increasing problem in our area as it is in Northern British Columbia, increased Pine Beetle infestation and further hazard potential to adjacent land with future losses to forested lands in public and private

ownership. There is a strong link between a mountain Pine Beetle epidemics and wild fire and I should mention we have other epidemics in our region as well to do with other types of trees, no just Pine Beetles and Pines. We have Fir Bark Beetle as well, as well as other problems.

We urge this inquiry to recommend to the federal government that they expand the Mountain Pine Beetle initiative, 80% funding to private lands to areas in B.C. that have experienced extensive wild fire, or to create a new program with similar funding to private land owners for rehabilitation of their forested lands.

So, again, we recommend that the Disaster Financial Assistance Program be renegotiated with the federal government.

And I will just mention one other problem from the fire that isn't in our report, and that is the effect on farmland from displaced wild life. We now have a tremendous number of deer, bear and other creatures that no longer have a habitat and they have been creating problems in orchard lands and grape lands within our city.

I would now like to turn to Mayor Gray to deal with some of the communications and public information issues. Thank you.

Mayor Walter Gray:

Thank you very much Councilor Hobson and Regional Chair Hobson.

Provincial structure required to deal with communications and public information during emergencies and disasters to determine the timeliness and effectiveness of communications is my first topic.

Good communications with the media and the resulting up to date flow of information to the public were the key factors in the success of the local response. Detailed factual and frequent communication with the public is paramount in any emergency. It builds trust with staff and elected officials when the public feel they are fully aware of all that is happening. Each EOC should be responsible for handling its own public information program as the directors deem best suits their community and the unique circumstances at the time. All media should be treated equally – in other words no ‘scoop’ – and any new information should be disseminated as soon confirmed and approved. Locally that often meant four or five new releases a day, plus new briefings. At the height of the fire six and seven news releases were issued daily. The availability of staff and elected officials, EOC director, fire chief and other officials, fire fighters and the mayor to conduct frequent interviews is also a key element of open communications. The public wants to hear from those directly involved and in charge. And I must say here in Kelowna it all worked very well, but we acknowledge that it doesn’t always work that way under all circumstances.

In this area media tours when safe to do so are also an important element in communicating with the public. Emergency situations and the response to same are stories of public interest. People want to see the images for themselves. Pictures are not only key to telling the story, they also play a significant role in helping the public feel assured that they are getting the whole story. Since criticism of media access can arise, it is helpful to have a ready explanation as to why the media may be allowed in prior to residents. Journalism is an inherently dangerous business often times. Members of the media were entering an active fire scene and they knew the risks. They were also escorted by the RCMP, fire department personnel and an information officer who explained the rules and the restrictions for their ability to enter the area. They were asked not to show street signs, don’t show house numbers, don’t trespass on private property – in other words show respect for those people whose homes were going to be the object of the news story and who had not yet seen their homes, or seen their homes burned.

If media access is not provided the media will try to get their story regardless potentially causing problems for themselves and for others. If they do gain unapproved access there are no restrictions on their activities. In terms of provincial structure some further discussion should occur regarding what communications role the Provincial Emergency Program plays in a local emergency. How do the public information officers interact with PEP, what are

their roles at PEP, and at the local EOC. What does PEP expect from local PI staff. Can PEP offer guidance in terms of relationships with national and international media. Locally, PEP was of assistance in setting up initial large-scale news briefings, then a further assistance by phone when the briefing continued with local staff in terms of the set up required the technology links for the out of town media, etc. But one difficulty – public information staff at PEP kept changing and therefore continuity was somewhat difficult for the local information people. Our suggestion here, it would be beneficial for PEP to consider offering training for those in smaller communities who may need assistance in terms of how best to handle swarms of regional and national media. It can be very overwhelming. Another suggestion, methods of incorporating the media into the process is important in large scale emergencies and should become part of the PEP template.

And now, Inter-regional communication and public information – for two days, August the 19th and the 20th, before Penticton-Naramata EOC information personnel were in place, the Kelowna EOC received dozens, if not hundred of calls from residents in the South Okanagan. Kelowna EOC did not have the information they were seeking. In other words the questions typically were do I live in an evacuated area, where should I go if we are evacuated – those sorts of questions. It was frustrating for the Kelowna EOC because we didn't want to give the wrong information or tell them to call someone else, particularly when we didn't know who to direct them to. Kelowna EOC eventually got the information, but only after making many phone calls to Penticton and Kamloops.

Certainly those residents who were looking for information were even more frustrated, as you can appreciate. There were also many queries from the media about the South Okanagan as they too wanted to provide useful information for viewers and listeners throughout their broadcast areas. The same situation occurred in later weeks with residents at Ida-Bell(?).

Our recommendation: PEP should proactively provide pertinent information to each EOC's public information staff regarding adjacent region contact numbers. The scale of the fire and the need for information quickly overwhelmed the resources assigned. Three experienced public information officers, and we were so blessed to have the right three people. A fourth could have been utilized in an emergency of this scope. Other communities need to be aware of the staffing requirements necessary to ensure the job is handled properly. In particular, a public information officer needs to be on deck early, five in the morning if there is no one required overnight to check on overnight activity with the appropriate personnel, issue a brief news release and contact each local radio station to provide tape prior to the 6:00 a.m. news. This satisfies the medias' immediate needs and provides residents with the latest information as soon as they wake. All public information officers – local, regional, forestry, RCMP, armed forces should be working in close proximity early in the process. Locally, RCMP and forestry info officers

work directly out of the EOC. This ensures a coordinated approach with the media. This also ensures media tours are organized properly, and sanctioned by all appropriate agencies. While each agency may choose to issue its own news release, consideration could be given to issuing joint news releases. Joint news briefing are essential to bring all players together for the media. This also reduces the number of media calls and PI officers need to handle every morning.

A recommendation here would be better coordination of communications resources is necessary early in the process. This by no means is meant to suggest that any one agency should control content, but rather share information and methods of information delivery.

Media demands can dominate communications resources very quickly. This created a second problem as the ability of the EOC to answer direct inquiries was constantly overwhelmed. The growing need for information impacted all communications as residents used any telephone number available to try to get the information they wanted. The regional emergency plan calls for the establishment of a call centre to address this issue. We initially set our call centre in the EOC, but it quickly became apparent we needed further assistance as well as a separate location for this function. Shaw cable generously provided their staff of professional telephone operators and their call centre facility which turned out to be a wonderful asset. During the height of the fire it was staffed around the clock. It is imperative that all communities made the effort to have a call centre plan organized in advance. There are too many other demands at the height of the emergency. While PEP can offer assistance here, we found our residents appreciated being able to dial a local phone number. Again providing residents with timely information is critical to keeping a community informed and calm and eliminate any chance for panic.

Suggestion: recommendation that coordination of the call centre shift from public information to logistics and personnel. Public information officers are too busy preparing news releases, handling media inquiries and arranging interviews to handle the actual setup of the call centre. Once the logistics are taken care of, personnel can handle staffing. Public information will ensure the call centre personnel have all news releases, fact sheets and messaging information as soon as physically possible.

The use of the internet proved an invaluable tool for public information during our fire experience. The internet became the most immediate means of communication during the Okanagan Mountain fire other than news briefings carried live. One local site registered up to – get this number – one local site registered up to one million hits per day. News releases were posted almost the moment they were sent by e-mail. The internet is a worldwide source of information available at the click of a button and it offers an important archive feature as well. The internet should not be overlooked by PEP, it is vital for the communications in the province.

We in no way wish to diminish the 24/7 commitment of all local media – all media – local, regional, national – did an extraordinary job of keeping their public informed and instructed.

In our view the excellent detailed information available on the local private website met a huge community need in three main ways. Information was available at all times of the day and night, from anywhere in the world, and we got inquiries from all over the world because of the internet. New information was available instantly – another valuable feature. And thirdly members of the community found it to be a new ‘townhall’ and used it as an interactive tool posting their own fire photos.

Two suggestions – suggestion one: that the provincial government take the necessary steps to include the internet as a dynamic public information tool. Plans should be prepared which would allow community websites to be up and running in every major emergency. Our second suggestions here: communities should consider the role of their information services technologist in an emergency. These specialists play a critical role in ensuring websites are operating properly and posting can be done around the clock.

So that completes the presentation on behalf of the City of Kelowna and the Regional District, Councilor Hobson and Chair of the Region and I have the privilege of having the gentleman that – the Director of the EOC and he is right here – Mr. Mattusi, if he would like to come up and join us in case there are any questions that should be referred to him and there probably will be, will do just that.

GF Well thank you very much gentlemen. That is a very comprehensive and a very thoughtful presentation and you certainly have given us a great deal of food for thought. Useful suggestions, lessons on practices that worked well for you, and certainly emphasis on utilizing all of the tools available at our disposal, including the new technologies that – you are right, I am astonished always at how many people will access a website and how many hits you can get when people know that it is being kept up to date.

If I may, I would certainly like to go through all of these recommendations with you because they are comprehensive, they are based on a good deal of your knowledge and direct experience, so I think they can be very, very useful for us as a commission and others.

The partnership role between local government and the provincial emergency response – I am not sure whether there is reference within your presentation to early on difficulties sorting out, so to speak, who is in charge. Because most of these efforts occurred as a result of the provincial government declaring the state of emergency, in effect they gave the emergency powers or they held the emergency powers which they could delegate then to local governments,

other agencies, which ever – and the choice was made in terms of what was the most practical. In other words, who was in the best position to make certain decisions.

So this whole area of the true partnership, the merging of organizations, three different levels of government in effect here, although the fed's was really a passive supportive role, there certainly were two active levels of government, but countless agencies within that active role. Is there any difficulty in your part in accepting the need for provincial direction in terms of the overall emergency?

- WG Mr. Mattiusi will handle that – clearly in this case before the fire hit our area there was already a provincial state of emergency announced so you are on the right track there, but the frustrations and the partnership role I think Mr. Mattiusi can best address.
- RM Thank you Your Worship, Mr. Chairman – I don't think we are implying here that there doesn't have to be a hierarchy of duties and responsibilities and we recognize and accept that. I think one of the difference that we saw that in augmenting the plans there were clearly, it was our feeling that by and large it probably worked most years – year in and year out there are hundreds of forest fires and most of those fires are in fact in rural areas and from time to time they do impact on communities, often smaller communities. Really what was unique here was – I am not sure that this type of collection of activities of a large fire impacting a large urban area with a municipality, in fact a regional response and an organization that normally happened – so again we don't mean this to be criticism, what we are saying is one size doesn't fit all. And as one re-examines the template, you might have to take into account that what works in Barriere may not work in Kelowna, might not work in North Vancouver or Victoria.
- GF Yes, I think the best way to put it is we are looking to give the authority and responsibility to the level of government that is closest to the place that needs the service closest to the emergency itself and is competent to do the work. In other words, where you have an administration under an incorporated city government like yours, and you have people who are competent to do the work, then delegate that authority and responsibility to them because they are the most capable of doing it. Where you go into an area, part of a regional district where there is no municipal jurisdiction, maybe not even a volunteer fire department and certainly no administrative capability on the ground to deliver the services, then there is a need for the provincial government to come in and not only direct, but deliver, because there is nobody capable or competent to do the work. That works for you?
- RM Absolutely.

GF The 1999 recommendations on risk assessment and carrying out the fire proofing so to speak, we are getting some interesting presentations where communities are – whole range, ones who are taking it one with a passion and believe in it and in carrying it out – either on a volunteer basis or with the help of other resources in the community – maybe forest companies that can help them out with equipment and so on. And of course in all cases the limitation is one of resources – financial as well. I mean small communities just haven't had the resources financially to carry out a lot of these things that bigger communities can. Or you can make it part of development agreement requirements. So if somebody wants to develop the land, they have to meet your requirements so you can build it into that.

I would like to see those 1999 recommendations. Were they ones from your city government or where do they come from originally?

RH I am sorry, what recommendations are you referring to?

GF The wild fire risk assessments and the – I guess the official community plans providing for mitigation of wild fire risk.

RH Yes, our Regional District started that in the early '90s Mr. Chairman and as I said, we were the first to do that. The City of Kelowna has subsequently incorporated that within their official community plan procedure as well, but as we indicated in our report that only works where you have new development. Where you have large tracts of land that are being developed or which were developed earlier, you can't force these measures on private property owners under the current regime.

GF Okay. If they are not yet developed, can you not then make that a condition of development?

RH Yes, you can but if they are holding properties, there are large holdings around the edge of the city outside the Agricultural Land Reserve and in the Regional District in the 100's of acres. There is one in the Mission that is over 600 acres for example, not zoned for development at this time, no services, not shown in the community plan as being developable within any reasonable period. Those lands sit there and of course in our case, the large areas have been burned or partially burned as well and the owners have no resources to rehabilitate them, to take out the dead timber or remove any of the material that is still a fire hazard.

GF All right what are you suggesting then – are you suggesting that this requires provincial legislation to mandate that lands being held for development have to have investments in them to protect them from wild fire risk?

RH Well certainly that could be part of the area for the future that has not been damaged. In our case we have the damaged lands to deal with as well and we

have no federal or provincial program that provides assistance to private property owners to mitigate the damage from wild fire that is not covered by insurance of course. And as I indicate in the report – we have areas where we have serious erosion problems, where we have problems of material which could still create fires which has not been removed and it would be very expensive to remove, burned to the extent that it is not marketable timber. So many of those lands are going to sit there and we at the Regional District level have been able to apply for an HRDC program to do fireproofing within our regional park systems and we are hoping to get money for that. But there is no such program that the federal government has for the province that would allow assistance to be given to private property owners. Perhaps Mr. Mattussi could speak more to the planning side.

RM Certainly, it is always a balance. It's a balance between the fact that in fact people move to hillsides because of that environment. As someone asked me, should people be living on these hillsides – well should people be living in Vancouver, there is going to be an earthquake there someday and should people live in southern Manitoba because it floods from time to time. Part of those things are the risks we have to accept in our personal responsibility. I think we do have to look at this fire and see what we have learned – can we design neighbourhoods that are in fact more fireproof. But the wholesale cutting down of every last tree on the hillsides of Kelowna, I am not sure that is necessarily a solution. We have taken some steps as councilor Hobson has mentioned, we have taken steps within our planning, I think this fire will allow us to look at more of those steps but clearly there is a grey area – there is a gap dealing with those private lands that are being held. And I think the answer may be in some form of incentives to deal with that interface area because I don't believe – it would be very difficult to just legislate it because I think it would be somewhat difficult to just now demand that people go and mitigate hundreds of acres of forests after the fact.

GF Well it also occurs to me that if we are going to mandate by legislation that privately held lands be fireproofed, isn't it a little inconsistent then not to have the same requirement on a provincial park?

WG Bingo.

RM We are local government but we all have to deal with the same types of problems and balance is important.

GF Yeah.

RH In fact, if I could just leave one message with respect to the damaged land, you know we have what I would say is an emergent environmental emergency if you like, because of the four categories of damaged land. Kelowna is quite unique in that it has these two very large provincial parks directly adjacent to our boundaries that have both been severely damaged by fire. We are not

sure what provincial parks is going to do with those lands, we think not very much and that certainly continues to be a concern for us. But we also have large areas of Crown land between the parks and private land and some of those areas are being logged, some are not merchantable for logging. And we have the area of large private holdings which I referred to earlier and only then do you come into the small subdivision lots where people have had homes destroyed and also had trees that had to be removed. All four of those categories of land had needs that are not able to be met by the community. And we as a Regional District are preparing a broader report on these issues to provide to the provincial and federal governments. While I recognize they go beyond your mandate, I did want to put on the record that these concerns exist.

In addition to that, we have long term economic impacts that have occurred because of the fire that we are making representation to the federal and provincial governments about. Businesses for example that have been forced into bankruptcy because areas were evacuated or because they relied on access to Crown forests which were out of bounds for their businesses. Those kinds of things are going to be long term economic impacts for our community.

GF You just bring to mind something I am going to allow you to clarify or maybe correct a statement that was made yesterday with respect to the issue of prescribed or controlled burning practices in and around this area. It was suggested that one of the reasons that it was stopped in past was that the Central Okanagan Regional District opposed it.

RH Well, there is no question that the Regional District and the City of Kelowna have been concerned about air quality for a number of years. We have had deteriorating air quality and so we have been very active in trying to ban backyard burning within the Regional District on small urban lots. We have always allowed burning on properties of over two hectares under appropriate burning conditions and with a fire permit. So as far as I know, I know this has been stated in other places but I can't find any recollection of it that the Regional District was opposed to prescribed burns within Okanagan Mountain Park. But I can tell you that it was recommended in a report of 1997 as I referred to earlier by provincial parks and I think we are now in a situation where we have to determine what we are going to do with the results of the fire within the parklands. We have large areas of partially burned parkland and it is going to create problems of many kinds. The land adjacent to the parks and private lands within the city that is adjacent to the Crown land that is adjacent to the parks. So I think we have to look forward and see what we can do with those areas to mitigate future environmental hazards.

GF Okay, thank you. The sharing of geographic information can be a life and death situation if you are evacuating people and you don't have an exact location. Also even the location specific resources. I mean, if you know that

there is a front end loader at this particular location and you send somebody out to get it – and so this whole business of a data base and having information about the available equipment within all areas of the province – do you see that as the responsibility firstly of the local level of government of keeping it up to date – you know, the locations of individuals and homes that you want to get to in an emergency and also of equipment and resources that you want to get in an emergency. Is it a local level under the coordination of provincial authority, either PEP or something like that. Maybe if it is fire fighting equipment it should be OFC but how do you see that?

RH I think good information systems are very costly and I really can't see any way of – I mean of a provincial mandating of how you would do that. I think the industry has dealt with it to some extent – there is not a lot of formats out there and data sources – the sharing is possible. I think that what we saw was that it wasn't considered an important part of the whole PEP package and really as we have moved into that to the EOC, in fact our mapping was fairly limited – it was only because – looking around the room we said well where's the GIS, well within 24 hours we actually had two full-scale colour plotters and five technicians creating maps and they were very invaluable. So the lesson is not to underestimate that resource. And again, this is a resource now available to a larger community we are not expecting this is going to be in every small town, but I think certainly spending some time both at the regional level, which is probably the best way to try to deal with it – and the local level and then working with the provincial agency just to ensure that in fact they can share the mapping. Our particular problem was that we had a wild fire that through most of the time it attacked Kelowna, actually ran along the boundary of the region. It was almost scary how it seemed to run right up the boundary of the city, the region and the provincial parks. And clearly it ran as – from an experience of many nightmares that I had that night – it clearly ran at the middle of where those three types of base maps intersected and so that was something we had to build on the fly. We learned a lesson. I think it was a simple matter for the city and region now to make sure we have a seamless base. I think it really just means having some of those protocols and just recognizing that it is a very important resource. In the end I think it was probably the most under – we walked in the room, it wasn't there and in the end certainly I know as both the RCMP and General —(?) came through their tours. They thought it was outstanding the level of map and reconnaissance that we could have with those maps.

So again it is one of those new technologies. Forestry had wonderful mapping. They did a great job. They had thermal mapping, but the ability to take and share information was critical. It was one of those things where we found a way to do it, it would have been nice if some of those protocols were in place beforehand.

GF Again, it looks as though it is a very logical recommendation of the different organizations operating on different boundaries and obviously if you can't

superimpose the boundaries and you don't know who you are dealing with – whether it is a Forestry regional boundary, or whether it's a PEP regional boundary, or any of these things, well just municipal regional boundaries – so those are worth considering.

This business of evacuation orders – I think the overall perspective that people have is that there was a zero risk strategy taken. In other words it was always erring on the side of caution. That unlike the situation in California where people died because they didn't get out, here that was never an issue. People were always taken out. Perhaps the complaints I have been hearing are that they shouldn't have been taken out – that there was no risk and that if they had only used more local information that the call should have rested right at the local level – as you are suggesting at the EOC. In Lytton we were told that in one particular evacuation notice the order was given from Kamloops with the incident commander being sixty kilometers away as the local verification. So those are things that – its an instance where some things can be delegated to the local level where you have set up an EOC with tremendous capabilities and competent people there. So, certainly worth considering.

The confusion over rescinding evacuation orders and re-entry certainly has been raised before.

Regional emergency plans. Interesting. We don't have regional governments in Manitoba so I am familiar with municipal jurisdiction and all municipalities required to have those plans. I am interested to know that that leaves huge gaps because of the regionalization. So I think that is something that has to be looked at.

The roster and screening system for qualified forest fire fighters, make better use of local talent capability and experience is akin, as somebody has put it to the militia in the armed forces where people who are reservists who are known and are there and their talents, their skills, their knowledge – they have training periodically to make sure that they keep up to date with things and at the same time if we were in a time of war they would know instantly who the people were in their area. Well, as somebody said in one of the early presentations, this was not unlike a war in the way in which you had to marshall all sorts of resources.

RH Mr. Chairman, just one point if I may, I think the point is that what we were seeing and it was a number of people showing up at the door and I think that wasn't – we just didn't need to be overwhelmed by volunteers and even with equipment – I mean people were parking D9s outside and asking to be billed for it. I mean even in an emergency finance is important and so we need a structure that has the equipment or the people when we need them. We don't really need it rolling up to our doorstep as we are trying to evacuate people.

GF I think I saw a picture from Chief Zimmerman's parking lot with about fifty pieces of equipment there at one time so I understand that.

The re-negotiation of the disaster financial assistance program – I would say that every province in Canada would agree with that. I can tell you many stories from the floods of 1997 as to how the gaps in the system exist and it's designed on a certain model and it doesn't include forest fires – I know that from 1989 when we had our worst in history. So I think that those are certainly things that every province would support.

I think you made, Your Worship, the right comment about respect in the case of media access and media relations. That is something I think that should underlie any plan and recognition that everybody has a job to do and communications is not an intrusive thing if it is proper information that people are desperately seeking. Certainly there was a lot of anxiety out there.

All the recommendations with respect to public information, communications, and so on are ones that we have been hearing throughout the process and they are absolutely critical to a well organized, well run emergency plan, including the websites, the technology and all of those matters.

Thank you very much. Are there any other issues?

We have taken a lot of time with your particular presentation because you have taken a lot of time in putting it together and we are very much appreciative and it will certainly be something that we will be reading over again and utilizing as we get through the process of preparing our recommendations. So thank you very much.

WG/RH/RM Thank you very much.

Chief Gerry Zimmerman:

First of all thank you for this opportunity. I have given you my submission in writing and what I will do right now, I will probably just speak to some of the specific things and I will keep it brief.

What I am going to do is echo some of the things that the previous speakers have just spoken about. I think they are important ...

(Tape 3)

... intended or we tried to do here based on our strong regional plan that we had, that we've practiced that we had in place that's been a good one. Based on our mutual aid agreements that we've got with our neighbouring fire departments – they all really helped but a couple of other things that really helped too was the help that we got from the outside fire departments from around the province, and also the community. We had big community backing, that allowed us to do our job. Very important – one of the recommendations that was made that Councilor Hobson made was that municipalities are forced to have emergency plans where regional districts aren't. I think that is backwards. I agree with councilor Hobson that is totally backwards. Apparently there is only about half of the regional districts in this province that have emergency plans and that is probably just not adequate. When something like this happens, you have usually got pretty good local resources. If that was mandatory that regional districts were forced to have emergency plans, plus the provincial government helped them set them up – I don't mean just say you've got to have one. Send the people in to help them build this thing, send them some expertise. We've got a lot of it locally, we've got people like Beryl Itani and Sid Labeau(?) that have worked on this, have done this – make use of people like that – help them set it up. Don't say you've got to have it – give them the template like councilor Hobson said – give them the people to help them do it. Then, in the case of emergency, even in some of the smaller regional districts I believe that probably what could happen is these groups of people that help them set them up could be brought in as advisors – not as dictators, or people that come in and say this is what you have to do – but as advisors to them, to help them do their job when they need to do it. I think that is one of the most important things. If nothing else but that gets out, I think that would be a significant change.

The second thing, and Mayor Gray has spoken about this, is our media relations. And it goes a step further than that – we had the opportunity to learn from the Barriere experience – and what we saw in Barriere when we watched it on TV was that the media was being choked for information, plus the people that lost their homes were not being told what had happened. We just decided very early in this thing that we were going to look at both of those items, we were going to work with the media and were going to let people know as soon as we could – which we did even after we lost the 223 houses on the one night, we were back to those people within a day and a half to let them know what happened. I think that is important because it is cruel not to tell people when you have lost your home. I think that is inexcusable. But the

relationship with the media, the media has got to be looked at as being an equal partner in this thing, not an adversary. We opened our doors to them down at the fire station where we had our EOC set up. We told them what we expected of them and they didn't betray us. They basically gave us everything that we needed. They were part of this operation and one of the things that happened was in our evacuation – we had the second largest evacuation in history and probably one of the smoothest that could be done anywhere. The reason we were able to do that is because of the media – as soon as we knew where we wanted to evacuate we would give it to the media. We had excellent response from the RCMP they did a fantastic job and all the volunteers that helped, but the media got that message out. People would be watching because they knew they were going to get accurate information.

I heard one story where people were in a movie theatre here – the media got the information on the evacuation and the usher was walking up and down the aisle with a piece of cardboard and a flashlight telling what had been evacuated. That's pretty good cooperation. We couldn't have done it without the media. So I think that's something that everybody can learn by.

Our relationship with the B.C. Forest Service. This was a different situation we just went through. Our relationship with the Forest Service is excellent in this area. We have got unofficial agreements with them, official agreements with them, but the crux of it is if there is something happens close to the boundaries, we don't respect the boundaries when something is happening on a normal basis. We will cross over theirs, they will cross over ours, we help each other – good relationship. As a matter of fact a few years back we had a possible urban interface fire in our Magic Estates Knox Mountain area here – if we hadn't the Forest Service there we would have lost houses – we were about six minutes away from losing part of a subdivision. They saved it for us – along with our own people. But that was done with cooperation. So the relationship with them is, in my view, in this area is phenomenal. And I don't want that undermined.

Now what happened here, this Okanagan Mountain Park fire, this was different. We weren't accustomed to something like this and neither were they. To have a rank six fire coming at you in an urban interface area, I mean all the experts can tell you how you can fight it after the fact, but that was something different. Could we do things different? Sure. I know darn well we could do things different and probably one of those things is that we look at our command structures and some things like this. Maybe we need to do some tabletop exercises for something of this magnitude. Maybe we need – you know the structural departments need more access to their fire behavioural specialists so that they can come in and tell us what to expect. When people come in and say – you've got winds of 130 or 140 kilometers an hour, you've got walls of flame 300 to 400' high – I don't even know really what they were. We don't know about those kind of things and could we do it a little bit different next time? Yeah, probably we could. I know there was

some people that thought that – you know that we were maybe respecting lines that we shouldn't have respected and that could be true in certain situations, but there is some work to be done there and I think we can do it with them. I wouldn't want to do it in exclusion of them. But as I say the relationship normally is very good and I think we can build on that. This was just different.

Provincial government agencies – and this one I am speaking specifically of PEP and of the office of the Fire Commissioner – we were never really clear who was in charge of certain things. Now that could have been partially our fault too, I know PEP has a manual that is out that explains some of these things – the Fire Commissioner does not. What I would say, that if provincial government agencies are going to be involved in these major disasters that perhaps what they need is something that instead of being three inches thick is about this thick so that the average person is going to read it and understand it. And it's not too difficult to pick a one page – who is in charge of what. I think that can be done – and it can be done prior.

Some of the other issues are the provincial government department – that was the provincial fire department that was established. This one gave us a lot of headaches because the legislation has been in effect since 1996 to create a provincial fire department. I didn't know about it – I maybe should have but I didn't and I think a lot of other people didn't either. But, over and above that I never saw anything in writing, I never saw any policies, I never saw any plans. I didn't know how this thing was going to be implemented when it was. We had people showing up representing the office of the Fire Commissioner that we would ask them what are you here for and they couldn't tell us. PEP on the other hand would send people into our EOC to consult with us. They could come in and they would say is there anything you need? They would look at it and they would leave or do it from a distance. There was no interference from them.

When it comes back to this provincial fire department that was set up – at one stage we had set up an operational plan – the regional district administrator, myself, and the fire chief from a certain area had set up. We got a call from the Fire Commissioner's office 24 hours later. They by-passed their own chain of command that they had set up that, as far as I am concerned, was too steep, but they by-passed their own chain of command to tell us what we were going to do. When we questioned it, that it didn't make any sense, basically a comment was made to us that the regional district boundaries do not exist, the Kelowna fire department does not exist, the Fire Chief Ian Jorich(?) does not exist, we can replace you at any time we feel fit to do so – which I am sure my political masters would like to know that ahead of time if they are going to do that – and basically we are accepting all liability and all costs. I've got no problem with that if that's what they want to do but I would like to know that ahead of time so that I can at least prepare for it and that we would understand that. But that caused us a fair bit of confusion that probably at the

time we didn't need and, unfortunately, when these things are going down you don't have the time to be politically correct sometimes and tempers flare. So I would prefer to do those things ahead of time.

Another thing I found a little – well wrong – was the rates of pay for the fire equipment – the structural fire equipment. As I said we were very happy to get it from outside, but money wasn't the motivator for either the people or the equipment that we had here – it just wasn't. Those people, a lot of them would have been up there for nothing – maybe not all, but a lot of them would have been up there for nothing if that was the case. The provincial rate that was set and here again I believe set by the Fire Commissioner is \$500 an hour for a pumper truck. Now when you start adding that up, the amount of trucks that were used and the rate for standby, we didn't even understand it because it was so vague that we really didn't know what that even meant. So the bill for an average truck, an average pumper up on any fire scene in this thing it was – well from anywhere being used here, if it was a 12-hour shift, you are looking at \$6,000. A lot of money when you start multiplying that times thirty days, or whatever they happened to be out – and it didn't seem to matter what kind of truck it was, it just said pumper truck. These same things are identified in the Salmon Arm fire earlier on, in the late '90s. They were passed on and nothing was ever done with them. So those problems still exist.

People in key positions – this was another thing – when they created this provincial fire department they basically started filling chairs and it didn't seem to matter where they filled them from. There were a lot of really good people put into those positions, but there were also people there – I don't know why they were – some of the decisions that were coming out – some of the comments, the remarks just wasn't what it needed to be, plus the consistency. We would phone Kamloops for something one day and phone back the next day, there would be a different person sitting in that chair and they hadn't passed anything on. They lost control of things and so did we. It was a little bit tough.

The Mayor and Councilor Hobson spoke about evacuations. This also was a major problem I think because it was a time-consuming thing. Some of my staff were up in Kamloops during the Barriere fire and they said that to get an evacuation order approved in some cases could take up to eight hours. Well when you've got local people here that are making decisions whether that evacuation should be done or not, why the heck do we have to go through three levels of bureaucracy and back down to make that happen – that just doesn't make any sense to me at all. And what you are doing – you are wasting time. So that I think could be streamlined, it could be done at the local level. If we are being appointed to act for the Fire Commissioner or whoever is going to be in charge during this thing, I think we have the ability to make those decisions or we shouldn't be in those positions.

One of the last things is administrative control of what was coming – this is another thing that we encountered as a major problem. We didn't have the proper forms, documents or reports in place when this first happened. They seemed – I don't know if they were developed after the fact or not, but we didn't have them. Another thing, when we went to order equipment, we would order – at one point during the second when we thought this thing was coming back at us, we wanted thirty units because we were going to start gelling houses. We ordered thirty units from the Pre-op in Kamloops. What we ended up getting, they sent us a list of what it would be – what we got was completely foreign from that list. I think instead of getting thirty we got 37, and it wasn't the units that we had asked for. Somebody just started sending stuff and I guess when they got tired of counting them out, they stopped – I don't know but – and then when we were finished with them, at one point we went to send these trucks back. We were finished and we knew we were finished – we let Kamloops know at that time and the information that we got back, or the directive that we got back – you hold them until we can send somebody down to do a count of them. We said this is stupid because if they are costing you the kind of money they are costing you why would we keep them here if we have already got the numbers. We ended up releasing them anyway, but that was in effect what we were told – to hold onto them. So there didn't seem to be administrative control

So I guess in summing it up, what I am saying – well it's not what I am saying, it's what the Fire Commissioner's office has told me – they referred to a policy at one point and I said gee that's great, can I see that policy – well, it's not in writing. And then they referred to their plan and I said can I see your plan – well we don't have that either. So in effect they didn't have anything. They were operating by the seat of their pants as they went along – which is not really helpful when you are up to your – well you know what.

I guess, sort of the last thing that I would like to say – the question has come up – is who should be in charge of this thing. I am a firm believer that you don't need too many fingers in the pie when this is going on. We have got a provincial emergency program that is a good one. We have a Fire Commissioner's office whose main duties are code enforcement and fire investigations and have nothing to do with fire suppression whatsoever as far as I know. I think to consolidate it under one branch might be a little bit smoother overall. I think that way an outfit like PEP could clearly set out what would happen in large scale disasters. They could provide the proper training, set reasonable rates – you know, have qualified people there and like I said earlier they would probably be able to advise or have teams of people to come in and advise during a provincial emergency like we had.

So that's pretty much it.

GF Thank you very much, Chief Zimmerman. Congratulations for many of the things that you did under extreme circumstances and the recognition that you

received. I saw the photographs in the paper, the Governor General and you and so, well done.

GZ Thank you.

GF The whole issue of where the provincial role is in this, is going to be a difficult one just simply because if you take the circumstances this summer and the enormous impact on a municipal jurisdiction no matter how big it is, no matter how well organized it is, no matter how much planning, resources, emergency planning, and competent people you have, this was way bigger than you could handle yourself. And so somewhere along the line, I mean you can't be the person on the phone, phoning every fire department in the lower mainland trying to get pumper trucks. You can't be the person trying to find out where the pumps are – or the hoses, or all of those kinds of things. Help me through this – but do you see that there has to be a role for some body that comes in and ties all this together – has the data base – knows where the trained people are – who is available – knows where the equipment is and how they can access them, all those kinds of things. There is a role there for some sort of provincial coordinating activity to make sure that you get access to all these things instantly, while you are the guy who is the general directing the war right on the scene. Right?

GZ Right. I agree with that.

GF Okay, so then it is a matter of coordination and making sure that everybody understands everybody's role, but somebody else out there is doing all these other things for you that go well beyond your boundaries.

GZ Absolutely.

GF The same thing is true of every other of the services – the social services side of thing, all the emergency services that – having an outside coordinating activity and structure is absolutely essential at a time of emergency that is this big and well beyond the capability of any local government. But the local governments are competent to do it. Like I say, you are the general on the scene. Somebody else is out there as the field marshall getting all these things into your hands to make sure that you can do your job.

The communications – there is no question, you in this area learned from the experience of the others that came before you because I read a couple of hundred pages of press scans and early on in the crisis, in the early fires whether they were down south or up north in the Barriere-McLure area, there is no question that there was a great deal of conflict over the who issue of communications. Here, the daily and many times a day briefings, the consistent putting out of news releases, sharing of information, making sure that people were absolutely informed, that there wasn't a sense of anxiety. That people could get the information through channels, that you could

distribute that information using, as you say, an active partner in the media was a great change in practice and one that seems to have worked very, very well. So, congratulations on that.

The rates of pay – I said this yesterday, that after five days I still haven't had anybody say to me that their criticism was that people were pulling the purse strings and weren't letting them spend money. It was in fact the other side, where the question was – where is the control, where is the restrictions – the reasonable restrictions – not on things that you need, but I think as I say you may have been the one who showed me the picture of all the trucks sitting in your yard – the pumpers. And the question is how much was being paid on a standby basis for all of that equipment and how much it ultimately was necessary and was used.

There are issues because you don't get one of those pieces of equipment there in a few hours. If you need it, it takes how long to get from the lower mainland and to get into your yard and things of that nature. So, some of it was necessary. The question is was this really looked at or did they just do as you say – you ordered 30 and they sent you 37 and said you should be happy. You know, all those kinds of things. So the rates should be looked at. And, would you say that the rates should be set in such a way that somebody gets a fair turn for having that equipment – they are not using it, they are not getting anything if it is sitting in their driveway or in their garage, but should there be a fair rate that pays them something reasonable, because they want to help in any case. I mean, I know that when it was the ice storm in Quebec we sent every generator we could get our hands on out there and we didn't ask about how much they were going to pay us – we just knew that they needed it and it would come – eventually you would work something out. But this business of having to pay for everything in a time of emergency – I am with you. I think that most people don't expect to make money on your grief and there are all these volunteers out there who are doing things for nothing, because they know that they are doing something that is really, really important. So do you have some ideas about that? How do you give somebody fair compensation without letting them make a huge profit on the basis of a civil disaster?

GZ Do I have some ideas on it? Well I don't think we have to reinvent the wheel. I think we just have to probably look next door or down south and find out how they are doing it. Here again I don't want to quote what they are doing in Alberta or Washington but I have heard that an average truck, you know a pumper truck is at \$100 an hour rather than \$500 an hour. I believe that in a state of emergency everything is supposed to be for the public good and not the individual good and this appeared to be opposite to me.

GF I have heard the same rates. What about the people side of things. You haven't said it, but there is big inequities in terms of people who come here from other departments with significant collective agreements that require

them to have travel time, over time, all sorts of things, fighting side by side, shoulder to shoulder with people who are being – in some cases not paid at all – but in other cases not significant rates of pay – the volunteer brigades who did an enormous job as well. Any way of sorting that out?

GZ Yes, a lot of these are not unreasonable people, they have collective agreements and if I come to you and say I am going to pay you according to your collective agreement and you say thank you, I'll take that. If I come to you and say under a state of local emergency we would like a bit of a concession here and I believe they would do that. I know there were a lot of the major departments from the lower mainland where people wanted to come here to help. They wanted to come on their own time. And so, here again it goes back to if I offer you \$500 you are going to take it. If I offer you something ahead of time, I don't mean during the disaster, I mean in the wintertime when the snow is flying – like right now sit down and talk to these people, I think you would be surprised how cooperative they would be with you. You know, I don't want to tell you what that would be because I don't want to put words in their mouths, but I deal with these people every day and they are responsible.

GF Thank you very much.

GZ Thank you.

GF I apologize that we have fallen a little behind our schedule, but I think you all agree that it was important to utilize the resources of the people who have spent a lot of time preparing these reports for us and so I apologize to those who have been kept waiting.