

## **FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW**

Public Meetings

### ***Kelowna***

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*Part B*

GF    Okay, we are going to sit here as long as there are people who want to appear this afternoon and may no be able to appear tonight and so I will call a few names that we still have on the list and we have one – Chris Blann – is Chris Blann here – would you come forward, please.

Good afternoon and welcome.

Chris Blann:

Thank you. I've got to tip my hat to the effort you are putting into this. It's certainly a huge undertaking what you are doing here right now.

I am actually from the south end of this fire. I actually live in Naramata. I wore two hats on this fire – I was a contract fire fighter and I am also a member of the Naramata fire department. Back in the beginning of October I wrote a letter to the Penticton Herald and I kind of want to go over it. Like I have heard the last few days, people who were not on the fire line as I was going on what should have been done, this that and the other thing – they are entitled to their opinions, however – you know like in structure fire fighters and auto ex and things like that – what was actually there and what you thought might have happened, or could have been done are two different things.

So, basically this is a letter to express what I experienced as a faller on the Okanagan Mountain Park fire. It also might give some insight to people who were not on the fire but seem to offer suggestions as to what should have been done. As we know on the morning of August 16<sup>th</sup> two fires were started from lightening that passed through the area. There were two fires. For the most part in the media I have only been able to hear about the one, the Okanagan Mountain Park fire.

One fire was located up at Rat Nip Lake. It was about 3-1/2 kilometers north of Chute Lake, up in the hills a bit. The other of course was the Okanagan Mountain Park fire. The fire at Rat Nip Lake was near an area that had heavy fuel loads in merchantable timber and the fire in the provincial park started in open grass and yellow pine stands. I was called to go to the Okanagan Mountain Park fire as a faller. The acronym is a DSF – dangerous snag faller. I have worked with Neil Campbell on fires before. I was tasked to assist the ground crews in making the work areas safe from burned out trees falling down unexpectedly, buck burning logs that might compromise the fire guard and to locate and slash out helipads as the crew moved up the fire line.

I arrived on the Okanagan Mountain Park fire at about 11:30 in the morning. I got a phone call at about 10/10:30 and the fire officer Leo Gill looked at the time and so I collected my gear, I drove up to the fire hall and he came by in a helicopter and picked me up in the back yard. They didn't have a faller and trees were starting to come down so I was it – I was the only one – everybody else was busy on all the other fires. We couldn't land at the time because the area was being actioned by the air tankers. All the air tankers, the ducks, everything – they were just going to beat the band at that time of day and had been for the previous hour or two.

By 12:00 noon, we had landed and I had met up with a supervisor from a fire crew who directed me to the fire line. At this time the air temperature was hot and there was a slight breeze blowing at the time from the south. I hiked down towards the beach with all my gear and I hiked back up, I felled the dangerous

trees, you know they were burning, some had already fallen down or were about to fall down, flames coming out of the things and I had the helicopter that was there at the time, trying to buck it, cool it down. Some of them I just couldn't do it – they just burned – put up ribbon to keep things safe and worked up the line toward the crews at the front of the line. At this time I had noticed the fire, it was so hot and so dry that the fire was actually burning through the pine needles that had retardant on them. We didn't need the wind to blow them through that stuff, it was powder dry. The needles when you crushed them, they didn't break, they just powdered, like you are sprinkling pepper on your food. The hang guard that crews were putting in – hang guards to back up the retardant lines, because it was burning through it. They were digging it down to mineral soil.

The hang guards were monitored by the forestry crews for breaches, and the objective at this time directed by the forestry personnel was to keep the fire as best they can out of Wild Horse Canyon. Like construction fire fighters you have a task and you have an objective and you are doing your best to meet that objective. They didn't want it to get to Wild Horse Canyon – there was a good load of pine needles on the ground, but as also a BCIT grad I am also aware that trees are under stress when it is really dry and they start throwing needles. There was an obscene amount of needles on the ground because the ground had been weathered – been dry for the previous two years – you see it in town everywhere.

At about 2:00 p.m. I noticed the wind had started to pick up and I was watching a sailboat out there – its leeward side was right down – whitecaps – it was getting wild with a corresponding increase in fire behaviour. By 3:00 p.m. the wind was blowing very hard, and there were whitecaps on the lake, and the fire behaviour changed dramatically. I was continuing to work just ahead of the crews, cutting the dangerous trees, calling in helicopter drops in vigorous hot spots near the fire guard and also slashing out helipads. I noticed the wind was taking hot embers and creating spot fires ahead of the fire and on several occasions on the wrong side of the retardant lines.

These spot fires grew very rapidly in the windy conditions, one grew – I estimated it about 10 x 10 meters to by the time the other forestry crews caught up it was a hectare – in about ten or fifteen minutes. It was incredible. The tankers were doing their best to keep the fire controlled but the wind was so strong the fire was continually spotting ahead of itself. People seemed to – whether they – I have talked to people and my mother has, who lives here in Kelowna, they didn't realize there was another fire at Rat Nip Lake going to beat the band just up the hill from us. So there was limited resources, these resources had to bounce back and forth to the two fires. It wasn't an easy job keeping these tankers – who is more important – we didn't know what the end result was going to be.

So the type of ground we are working on precluded any option of using heavy equipment, barging it across the lake and bringing it in there. The rock bluffs were incredible. They were anywhere from 10 feet to 50-60 foot sheer drops. Somebody mentioned working at night. It was difficult enough during the daytime, little alone the safety factor of working around the fires in that sort of terrain. It wasn't easy. We used to that when we were kids – go rock climbing – it was nuts up there.

After four days of trying to keep the fire out of the Wild Horse Canyon the winds had taken the fire north and east and it did jump the Wild Horse Canyon up at the north end of the park. That afternoon the wind had shifted and the wall of fire was heading down towards Naramata. That night an evacuation alert was issued and then an order for the north end and the Glenford areas. The air tankers were continually dropping; doing everything they could to stop it.

A machine guard was built – you heard about this in the Penticton one when Tom Chapman was part of it – a machine guard was built and there was a fellow from the forest service, a Leo Gillick(?) who made a call that really saved Naramata and the fire carrying on. He wanted to back burn. And the fire – the wind again slowed down and it started blowing again from the south – perfect conditions – we got the back burn in, there were a few hot spots, slowed the fire down enough and the structure guys, the forestry guys, everybody worked perfectly together. Everybody was just holding hands and they got it out, controlled it so it didn't jump, didn't threaten the houses.

And the same drama was also happening up at the Chute Lake area, the Chute Lake Lodge – it got saved – they lost an outhouse and a tool shed – oh well.

And then the wind started picking up in the south on the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup>, and unfortunately we know what happened after that on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>. It hit Kelowna.

There are some fact and point that I would like to reflect on. In my opinion being on that line, listening to the radio traffic, working with the forestry crews, the initial attack guys, the contract guys – the forestry officials at that time did everything they could to control that Okanagan Mountain Park fire. The wind strength and the direction was the single-most influential factor that made the fire do what it did. Secondary was the fuel that it was burning through – the open grass pine stands. And then it would hit a little micro chasm of dense trees and off it would go. But the wind was the single-most influential factor and all the preparedness and that, we can't do anything about it – it happened – Mother Nature – we can't stop it, we can't alter it.

The first few days, the aerial tanker applications, they weren't going to do much to that fire. I mean people were asking about the Martin Mars – and I

have heard people say the Martin Mars should have been called in. From what I experienced and from what I saw in my BCIT days, the first day – you know, they wanted to call it in the first day on the fire. The Martin Mars I know is owned by a consortium of logging companies and acts as a fire engine to protect the owners' interests on Vancouver Island. The fire hazard on the Island was extreme as well. They had forestry bans; they didn't want people running around in the bush down there, much like we didn't. Taking that fire engine out of their district – I in Naramata know that we can't take our fire trucks out of the district, out of our protection area unless there is a crisis or we get permission. They might have thought it was too big of a risk. They did eventually come up, send one up eventually.

You know I wanted to thank Leo Gillick and his decision to back burn it – I honestly think he took a pretty gutsy decision and it saved us out there in Naramata. But the forestry crews, the communication that we had in the first week in the south end of the fire, it worked really well. You heard the Naramata department guys – we worked hand in hand – we still worked with the Forestry, the Penticton Protection Branch – Tim Ottishaw(?) comes out and gives us a chitchat every year – we go over Summerland and work with interface forestry Summerland – other guys – you know we are really for the most part one big happy family down there. You know, I suspect they learned some stuff from the Garnet fire and let's get along instead of doing this empire-building – who is in charge and stuff like that.

The first day that the Fire Commissioner showed up or the fellow representing the Fire Commissioner there was a little bit of friction I think in the Naramata Hall and that soon got smoothed out and they helped us out with the paper work and the order of things and we looked after the operations – you know, to do the structure stuff and it worked really well. Naramata and we got the fire departments to help us out with the draughting and of tankers and stuff like that.

But what could have been done differently at the opening days of the fire? I don't know what could have been done. I wouldn't have been wanting to run around up there at night because of the terrain. It was very, very steep and very rocky and at the best of times it was a really tough slough. I am fairly fit and I was bet after 10 and 12 hours of that and so were the other guys. But they did everything they could and hot spots, fires, the wind – was the single-most factor in this fire that made it do what it did. I don't think we could have done much different.

That's really basically all I wanted to say – you know – come to the defense of some of these guys.

GF Thank you very much, Chris, for coming forward. I know that it takes courage to both be there at the front lines fire fighting and also maybe to come here and defend yourself to some degree. But there is nothing like the experience

of people who were right there on the scene at the time and right in the midst of ...

CB I must say though, those four days were the time of my life, I had a blast. I am in my mid-forties and I had a hoot – running around – I liked that adrenalin rush – and working with the forestry guys was terrific.

Anyway, thank you.

GF Thanks very much, Chris.

We are getting close to five, but we do have a presentation that is scheduled from Ann Ferguson of the Interior Health authority. Is she here? Thank you.

Is Patty Hall still here? -- okay you are next on the list and Thank you Ann.

Good afternoon and welcome.

Ann Ferguson:

I'm very pleased to be here representing the Interior Health Authority this afternoon. We wanted to give you a snapshot of our experience with the firestorm.

First of all I wanted to give you an overview of who we are – what is Interior Health? And so we are one of six health authorities in British Columbia and we were created under the Health Authorities Act in December of 2001. So we are a relatively new organization. We are geographically located in the south eastern part of British Columbia from Williams Lake to the U.S. Border, and from Anaheim Lake to the Chilcotin – so we are covering the whole south east portion of the province. We have a population of 698,000 people, with 35 acute care sites and a number of residential beds – as you can see over 4,000. We have 17,000 employees and there are 1,200 physicians in our area.

We operate as four health service areas and they serve the Thompson-Caribou-Shuswap, the Okanagan, the east Kootenay and the Kootenay Boundary area.

Each health service area provides a continuum of services including acute, residential, home and community and mental health. In addition to that we have a health authority wide health service which provides health protection services and prevention and early intervention. And the corporate services are also organized health authority wise – that would be our financial services, human resources, information technology, capital planning and facilities development and strategic information to name a few.

I wanted to give you a bit of the context within our service boundaries. We have 54 communities, most of which have emergency response plans and a great majority of those would have EOCs that would be set up in case there is an emergency or a disaster threat. We have ten regional districts and there are 55 First Nations Communities also responsible for their own emergency response plans and those are in varying stages of development. There are three pre-ops – the provincial, regional emergency operations centres under our provincial emergency program located within our boundaries as well.

The northeast covers down as far as Williams Lake and 70 Mile House. We have the Central Kamloops which covers the Thompson, Caribou, Shuswap and Okanagan and the south east which covers both of the Kootenay areas. In addition to that we have the B.C. Ambulance Service region located in Kamloops.

Now providing this context that's showing you the complexity of the communication that we would have in a situation like this and what's our mandate for emergency response. There is provincial legislation including acts

and regulations and also the Ministry of Health Planning and Health Services policy states that we will adopt the same emergency response management system standards as other ministries who are presenting here today. There is an expectation that we will integrate with other stakeholder plans including ambulance, local EOCs, pre-ops, and other ministries. We also meet the standards from the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation for Emergency Preparedness.

So our level of emergency preparedness when the firestorm occurred – our system that we are developing is based on the standards and the accreditation standards as well. We have a steering committee. We have been developing our emergency response management system and monitoring the implementation of that to ensure that we are meeting our goals.

We have local facility plans which would respond to both internal and external emergencies and disasters. So these would be plans that might – they have something called a code grey for example where you might have an air shutdown if there is smoke. Or, we might have code orange for a mass casualty if we have a number of burn victims, that type of thing. So they would respond to both internal and external emergencies and disasters.

We are developing linkages with local municipal government coordinators and our own facility planners. We have a health authority wide all hazards response plan which would assist us and give us a structure for responding in situations like interface fires, or communicable disease, floods, that type of situation. We are developing education training exercise plans and we are incorporating lessons learned from recent experiences with the SARS threat, and are adjusting our plans accordingly.

So the challenges that we are facing – business continuation – we wanted to try to continue caring for our clients and on top of that we had additional demands. So health protection services under public health – they were present in the pre-ops and the community AOCs to give guidance, especially on health protection matters like septic fields, water, food – the fire camp health protection measures – checking to see that the Food Safe was being adhered to and hygiene measures which turned out to be fairly important with an outbreak of a viral illness in one of the fire camps.

Public messaging on health issues – living with smoke – re-entry criteria – what do you do with your food in your fridge or your freezer – what do you do about your septic fields when the tops are all burned off.

And mental health – dealing with the stress – mental health services in the emergency social service reception centres they were a resource and they were supporting persons working in the OECs – they had to map the location of their known mental health clients in the community. They delivered media

messages and professional counseling and also offered 24 hour on-call services.

The acute care services – they needed to continually monitor their capacity to continue elective services and at some point may have had to cut down on the services that they were able to provide. The ready plans to deal with mass casualties should we get an influx of mass casualties and supporting staff who were facing evacuation and loss of homes. We had a number of staff who actually lost homes during the Kelowna fires. They provided staff and other resources to the outbreak in the Cranbrook Fire Camp—I'm trying to give a snapshot of how this impacted our business and added additional work.

The residential care services – we need to plan for possible evacuation and relocation and we did relocate residents from three residential care facilities into others of our facilities. We set up additional spaces to accommodate any frail and vulnerable community residents. We did advance planning in all of our facilities and community based care service delivery. We had daily census reviews, ongoing assessment of client needs, equipment and transportation needs; daily review of relocation options because they would change as more fires broke out, threatening highway egress.

And central registry for our overall IH approach. As you can appreciate, with all four health service areas affected this would influence our evacuation plans that we would have had traditionally in place. And special considerations that we had to consider here – clients or at home oxygen, power failures, oxygen concentrators won't work. Home intravenous therapy – same thing; home dialysis; nursing care clients, clients who need on-going care and are evacuated and relocated to reception centres or other places – we need to know where they are so we can carry on their care. Home support clients, same thing – these are usually vulnerable elderly clients who need support in their homes, personal care, that type of thing. Where are they? Do they need assistance if they are going to be evacuated. Mental health clients – are they experiencing additional stress and do they need additional care? And our private residential care facilities – we contract with them for caring for residential care – what is our obligation to them? And we were involved with that as well.

The infrastructure considerations – we needed the financial guidelines tracking across these four health service areas of public health. Logistics – how are we going to procure the equipment that we need to move our clients when relocating them – beds, other types of equipment, personal aids?

Information technology – communications – we set up public folders that were available to all our staff so they could access the information they needed when they needed it. Public information officers – public messaging and internal messaging – it was a time when everyone worked extremely well together. Re-entry to our normal jobs afterwards was quite difficult because

of the closeness that was built up when you are dealing with a threat like this and working so closely together.

Our role in emergency response – our business is changing. It used to be that we had clients in facilities and now with innovations in how we deliver care, care is increasingly community based. So we need to be able to monitor the needs of those clients in the community and be available for them.

We need to be recognized as a strategic partner by the community EOCs and the Pre-ops, and emergency response planners. As I have said the health authorities are recently newly formed, in 2001. The responsibilities that used to be at the Ministry level for their centrally run services have been devolved to the health authority level and we need to recognize that there is a change and prepare for that.

The additional challenges that we had besides the business continuation and communications, our internal communications – we needed to be able to link public health, the four health service areas EOCs and the IATOC. We set up regular teleconferencing for this and used our public folders. We needed to keep staff informed about what was happening and informing the clients who were presenting for care service delivery, making sure we had information for them on dealing with smoky skies, dealing with stress, where they could get assistance. External communications – we needed to have agency seats in the pre-ops – two of those were secured. The third one in the north east, we didn't have facilities in those areas that were covered by that pre-op so we had telephone communications.

The community EOCs and the reception centres – it is really important to know when the fire notices were being delivered, the evacuation alerts, and then the evacuation orders. We were not able to wait for evacuation orders because we would have had perhaps an hour of notice to evacuate our vulnerable clients and we needed much longer than that so we made special arrangements with the local EOCs and Pre-ops to move our clients when we had triggers indicating that we should do that during the evacuation stage.

The leadership council in B.C. including other health authorities and the reception centre messages – the media, public health messages – we found that our local radio stopped their regular programming and focused on providing information about the fires. They did a good job of getting their messages out and the newspapers as well. Good relationships.

Evacuation and relocation – we need triggers ...

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... registered at the reception centre so that they could be considered or obtain the services of the reception centres.

Tracking the evacuations routes and relocation sites so as the fires progressed we had, for example for Kelowna, if we were going to evacuate we were going to move them to Penticton to our facilities that way. But the fires broke out that same afternoon around Vaseux Lake and we lost our route of egress there and we had to start looking at other locations. And ensuring that the relocations sites aren't overlapping in our facility plans – in some plans if you have just a single event you are quite safe in one community using another community, but when you have multiple sites you need to be sure there are no overlaps and that we have spaces to provide.

Collaboration with the ambulance service and the community EOCs – who has the authority and responsibility for initiating evacuations necessary to collaborate because the rules really are not written – a mass evacuation plan after the evening of August 21<sup>st</sup> when we thought that Kelowna might be lost and the fire was advancing on the city at 100 meters a minute. We then realized that if we had had to evacuate all of our facilities in Kelowna, we needed a mass evacuation plan and hopefully with such a plan we wouldn't have come down to ethical decision-making measures – which ones we would have to leave behind. We had respite from that and during that time too of staff loaned to us from other health authorities and from Vancouver City – developed a plan the phraseology out of a Woody Allen movie called Planes, Trains and Automobiles – rather unique and certainly could be used I think for looking at mass evacuation. The old West Coast Express for example can take 20 stretchers in one car. It is still designed to do that.

The next area of a challenge was the health sector quality management review of the firestorm and rather than this being a challenge, it is a separate initiative that is a collaboration amongst the ministries of Health and the B.C. Ambulance services, Interior Health, and other health authorities and that review is happening currently with this review. We are expecting that report in 2004.

Now the conclusions – a very rich experience and as I said the closeness that developed during those war room times really build relationships, presents opportunities for improving the whole provincial emergency response management system. The usefulness of the B.C. ERMS – or Emergency Response Management Systems structure and functions as a framework for response, it gives you a structure and provides you with the necessary functions to get the job done. On top of that though you need to allow for innovation and creativity to address knowledge gaps in the response – that they are more effective if used with the underlying framework as an organizing and grounding map for action – so you need to have that as an overtone to the underlying structure, but the structure then allows more, I think, building on knowledge and faster implementation.

Increasing the collaboration and reducing the redundancies in the overall provincial emergency response management system – I am not sure at this point what could be done, but I think it warrants further investigation.

So the recommendations out of our experiences is try to reduce the stovepipes in the pre-ops, the community EOCs, the regional EOCs and health EOCs; promote systems thinking when response involves multiple stakeholders for a common threat. And egos do get left at the door and people do collaborate. Maybe we can formalize that a bit more, or perhaps it needs to be ad hoc, but I think it needs to be looked at.

Involve health authorities' as strategic players at the planning table in emergency coordination planning at the EOC and the Pre-Op level.

Add health authority staff to ESS reception centres so that they can be available to offer support, triage folks, vulnerable elders in particular, and to arrange for alternate accommodation if required where elders may need additional support.

Identify barriers to informed decision making. There were times when the information wasn't coming as quickly as we would have liked.

Explore search capacity needs for communicable disease threats. We activated a 200 bed hospital in the Cranbrook area to deal with the outbreak, the viral outbreak in one of the fire camps. Although this was a rather unique intervention, it provides a very rich experience for using alternate resources for surge capacity.

Consider further development of the mass casualty evacuation plan that could be used in any community.

And that concludes our presentation. Thank you very much for inviting us and allowing us this opportunity.

GF Thank you very much, Ann, that's a very comprehensive and thorough review of your involvement in this whole firestorm process and I know that it covers a wide range of issues and responsibilities and you must have done a lot of things right because we haven't heard criticism of your sector and so I congratulate you. And there certainly wasn't loss of life despite all of the various issues that you were dealing with on a 24 hour basis.

It looks as though you have a very structured comprehensive emergency action plan which you obviously developed much in advance of this summer and so again that is a compliment to you and your organization. And you cover a tremendously wide area – I didn't realize graphically how big the area is that the Interior Health Authority covers. That is quite amazing.

I gathered from a presentation that was made by the amateur radio people in Penticton that you at one point lost your telecommunication at some locations – hospital locations – is that right?

AF That's right, when the Vaseux Lake fire occurred, the power line was disrupted at that point and so we lost power at Penticton and also in Summerland. Our acute care hospital in Penticton – I guess the breaker blew – my phraseology – and we were without emergency power for about half an hour, but it was restored. But those are things that maybe you might not consider would happen. With the smoke, the satellite phones were very difficult to use and the ham operators volunteered to come in and actually sit in our IHEOC so that we had a way of communicating. Very useful.

GF Yes, that's great – that's an example of people coming through under unusual and emergence situations. The whole evacuation process, that triggering mechanism – it is very different for me because in our experience with the flood we had plenty of notice as to when people had to evacuate – we could give them twelve hours as the peak moved down the valley. You were dealing with one hour which makes it impossible when you are trying to move many, many people who are mobility handicapped and so on. That is a significant challenge and obviously has to be well thought-out and was.

Your point in conclusions about innovation and creativity, the more I see it the more I recognize the fact that – and it is in many people's emergency plans that as much as possible the process and the plan should allow for people on site who are competent to make the decisions, to make the decisions. That you have as much as possible the totality of the local information there as opposed to making it at some remote location, even if it's a kilometer away, the onsite response is absolutely the best if people are competent to make those judgments on an ongoing basis in an emergency.

I was surprised that you suggest that there weren't health authority staff at the ESS reception centres that would seem to be a mandatory requirement. Was there any health sector person at the ESS?

AF In this – yes, we were able to place them, but it isn't in the provincial plan.

GF Okay, I see. Thank you very much. I appreciate it, it's an excellent presentation.

Now, if Paddy Hall is here and if you would prefer to appear now versus coming back at 7:00 we would be happy to listen to you. Okay. Thank you. Good afternoon and welcome.

Paddy Hall:

Thank you. In a former life I was a special assistant to the Honourable Barbara McDougall in Ottawa. I am very familiar with these sorts of processes and I have tremendous respect for the time and effort that goes on not only here in this room, but behind the scenes, and thank you as a citizen of Kelowna for the efforts you are putting in and the many many hours.

GF Welcome and thank you.

PH First of all, it cannot be stressed enough the outstanding job that has been done by Beryl Itani, our ESS coordinator and Gerry Zimmerman in the leadership of his crews on the front lines. And I know that you have heard that time again and I want to preface my remarks by echoing what has been said. I truly believe that if Beryl had not been as well organized and if we didn't have the heart and soul of our local fire fighters it could have been a very, very different outcome here. When we look at the disaster and we put on our lenses to do the hindsight which is so critical there are the two different areas of fighting the fire. Those who are on the front lines with actual physical fighting of the fire itself and those who are looking after the evacuees and that human component that is so large and that is what I would like to address my remarks to – the soft side of the crisis if you will, the people side of it. I own and operate Beach House Bed and Breakfast which is located about three blocks south of here. It is a 4,000 sq. ft. home on the waterfront and our media did an outstanding job of letting people know what was going on locally as well as throughout the province and in other areas. They did such a wonderful job that I lost \$16,000 worth of bookings because people didn't want to come to Kelowna because of the fire. So, with an empty house, which is quite well set up in terms of high speed internet access to all the rooms, TV VCR, a large meeting area – the living room itself is 29' long by 18' wide – I can accommodate a lot of situations – be it command centre, a place to meet that is very private, and affords lots of room and space. The rooms themselves are well laid out, there is lots of room for kids to play, etc., so immediately I went to register at the Kelowna Secondary School as well as at the recreation centre to let them know that I had space available for meetings, I also had accommodation for families and would do everything that I could to help.

The first group of people who came to me was a couple in their mid-70's, they arrived at quarter to one in the morning and unfortunately I hadn't been notified they were coming and I sat up with them until about 3:30, comforting them – they wanted peanut butter and toast and tea – they wanted to be comforted, they wanted to know that – they had believe that they had lost their home that night. They felt they were too old to start again, what were they going to do. I literally held them while they cried. I was there for them. The next set of people who arrived were former neighbours and they went – they phoned me to make sure that I could take them, they then went to one of the emergency locations and they were told that I wasn't on the list. My

accommodation wouldn't be available to them, it wouldn't be covered by ESS. They then handed their cell phone over to the person at the desk; I assured them that I had filled out the forms, etc. Over the course of the three weeks when evacuees were needing accommodation I filled out the same forms six different times, twice at the school, three times at the rec centre, and after it was all over I went down to the office on Bernard Avenue, filled out the same form again, went back ten days later – it is still not in the system and my accommodation site never was part of the system.

I think that we need to support those in the ESS on the front lines with the technology that is already available via lap top computer, software programs – this is the time now when we are not under any sort of crisis – to make sure that that data is available. It would be very easy to once a year do a phone campaign, call to make sure those who are registered are still available with accommodation in times of crisis.

We know next spring we are going to be in the same problem. This poor woman who has lost so much of her house from the mudslide, that's the tip of the iceberg. More is coming. So where do these people go. One of our top industries in Kelowna is tourism. There are many times when our hotels are full and I have eight bed and breakfasts in my immediate neighbourhood. One has been in business for nine years; they lost 42 nights bookings as a result of the fire – people not wanting to come here. They weren't contacted for accommodation. Another gal who has been in business 17 years, is well-known locally, she wasn't contact. I am not an isolated incident.

So there needs to be a better way of recording other accommodation facilities and what we have to offer – whether by use of people from the Health Authority, or whether it is individual families – could be an ideal spot for media location briefing – we need to have a way to register these.

Also I would like to see that data base available to insurance adjusters because we are in situations where we have long term evacuees, some of them being housed here at the Grand Hotel. While the Grand has fabulous facilities, there are other options available to those people that are probably more cost-effective to the insurance business in the long run, which benefits all of us.

The other point that I would like to make is regarding disbursement of funds. There are many I understand who are not able to have their homes insured because of where they are and their proximity to the infrastructure, the forests, etc., and those people certainly should benefit first and foremost from all of the monies that have been donated to them. My understanding, however, is that all of the monies that have been received are in excess of the need. I know firsthand there are people who have full coverage in their insurance; they are returning cheques that have been received by them from various agencies because they don't need that money. People like myself who

are a small business – I was not directly impacted in that I was not burned out – I have lost the business and business interruption insurance, I pay \$1,348.00 a year for that policy – I am not covered. I lost \$16,000 worth of business which for me as a small business was a very significant amount of revenue. I have gone federal, provincial, local – there is nothing – there is no program that I can find where I can apply for any type of compensation and yet there is more money than is needed by those who lost their homes that is sitting and has not yet been allocated anywhere. Certainly there would have to be a merit criteria that would have to be met by those applying for it, and you would have to be able to show that there is a clear, direct impact – the fire was the cause – the loss of business was the result. That in many cases is fairly easy to do.

The other thing relevant to that is handing that money out 90 days, 120 days after the emergency is over is a time when small business owners have already had their credit rating negatively impacted. People have had their cell phones cut off, etc., because they can't pay those bills. Well coming three or four months after the fire and giving them some money isn't going to help them and there needs to be a timely disbursement of those funds. I know others have leveled criticism at the length of time it is taking for funds to be allocated and I would just like to echo that, particularly because when you are a small business it is your personal credit rating that impacts your ability to do business.

But, having said that, obviously those who lost their homes, etc., should be taken care of first and foremost.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much Patty, you have once again presented a new perspective here that we haven't heard and obviously the affects of the summer's fires were so wide-ranging that there were just all sorts of unanticipated and maybe unrecognized impacts along the way. So thank you for sharing that with us.

PH My pleasure.

GF Now we would normally be taking a break now and I know my colleagues would love to have a bite to eat, but if there is somebody who is here who can't make it back tonight I would be willing to sit and accept another presentation. Otherwise, we will be back at seven.

Please come forward.

Mel Gauthier

MG Yes, I am here to present you one letter by a Bob Campbell from Summerland. There was death in the family and he had to go to Ontario for the funeral, so I am presenting his one page and then my report.

GF Okay, great. Please have a seat and go right ahead. Thank you.

MG Well, no, I don't think I want to make a presentation – I would just like to hand it to you. But, can I make a few comments if you don't mind?

GF Absolutely. What is your name?

My name is Mel Gauthier

Mr. Filmon, I want you to know that the allegations against the B.C. Forest Service are serious and I sometimes wonder if – and I actually do believe that we should have a criminal investigation into why the B.C. Forest Service did not put that fire out – and many others in B.C. This has been the trend now for the last five years. They seem to have fires that get away on them and in my report I also mention that the B.C. Forest Service seems to be good at mopping up a fire and they don't have a clue how to put out a fire when it starts. And most fires start small. A snag has been struck by lightening, carelessness by human error starts a fire – they are all small when they start. So in the Okanagan Mountain Fire I am just pissed right off that the B.C. Forest Service didn't jump on that one fast enough. It has devastated my business to the point that I lost all my timber up at Chute Lake and I am trying to get compensation for that through the recovery centre, but nothing has developed yet.

I believe the B.C. Forest Service should forfeit their rights in B.C., Mr. Filmon, to govern and look after our forests. Through the pine beetle killing, through the B.C. forest fires that have been devastating in B.C., plus now the drought conditions, trees dying from lack of water and also the softwood lumber crisis in the United States. Nothing that the B.C. Forest service seems to be doing is helping us any and it is going to break us in B.C. if we don't start getting better management. I believe that the community of – and the regional districts, regional zones of it – should be involved to manage the forests in B.C. from hereon in. Much more than we have – a joint effort as opposed to the Forestry handling it all by themselves.

Yes, Mr. Filmon, I just want to make maybe a final last comment – your role in B.C. is very important right now. Our B.C. has suffered much this last year through the drought, through the fires, and we have come down to the truth of what happened. I just hope in your case, Mr. Filmon, that you will be able to look at all the input that we, the community have put in here and the complaints we are putting against the B.C. Forest Service and how they

handled affairs – I hope the truth comes out Mr. Filmon, and I hope that you are honorable and you will definitely realize that our B.C. is threatened by the loss of our forest industry.

So, with that in mind, one more little comment ... and I'm sure you will Mr. Filmon, I'm sure you will.

I just hope, Mr. Filmon that that money that the City of Kelowna is going to receive – \$6.2M they are claiming for fighting the fire in Kelowna, the area here, the Kelowna mountain fire. They are going to probably get their \$6.2M, however, us that have lost – and in my case \$50,000 worth of timber – it doesn't look like I'm going to get anything and if I do it's going to be very little. But yet, I can almost guarantee that the City of Kelowna will get their \$6.2M. I feel that as a commissioner I hope you realize and acknowledge that we smaller people do have some compensation, if not all of it. I hope this is considered in the report – our loss of our income, our loss of our valuables, the loss of our homes, I do hope that you side with us and help us in that area.

GF Thank you very much, Mel. I obviously need to look at all of the things that are being put forward and I can firstly assure you that your comments will be a part of the public record so others will read the report and see what you have said. Whether or not I am in a position to make recommendations on compensation – it is a little outside of my mandate, but I will be looking at everything very carefully.

MG I appreciate that.

GF Thank you very much, Mel.

MG Do I just bring the report to you?

GF Yes, please.

MG I sent you a whole bunch of pictures of the fire – not the fire – before the fire started of what I – and the Minister of Forests said he sent them to you.

GF Yes, yes, we did have them. Thank you.

Okay, we will take our break now and be back at seven o'clock. Thank you everyone.

GF Good evening ladies and gentlemen and thank you for coming out. We will continue with our presentations. We have a number of people who have indicated that they wish to speak and we will begin by asking for Dave Ross and Chuck Ross – I am not sure if you want to come together – if so please come forward. Welcome.

We just came from work, that's why we are dressed the way we are.

GF Oh, I thought it was just for me. (It was a long night and a long day) – I'm glad you came, thank you.

Dave/Chuck Ross:

I guess we'll just sort of start with some of the basics, the beginning that you have properly heard a hundred times already. The initial attack when it first started was – that's not the way to do things – you put a fire out – you don't watch it burn. We had close friends that were in contact with one of the bomber pilots or were friends, whatever – and he had – the pilot had let him know that they were pulled off – they were stopped, pulled down or grounded in mid-afternoon when the fire was still burning. It wasn't out. At that point in time it would have been very, very easy to get that fire out. Even if they couldn't get into it – the ground is – it's not good ground where it started, but that would have knocked it down and then they could have got hand crews in there easily to get it down.

Then, we'll just jump back a little bit more here – what I'd kind of like to talk a little bit about was a lot of the back burning that was going on. It – a lot of the stuff that you heard in the media that was announced by Mr. Matuga and their PR people – you'd hear on the news – we'd get home off the lines because we were both on skidders working – he was in the Crawford area and I was around the Mira and Pooley Creek area where the trestles were. They just – I don't know – they would say that the fires had jumped guards and this and that and while we are up there, we are watching them starting back burns – those fires weren't jumping guards because of wind. That wind would have helped; yes, but what they neglected to tell the public, or what they neglected to take responsibility for – was the fact that they were lighting back burns that were getting out of control – *consistently*. This was going on – we'd hear it on the radio, my brother, he'd get the Forestry Channel more than I would and we were listening to this crap – well they did it again – and this is coming from the ground crews. You know there is a time and a place for lighting back burns from helicopters. I am not a fire fighter, I am a logger, but I have several years of experience behind me and we learn from what we do and the way they were lighting those burns, and the places and the conditions should be looked at very, very carefully – because it did not work. I had – one of the fellow when we were up on the one guard – this was before the trestles had burned, it was on the day, or the day before the second evacuation and we were working on guards up there and we were warned at probably 10 or 11 o'clock that they would be lighting back burns and pretty much to a man everybody on the crews just went "Oh Christ!". Now we – I have video tape of it. We watched – we couldn't see the actual fire because we were just on a ridge, it was out of our site line but we were close enough that we had seen the chopper and the buckets and everything – the torches and stuff they were actually lighting these things with. The fire was there – it was burning – but it was relatively calm. Now after they get this going – picture a little puff of smoke – just in relative terms, and then picture Mount St. Helens – that was what the different it looked like was – I can prove that with a picture. And at that night the sucker roars – comes out of the Belvue, around the side of the Belvue Canyon, it went up and over – it crossed two pathetic fire guards, went down

into the canyon and burned the damned trestles down. A lot of those trestles were lost that night – the people didn't know that, the media didn't even know that. But we watched it. That bothered me considerably.

The days before that, there were four days where that fire was dormant, it did not move. We had – at one point in time there were thirteen bunchers up there – thirteen bunchers and I don't know how many grapple skidders. The fire, where it was on the Belvue area – I know we both grew up there, we know the area better than probably 90% of the people that were from the Forest Service did, no matter what they said. I had guys telling me; well we've got thirty year men on this. I don't care if you've got 40 year men on this, if they are no good and don't live around there it's not going to help. In those four days nothing was done. They were releasing equipment – thinking of this is just hunky dory. At that time it would have been fairly easy to spend – oh I don't know, ten, 20, 30 – whatever it costs – thousands of dollars to get the bombers in there and knock it down to a point where it is even less – get the hand crews in there – they didn't do that. There was literally nothing moved.

In those four days, with the bunching equipment – with the iron that was around those areas we could have bunched our way and skidded our way – we could have skidded off half that mountainside and there would have been no fuel left for the fire. You know, and we had to sit – and there were guys in that yard there that were just about ready to punch people because there was nothing we could do and we were having to listen to people that, as far as I am concerned, were incompetent. And these are maybe some of these 30 year forestry men. Some of these guys are good people, some of them are good, but there is obviously a problem when you sit and watch something to that degree that is scary. And what are you going to do. There weren't enough industry people involved. There are a lot of industry people – loggers – basically what I mean that have the experience with the equipment and they know what can be done and what can't be done. You don't learn that in university – you learn that from working.

The other piece that bothered me really badly was one that we were in – it's called – it would have been kind of somewhat out of site of the City of Kelowna, it would have been over in the backside, where Belvue Canyon it, it would have been kind of in that direction if that helps. There were big guards that went up over from the tracks down to Little White Forest Service Road – and they were trying to skirt it. Now this area we were working in, we were skidding off, we were skidding off the materials, the CATS – there were five CATS met us over the top of the mountain and they were doing their guard and we were skidding everything off and getting the fuel out of the way on our side. The one forestry fellow that landed there – I found out in mid-conversation, he was the guy who was in charge of the back burning – I wasn't too happy to talk with him.

Now they were prepared – there was a piece of land roughly like this – from the backside, looking at Kelowna here – the fire was up into that area. I asked him, I was told by our supervisor that they were going to burn this entire area off – this was almost 1600 acres by his own account, 99% of it would have been green timber. Now this did not happen – this was going to happen if the weather wasn't going to change within a day or two – thank Christ that it did change within a day or two – this is my example. They were prepared to burn this – he didn't even bat an eye. He didn't care – he was just in charge of burning things. He didn't seem to realize what was going on here. I hit the roof, my supervisor hit the roof – what are you thinking – with the amount of iron again that was in the area – the loggers could have bunched and skidded their way into that area because it was still fairly – it was safe. There is an acceptable amount of risk you've got to take – these guys were pulling us off the lines when the fire was a God Damn kilometer away. We can get out – and I am very well aware of how fast fires move – we are not stupid, we deal with this all summer – we deal with it – fire and logging – just – we have to deal with it. We could have bunched, skidded our way in there, got right into the area where the fire was burning, surrounded it, got the CATS in there and got the guys – got the Forestry, the ground guys in there, hit that – have the bombers at that point in time assist, knocking things down just to make sure it's safe. Like I said there is an acceptable amount of risk – they were turning tail and let's get out of here – let us finish our job then we'll go home.

There were probably some more locals that should have been listened to. There were a few hired, I knew a few, but there was some things that people were told and they just – they were specifically told that the fire is going to go here – that's where it cross the tracks. That wasn't listened to. You can pinpoint that – you can see it. The friend of ours, he knows the area like the back of his hand. He told the – I guess it was –

New speaker:

The fellow in charge of the June Springs area – they had – I was stationed in an area below the KVR – above Harvard and Salos Road, between June Springs and Crawford Estate area up there. I had – they would change crews on me every two days I would have a different crew – or every day and a half. One day there they yanked the crew away at one in the afternoon, me and the other operator we were left to fend for ourselves which we did. It wasn't a big deal. But the operators were there – we wanted to get this out – we were there early in the morning – it makes no sense to start some of this crap at 8:00 – have a meeting or a debriefing every morning when the guys that come off the line at night that have been looking at it – they know where everything is at – they tell the guys that come up there in the morning – You know – when you start that late in the day it seems almost like defeating yourself – in the morning when it would be cooler, fairly subdued, four or five o'clock – most of the loggers are used to getting up at that time anyhow but they left – they took my crew away – once in a while – I mean they change regularly – I

had five different supervisors in fifteen days. The command structure seemed to change almost daily.

I was in the one area there and we knew where the fire was, it hadn't got above the KVR yet – I suggested to my supervisor, I said we have enough rigging here – they are worried about the fuel in this one draw – bring in the bunchers and the skidders and clear all the fuel out. Get it out of there and they can put a guard right up to the top. A couple of the guys said that would be – that made a lot of sense – common sense, you know; get it out of the way. He had to radio back down and it took a couple of hours before they had some decision – he said well they want to discuss it tonight at the meeting. I thought – oh! This just seems to be almost a futile effort here. It is a lot of hurry up and wait. When it was in that area of there I had a military crew there and they had just come back from overseas and they had a couple of guys that I guess did recon work and they took off up the hill there for about half a kilometer from where everybody basically was. They came back and said we've got to move in – like the fire is burning, it's not going anywhere – we could have gone in and put this thing – or beat it to death – put it out. There was no need to sit there for four days while it just sort of smoldered in itself. The area where it crossed the KVR is visible from town and I went there in my ATV – it's the only place that had a substantial amount of fuel in it – big fir trees in a draw – there was a lot of old timber from the trestles when they were being played with or whatever over the years – so those things were just great big brickets. The guy that was up there, according to the ground crew guys that I talked to, they were told about it, they knew about it, the response was well, we're not going to deal with that today, we'll worry about it tomorrow.

The winds came back, the shit hit the fan, and that fire went up over the top of the KVR and I say from ground level you can see it – it went up over the top, it went right across the top of Little White and we had a whole new scenario again. I mean it should never have got as far as it did, but when it was in that Belvue plateau – I logged in there in '89 and '90 and I did a little bit more in the '90s. some of those areas are still green, but that one draw there is just a little bit north of that big trestle and it has beautiful big fir trees in it and I mean it was the only place – I mean it could have got across others, maybe, but the area had been thinned out and it was fairly open – lots of ground fire, but there would have been no – it wouldn't have burned up through the trees. But it go across on that one skinny spot there where the draw was and as soon as it hit the topside of that track – it was really – the winds blew basically the same way consistently and they did blow – there was no other way for it to go except across the top of that hill. There is just that one spot that was pointed out to the people up there and from what I was told they were up there patting themselves on the back that this thing was probably going to burn itself out.

Well, instead of letting it burn itself out. We should have gone in there and put it out. There was enough equipment in that yard downtown. There was dozers,

bunchers, they say you need – what is it – oxygen, heat and fuel to get one of those things to really go. All we had to do was get rid of a lot of that fuel. I mean they could have cleared a strip out of there with the equipment that was sitting there doing nothing. They could have landed a space shuttle on the side of that hill. That Belvue plateau, I hunted in there with my grandfather when I was a kid. It's riddled with old roads and trails. I've snow mobiled in there. The supervisor that I had took that into consideration – he tried to get that point across to his supervisors, but nobody wanted to listen to it – communications seemed to be next to nil. We needed another couple of tankers on the spot where I was at. I said there's two guys in the yard right now that I know – they live here – my brother was one of them, and another fellow. They've hunted in these areas – there's nothing but all kinds of little roads up there. If you know the area you'd think that would be an advantage. I would up with a guy from Salmon Arm, and two guys – one from 100 Mile House and one from someplace else. And yet there are all these locals sitting here in town that are just chomping at the bit. They want this thing out.

We didn't want to wait and have a meeting to discuss this and that – the guys come in to tell you where the fire was at – we knew where it was at for four days and everybody just sort of took a step back it seemed like. They pulled us back; they said they didn't want us to go any further. Why?

First voice:

At that point in them they were releasing equipment – it was leaving – they were releasing the stuff thinking – oh yeah, we've done a good job. This is out and meanwhile everyone who has any brains is going – what in the hell are they doing! To sit and watch that was painful to say the least, but we were well aware of what happens with guards, I mean fire guards don't hold fires when they are jumping kilometers. They will slow the main burn down and then you can get at the spots that are running in front of it. I am going to stress – we are not fire fighters, we are loggers – over a number of years you are going to pick up the odd thing, and especially when you have to deal with it all the time. What was going on there, especially with some of the guarding that was going on – the last guard that they did at the Mira – on the Kelowna side where basically it crossed the Mira – they brushed a guard in, which means they took a bunch here and they just went along and kind of weed-whacked it along the side of it. That's useless. There was a small dirt road that was from us to you guys and that was going to keep the fire from crossing in to this region? They should have had 48 CATS up there and dropped blades and just run it right from the top to the bottom. That would have saved 500, 1,000 acres of region that burned up. Not to say the least, the damned trestles. I want to specify again that the back burn that got away – I'd like to see some accountability. Do these guys even write this down – is it documented? Do they document the action of the fire or what happened after it? Because they sure as hell never let the media know about it. All we ever heard was the winds came up.

I'd come home and – oh yeah, the fire jumped – it didn't jump the guard we watch them light a back burn that got away on them. These things – it's a very controversial practice – there is a time and a place for it and as near as we can tell that wasn't the time nor the place to be doing a lot of it.

#### Second Speaker

I had a supervisor at the end there for ...

(tape 4)

... he says that sounds like a good idea, but we've got channels. And I said, yeah, you got bureaucracy up the hoop. It was just – every time you turned around he had something else. There were lots of guys running around out there but nobody seemed to actually be in control. You've got all this iron sitting there and it was just like – WOW – this could be over in pretty short order. But when it was sitting in that Belvue plateau up there – when it left that – that really bothered me because we all knew where it was. We knew if it was going to go, where it was going to go because everything had been logged or selectively logged up there over the years and it seemed like a no-brainer. Take the equipment up there – scrape the KVR down at that spot and clear that stuff out of the bottom end of it, get all that shit off the high side so if it is going to jump, at least – try and slow it down somehow. But you know a four-day window seemed like – well when I say we sat down there at the bottom, they pulled us back and we thought, well why – we should be moving in on this thing. It wasn't going anywhere. They said it wasn't going anywhere. I don't know what that was – I mean a way to sit there and keep an eye on it or watch it or see what it's going to do. I would really have rather just gone in there and buried it – put it out.

#### First Speaker

They were at times – I mean they had bean counters that were going out there. These guys aren't paid pennies either and they would sit and bickered with my brother here, telling me they wanted us to take the chains off the skidders. These things have got to crawl around in places that you don't want to walk and this guy didn't want to pay for the chains. Now that's the kind of crap – that had nothing to do with putting the fire out, but that's another side of when you have a bureaucracy in charge of a forest fire – it's not – it just doesn't work. There's got to be – something has to change. I don't know what the answer is to get back to the four day window there – they were worried about saving money with these guys – stupid little things like that – they would have spent the same amount of money with those bombers when it took off again after the four-day window. If they would have had those bombers in there for just the same amount of time while that fire was just standing still – there wouldn't have been a lot of smoke up there – now they brought the bombers in only after the fire erupts again. That's a total defensive action – try hitting it right square on. They brought – you know they had the ducks in – the five Bombardier planes and they had the Mars at that time. Those guys were beating the hell out of that fire. They just constantly – they bombed that for I can't remember how many hours that day. But the fire

was out of control again – do the same God damn thing when the fire is in control – when it's not moving – they had four days to do that. I mean that doesn't count any of the crap that happened before this – like the actual start of the fire and a few other things that happened as it cruised up the lake.

But that one, I mean that was so bad, I mean everybody was watching it! Like what are they thinking? That's where I would like to see some accountability. Or some answers. What was the decision there. What was the decision in some of these back burns. And why was the public maybe not notified about the back burns. We had equipment operators when the first firestorm hit that were trapped. They were napalming right next to bulldozers and CATS and hoes – there was another inquiry going on about that – a safety inquiry.

I would think you probably should know about that, or will know about that because these operators were getting phone calls from an independent guy finding out what in the hell they were doing. This was the first shot – there are equipment operators that will swear up and down on a stack of bibles that the back burn they did there burned the first section of houses down. The fire went up and skirted up around the canyon they were working in.

I can't speak any more to that because I wasn't there – that was second hand information from other operators. The rest of what we have been telling you was all first hand information. It's too bad there wasn't someone here that was at that point in time, but there isn't.

Gentlemen, there were lots of local there that had lots of idea that I don't think got much attention, especially when it came to the areas up there that – you know where the trails and roads were, people maybe thought you couldn't access it, but it was very accessible in that Belvue area there before it got away. I mean it is unfortunate that it happened but it did, but maybe hopefully something can come out of this, or you can come up with some ideas to put forward because there were nights I'd go home after that shift up there and I'd just shake my head. I just – good God –

Second speaker:

These aren't ---- fires – or fifty year fires like some of these guys are saying; just think back on some of the fires we've had here. The Garnet fire was in what – '92 –

First Speaker:

It was '94.

Second Speaker

The Salmon Arm fire was a few years – every three or four years there is one of these and you know when the Garnet fire happened, it was the same damned thing. They didn't want to drop retardant into the one area – they were scared about whatever – and looked what happened there. It wasn't the

degree of the amount of houses, but you know it was the same sort of incompetence. Well, let's watch it burn for a little while. You don't do that. If we did that in the bush, on a logging site or anything like that, we would be fired so quick it would make your head spin. I'd never work in the bush again if I did something like that.

Now how do these guys get away with it?

First Speaker:

There has to be more control on some of these ground crews – the people that are actually – like site supervisors that I had – he needed things and it was such a performance for him to get something out there. It just seemed like he'd have to fight tooth and nail to get something. We needed an excavator and a draw – it took a whole day to get one. There must have been nine of them sitting down in the yard. We finally got it up there – it did the job – unfortunately we would have been a little further along in our initial movement if we would have had it when we requested it. But there seems to be an awful lot of – if this guy in site is my supervisor and he is the one that I go to, he should be able to make these calls I would think right there on the spot. This is what has to be done, and this is what we need to do, we should do it – not let's talk about it later because he told me – he goes we have a meeting every night – we have a briefing for the debriefing and there just seems to be a lot of that stuff going on. But there was – I mean I can't even count the pieces of equipment that were not working – that guys were just willing to go out there and do this to get it over with. I mean people lost their homes over a lot of this and the fact that the availability of all the stuff – to have it at hand right there is probably never going to happen again. I mean the bush was shut down because it was so hot and dry so all this equipment was sitting here.

But we sat here, we live here, we sat here for a week before they let us – they were bringing in guys from Merit, Kamloops, and most of us, or 95% of our crew lives here and we were like the last ones to get called – a couple of other logging contractors were the last ones to get called. And then we get there, it's like okay, we get you down there and we are going to assess this and have another look at something – well, you know, there's the fire – and the smaller ones – areas there – I mean there are times I guess you've got to look at – you've got to take everything with a grain of salt. But there were ample opportunities for a lot of those guards to be put in a lot faster than they did – I mean equipment sat on low beds for three days. And by the time it got here – the fire got here – it was too late to send them in. I mean some of those guys got off the beds and had to turn around and get back on again. When that fire was coming up from the bottom down – you could see it Saturday night from the Harbour's Golf Course. Why didn't this stuff get started immediately – you knew where it was going to go – get on it, get the guards in – I mean start – don't just build one and then hopefully it holds it – build one and get the next

one going at the same time a half a mile away – get another big one. All that equipment was just sitting there.

Second Speaker:

They should have been picking their spots – we don't want to repeat what we've said, but you can't fight a fire when it's a firestorm – but it's the time before that – like the four-day window – the actual first lightning strike – there are several others there that you have probably heard about. And you just look back on it – well, no we looked at it at that time and said what in the hell are they doing? There were enough loggers, there was enough equipment operators – all they had to do was – get in here. They needed a lot more industry input. You were told ...

First Speaker:

They didn't want to hear that, though.

Second Speaker:

You were – I guess it was the other day – you were explained to what was going on with the small fire, relatively, that was in Four Mile Yard. That got put out because the loggers were there. The forestry guys went home. We know those guys personally. They were there all night. He basically chased in – not as polite terms as we can display here – told them to get the hell out of there. And they got that under control, how that started and whatever else – that's not my thing. But, that could have been an absolute catastrophe over there too. They were there 24 hours a day and they just did things differently – they were willing to take a risk. You can't stand in front of a raging fire and watch yourself get incinerated, or watch somebody get incinerated, but there is an acceptable amount of risk and most guys to a man – we were being pulled out of the lines that we were on. I mean you could have sat there and had a pot of coffee and waited for something to happen. It was still relatively safe. Let us finish the job before we take it out.

GF Okay, thank you very much gentlemen. Some of the things that you've raised – the need for more local control and more local knowledge into the decisions on the front lines – starting earlier in the morning – certainly resonate with what has been said by others. So thank you very much for that.

First Speaker:

The back burning is a big, big thing, do not forget about that. That caused a lot of ---

GF No, I have it marked it down. Thank you.

Both Thanks.

GF Thanks.



We have Dean Ferrer? – is he here?

Hello.

GF Good evening, welcome.

Dean Ferrer:

I am just going to lead up to some of the events – to the situation that we are in now with the Forestry. This is currently an ongoing issue. Just to give you some history I was in the Garnet Fire of '94. Due to one of the back burns we did lose everything we owned in that Carma area.

Getting back into the Okanagan Mountain Park fire, we have some recreational property up in Chute Lake Lodge area. We spent three days after the real take-off of the fire – we spent three days up there putting out a lot of the burning embers. Some of those embers were flying three or four kilometers. We spent three days of good effort putting out spot fires and the fire came across the Chute Lake road into our immediate area where we were. After three days it did jump the lake and it was burning at the far end of the lake as well. We went down for more supplies, a generator, pump, gas, etc., but in the hours that we left that morning of the fourth day we were unable to return to our property due to the fact that it really started flaring up, the winds changed, etc. I understand why they wouldn't let us up there, but after three days of evacuation they allowed us to return to day pass.

When we returned to our property we found that equipment was taken – just some items to mention would be a quad chain saw shovels, back pack fire fighters, etc. We notified the RCMP, they told us to call the Forestry. We called the Forestry. We traveled to the different base camps that were on the Naramata side of the Okanagan Mountain Park fire. We were notified from one of the base camp chief operators that they did have our equipment but they didn't know where it was located. After three days of heavy phone calls and contacting the base camp over in Peachland, across from the Okanagan Mountain Park we were notified that they found the equipment and it would be returned that day.

The fourth day we called and tried to find where the equipment was. We had many different stories – one story was sitting over in the Westbank compound, another story saying it was over at the base camp – I got a call later that day saying that the quad was returned with all the equipment. I went back up into that area with another day pass and found the equipment was not returned. I called once again to the Peachland base camp and after a couple of hours they returned my call and said the equipment was sitting at the Chute Lake base camp – the Chute Lake Lodge.

When we returned to the Chute Lake Lodge, yes, we did find the quad – but the racks were taken off and the equipment was not with the quad. As well, there were some back fire fighters – one of them we did borrow from Forestry – we borrowed a shovel, some hose, we had it all in a bunch because we had full intentions of returning that the day after picking up supplies.

We contacted Forestry again to find out where this equipment was – they said they would look into it – after a couple of days – we gave them three days – we did not get a response. We contacted forestry again. Still no response – they said they were looking into it. Things changed after about six days after initially getting the quad back – the Peachland Base Camp moved – they moved into West Side – once again we weren't notified – nobody contacted us – we tracked down a different foreman in that area, or manager – he said he was not aware of any of the situation – he was not aware of the quad being taken, he was not aware of any equipment being taken.

So, once again we went through the whole thing, explaining who we talked to, how we got the quad back, etc. He looked into it, said he would assign someone to it – once again it was three or four days – we didn't get a response. We went back in.

They finally said to come over to the left side, they met us in person, we made a written report – that gentleman left, he was pulled off because they were only five or seven days on and then someone else was reassigned to that position. After that period they finally tracked down the report that we did make and they said that they would make an inquiry. We worked with one gentleman, an information officer quite intensively on it and they found that they did not – their final decision was that they did not take the quad, even though Forestry contact us directly – we did pick up that quad from their base camp – the people from their base camp on the first day that we returned knew of the quad, knew where it was, knew of the equipment that was in the yard. They did remember lending us the back pack fire fighter and the equipment. They knew the layout of the area. But at the very end when we talked to the gentleman – I can supply all this detail later – he said they were not responsible for any of that missing equipment.

We contacted the RCMP and the RCMP notified us that only authorized personnel were in that area at the time. What I am trying to get to here is, it seems like there is no accountability for a lot of the actions of Forestry. I went through the Garnet Fire and once again through the Okanagan Mountain Park fire with personal interests that were affected. In the end of this they walked away and they said – sure we had your equipment, we saw your equipment, we can remember the events leading up to the situation, but we are not responsible for this.

Whether it was Forestry, a contractor of Forestry, or a representative of the Forestry, if Forestry is paying their wages they should be immediately responsible for that equipment. This is a very small thing in the scope of the whole fire, but it is a very valuable thing in our eyes. We did get the quad back which is a big ticket items – these back pack fire fighters are a couple of hundred dollars, a few shovels – we're looking at 50-60 dollars. This is a very small thing in the scope of the fire, but like the RCMP notified us, only

authorized personnel were in that area. Only representatives or Forestry personnel were in that area.

In the end, Forestry did not want to have any accountability on it. We were sloughed off – many, many times when we called, they said they did not want to deal with it because it was such a small item in the scope of the whole situation. But, as we stressed to them, once those base camps were broken down, there was no way of getting back to these people. Some of the people that were up in that area – they were from UofA – they were only here for the summer, on summer jobs. Once they leave there is no way to interview them. We are still trying to work with Forestry to get some of these names – I have the first names of quite a few of the people that we talked to – but once again we don't have any last names and Forestry is not willing to work with us to get the interviews that they took from these people to find out exactly what happened – where this equipment went.

What I am hoping will come out of this is that I agree getting locals in to do the job, but there has to be accountability. If Forestry hires these people, Forestry has to be accountable for their actions. We weren't the only people who lost equipment – one cabin down the way – these are recreational properties – just lost a couple of shoves and that sort of thing – I realize in the heat of the moment the equipment is there – take it. But it should be returned, or there should be some sort of inventory taken. Because when I borrowed the equipment from the base camp at Chute Lake they made me sign out the back pack fire fighter, the hoes, and the shovels. They came back later that night, when they broke down at 12:00 o'clock. They took one of the back pack fire fighters – they took one shovel and one hoe – because I had two of everything. So if I have to sign that stuff out – I understand I am responsible if I lose it, if it burns, I am responsible to pay for it. But if Forestry representatives borrow our equipment – whether it is Forestry directly or a contractor of the Forestry, someone should be responsible for that equipment.

GF Okay, thank you very much, Dean. I don't know what I can do about this, other than what you have said is on the record and it will be reviewed by people and I know it is a frustrating experience for you and I hope that somebody will respond to you. Have you put a claim in with the Emergency Management people?

DF No, we were still working with the Forestry; we had some line of communication until their final report two weeks ago. So we are going to contact who the report went to, find out where it stands from that point. So we are working with them. I realize – I am not expecting any action from this tonight, but I am hoping that in the future there is some accountability on Forestry's side.

GF Okay, thank you.

DF Thanks.

GF Next, we have Phil McNair – he's not here yet.

Terry Prechel

Gentlemen, good evening.

GF Good evening.

TP I worked in the evacuation centre, as a volunteer while I was there – mainly on the floor for registration purposes, and also later on as a registration supervisor. My comments tonight are in regard to that area and specifically to the ESS vultra(?) forms that were filled out. I believe there was a lady here earlier today who spoke about getting payment – being on the list. While working in that area we were working with a standard government form. The form has been around for a number years and used in many places. There was still a lot of confusion with how it was to be handled, how it was to be completed. Certainly as the fire changed, the rules of engagement and the opportunities that they were providing the evacuees changed – understandably. However things like filling out the boxes on the form shouldn't change and in the time I was there I counted up to twelve different changes in – administrative functions really is what they were. Okay, one day we had changes within five minutes. Somebody came buy and said look you can't fill the form out with an 'x' you have to use a 'y', five minutes later somebody said you can't use a 'y', you have to use a 'z'. It was rather comical if you look at in that light. But it led to confusion, it led to people who were dealing with the forms issues which they had to pass on to the people they were trying to assist. And, as an administrative function I think that is something that is pretty easy to fix.

The second issue I've got has to do as a consideration is volunteer counseling. Certainly the volunteers that were there did their best to work with the people that were coming in who were under a large amount of stress. I think an issue going forward as a consideration again is just to remind the volunteers or have counselors available for the volunteers so that they can hopefully better understand the situation of the people that they are working with.

That's it. Thank you.

GF Thank you very much.

GF Is Phil McNair here? If not, can I ask if there is anyone who wishes to speak who may not have registered?

Okay. I think we may take a break because I think Mr. McNair is supposed to be here perhaps at 8:00 o'clock.

We'll take a break and come back in ten minutes and see if Mr. McNair is here. Thank you.

GF Ladies and gentlemen: I will call us back to order. It looks as though we are getting close to the end. We do have still a person who had indicated and registered to speak – Phil McNair – I don't know if he is here? If not, then I have Rusty Ensign. Welcome.

Rusty Ensign:

Mr. Filmon and panel, ladies and gentlemen: The reason I am here is I feel compelled to do this. There was an article on at the time of the fires and if I had not bore witness to it I probably wouldn't be here. But I was on business at a Regional District board meeting in the spring of 2001 and at that time Nick Arcole(?) a registered forester for Gorman Brothers made a presentation to the Regional District board. At that time they were on the south slopes, above the Okanagan Mission and neighbours the Okanagan Mountain Park. They were – Nick Arcole, or Gorman Brothers was in the process of doing a study on the pine beetle infestation and making them aware of what the procedures were in order to log the pine beetle. At that time he informed the Regional District board that that entire slope including the Okanagan Mountain Park was not a managed forest, that it should have some forest management practices used on the entire park and that it was an accident waiting for a place to happen in effect – he told them that within twenty years there is going to be a fire in that park and when there is a fire there is going to be some major damage.

Now the Regional District board is not governing authority over that park, I recognize and respect that – regardless, I would like to know and I am not aware of any letter that was written by them to the province and my only comment might be that the Regional District board is an entity that should be governing or dealing with regional issues and I think that it is more preoccupied with governing the west side than it is with regional issues and if it had been done what it is mandated to do, there may have been something done to stop this from happening.

GF Thank you very much, Rusty. I think that there has been allusion to what you have said by other people and there is an overall concern about parks and the different attitude that is taken toward forest management in parks versus other areas and I think these are questions that we are going to have to ask of the various government agencies. So I thank you for bringing that forward.

RE I do have a copy of those minutes of that board meeting if you would like them.

GF Sure.

RE And the agenda, for that matter – I can fax or e-mail them to you, and I don't know if Mr. Arcole has been here or not, but he did have a write-up in the paper so I presume if he hasn't been here he would have presumably sent in a separate submission.

GF Okay, I would appreciate that. I will give you my card with the fax on it, okay?

RE Thank you.



GF Now we have if not the most popular, certainly the most dedicated city Councilor, Sharon Shepherd

Sharon Shepherd:

Good evening. Actually I wasn't going to say anything because I am going to prepare a written submission but since you are looking for people to talk, I decided I could fill in a little bit of time here.

I guess I come wearing a number of hats – I am a city councilor with the City of Kelowna, I also sit on the Regional District Board and I do Chair the Air Quality Committee and I Chair the Parks Committee for the Regional Board. I am also a Viewcrest survivor of the fire. My neighbourhood – half my neighbourhood has gone and we had thought we had lost our home. I feel I come, having been evacuated twice, because we were evacuated to my parents' home in the Lower Mission along with our two dogs and our friends' belongings and then had to evacuate them.

So I come with a number of hats and sometimes I feel that maybe I was a lucky survivor because we arrived to have our home still intact and I feel that now I can maybe speak on behalf of my neighbourhood that do not have their homes and if I had lost my home people would think I had something to grind – you know about some of the issues – so I come trying to be there for my neighbourhood as well as a city councilor and the regional district. So I've got just a couple of issues that I'd like to bring forward.

First of all the evacuation was done very well in my community. I spent quite a bit of time trying to get organized to try to help other people that further south were evacuated and I think it was done in a very orderly fashion and my husband and I, we were probably one of the last ones out of our neighbourhood. We have – and it has always been a concern, because I was a neighbourhood advocate in my area before becoming a councilor. The growth in the south end of our city is going to be 4,000 more units over the next twenty years and we have one access today and it's going to have other accesses, but today only one access. And actually people used a gravel pit road that was not really meant to be used as an access in order to get out. So certainly I have heard over the last two days the issues of having accesses out of development to be very important and I concur with that.

The media – I can't say enough about the media – from the moment that we hear about the fire strike and the fire moving some media went on 24 hour discussion about the fire. Where we were located we could not see the fire, we depended on Peachland and Westside residents to keep informing us of what was happening and I have to commend all of those community people for keeping us informed. On every floor of my home my radio was on as I was doing things in order to keep in touch. I can't say enough about needing that media and I heard the presentation today from the media and they are very important in any evacuation aspect or any disaster. I think people need to know and they want to know.

I have heard criticism in the community about the start of the fire. I was actually involved, a resident had contact me about the Mars bomber and why it had not been sent to our community and I didn't even know that there was such an available asset – and I think we look at it as an available asset. I know there are not many things that we have as a province that we can be very – you know, celebrate. And those are our assets.

So I did some research and as I started to ask questions I was being, even as a political leader – and I have to tell you as a councilor we were told to stay away from the evacuation centre. Basically it was being run from the province because it was a provincial emergency and the Mayor was basically the one that was supposed to be the centre. So I did not personally go back and forth to the evacuation centre. So there are some communication things – because I was being contacted certainly from my community to try and find out what was happening because they assumed that I would know things – and so there are things that have to be worked out there.

But the Mars bomber questions started to happen and certainly as a politician I tried to ask some questions and was given the run around – I can say that. And I think that the excuses started to change. What we needed to know was an answer that was sincere and true and we were hearing very different things every time someone asked the question – a different answer was given as to why they weren't in our community. So I hope that whole discussion can at least be brought to rest. That was a big issue and I heard from a lot of members in the community about that.

The aftermath – you heard Jennifer Bannifer(?) earlier this evening. I had – she lives not far from my home and she was not – she did not have any impact from the fire but she had an impact as a result of the aftermath. Her home, in my mind, is – she had a beautiful little home – she said it was fifty years old – I think it is two to three acres of land with some orchard on it and she lives on her own and she has really had no help. She is an aftermath and I found it very difficult from my political point of view how do you help someone – basically the municipality draws the line in the sand to private property versus public property. And I think as community and as leaders, provincial, federal and municipal politicians we have to start recognizing that we sometimes have to step over that boundary. I am not sure where the answer is, but certainly I think we have to do something about the aftermath and the effects of floods. And that's what's happened and she isn't the only one. I had witness to another family this past weekend and they have to look at re-mortgaging their home in order to pay for the damages because there is no insurance. Now, recently at a council meeting I have raised the question about why do we not have insurance – and I think that is a whole other issue but hopefully we can work towards finding out about what we can do – because you and myself, we are all vulnerable and I am very concerned about that.

On another issue to do with the air quality – it was interesting the night that we were evacuated from my area – the south end of the city was evacuated on the Monday evening and they were allowed to go back and forth for a day or two and on the Thursday evening I was actually on the radio. I was doing a talk show with one of the hosts. I had been on there to talk about air quality. That was the worst air quality that our community has ever experienced and we were very disappointed because as an air quality committee we had set up a Memorandum of Understanding with the Health Region and the Ministry of Land Air and Water to talk about – like when the air quality hits certain indexes that we would do releases to inform the community what they should be doing. There were children on that day, mothers taking their children out and they weren't sure if it was safe or not. So I think that we failed our community and that was kind of what I was out and on the radio talking about. We will be presenting comments about – you know, releasing information to the community again, letting them know about whether it is safe to be outside – what they should be thinking about doing, especially those most vulnerable in our community. So we are quite disappointed and I will send you our air quality chart of that week. Obviously it was a very surreal day, it was a very strange day and I think I commented on the radio, it was sort of the calm before the storm – it was kind of a strange day, and then everything hit that Thursday evening when we were evacuated. I had to leave without even saying goodbye because I knew my area was being evacuated and I had to get home to kind of get my animals out, etc.

I know you have talked about prescribed burns. From the air quality committee's perspective and we look after the Central Okanagan Regional District, we also have representatives on the air quality committee that come from the north Okanagan and the south Okanagan. We live in a valley and the air quality in our valley is a very important thing that we try to preserve and we have difficulties with air quality. I described when I am going out to explain to people, it's like living in a fish bowl. And when you put the top on the fish bowl, which we do have inversion in our valley, anything that is inside that fish bowl affects us. So we do have air quality issues in our valley and we are trying to work on those and we have been very proactive and certainly in the central Okanagan we have tried to be leaders and the north and south Okanagan have joined us at the table. We have received a lot of money from the federal and provincial levels to work towards solutions. We have met with the Ministry of Forestry. They have been at the table, because the first people they blame for any air quality issues with slash burning that is occurring on our hillsides – and we have been very protective of the Ministry of Forestry because they have actually practiced good quality decisions when they have done their burns. They have checked that the index is correct and that the winds are blowing, etc., and they have not, I don't think, added to the problem and they have been very sensitive to the problem.

We have also had information from the Parks, the B.C. Parks talking about prescribed burns and we are trying to find – I have asked staff today to look

up the data about when they came to our community to talk about prescribed burns because I understand there has been some discussion about the community doesn't want prescribed burns so that is why it didn't happen. I'd like you to know that it has been discussed and why it didn't happen – who knows why. There have been some prescribed burns that have occurred, and one occurred last year to do with – on the west side and it was to do with the landscape – we needed to have the prescribed burns to get the wild sheep environment improved for them and, again, they waited for the right conditions and sometimes you make the wrong call and there is an inversion and winds stop and then you run into problems. But then you apologize – and I think I heard that comment. So from an air quality perspective, our committee has never, ever said no to prescribed burns. We have always said you know you have to obviously work with the community and you have to look at the conditions – and the conditions are difficult. It's not that every day is perfect for burning and whatever happens in the south Okanagan and the north Okanagan can affect whether we can burn here or not. So we are trying to find that data and be able to send it to you as to what dialogue has taken place. But certainly we have had a very good relationship with particularly the Ministry of Forestry – they have been at the table and any time we have talked about slash burning or whatever.

I think I would also like to bring to your attention that obviously prescribed burning is not always the answer. Some major fires have happened because of prescribed burning and so I think we have to be aware of the right conditions and obviously having the right people in control of those is pretty important.

Finally, I think I would just like to wrap up that 234 residents in my community, in my neighbourhood, lost their homes. There are many other homeowners that we didn't hear about – they are devastated because they are not back in their homes yet. They have had to replace carpet, replace windows, replace siding and their homes are still intact and in some cases some of them wish their homes had burned. The only positive thing I have told them is at least they can do an inventory and not have to go through all that trying to remember what it was – you know, you did have. So, there are a lot of other members of my community that are – and some of them are quite bitter, emotionally we have gone through an awful lot and it will be with us for a long time. Many people are still very worried, they are worried about what is going to happen in the next spring, if we have another hot summer, there is still – in a lot of cases a lot of fuel out there – but they don't want to see our hillside totally devastated. We started a re-planting program. The helicopters have already been out planting – doing the seeding – whether it works or not we don't know.

So our community I think will survive. I think we will learn a lot about it. I told Mr. Filmon I thought he was here partly because I had asked about whether we were going to have a review. I actually was criticized because of asking

that question and the word 'witch hunt' was used – is that what we were trying to do. And that had never been my intention, I felt that as a community I had a lot of people that had questions – I think you have heard many of those questions and whether they will all be answered I don't know. I am happy that you have been able to do this. I was pleased to sit in on the last few days and see that you are being very respectful of people and their comments and some are frustrated and some are – I think people will be encouraged – whatever comes out of this – I hope others will not have to go through some of the things that my community has had to go through. Hopefully we have learned some things from it and that is all I ask.

GF Thank you very much, Sharon. I think you have summarized the intent of this process and also what we are hoping will be the outcome and that is that some of the things we have learned – if we will be able to improve on the circumstance, no matter how well things were done and you have pointed out evacuation was well done. Other people have pointed out many other aspects of the whole operations that were well done. But then again, many people have also given us good advice about how to improve many, many things. And so as human beings we know we will never be perfect – I always say to my wife be patient, God's not finished with me yet. But reality is that's the way life is. So thank you for putting that into perspective. We will try and get an answer to the things that have been put forward. It may not be possible, but things like the Mars bomber, and its availability or non-availability, certainly there has got to be an answer that we can come up with from the people in charge

...

*(tape over)*

SS ... who told me?

GF Well you said that you were told not to go to the Evacuation Centre that it was a provincial operation or something like that.

SS Oh, as a political leader (yes) actually I would say it was more from my local Mayor. I must say the Friday night I kind of broke that edict though, because I thought that my home had gone and I wanted to go and see if I could find out anything so ...

GF You know, there is a fine line between people being seen to be there as a photo op and having to be the person who is informed. Because, quite honestly having been through the disasters of both the flood of '97 and the forest fires of '89 in Manitoba, the first person that people usually call is their councilor or their local MLA, or whichever politician they can get hold of, and they assume that we are informed. And I think it is absolutely essential that local political elected people are kept informed. You have said that the media come to you, and that is true, they assume that you are being plugged in on the issues that affect your people and so I would hope that is something that will be straightened out for the future.

That whole issue of the prescribed burns and the attitude of the Central Okanagan Regional District was raised yesterday – that there was a desire to do more of it, and this wasn't from the Ministry of Forests, this was other advocates because there is a growing consensus building that whether it is from aboriginal First Nations people, whether it is from the Wildlife Federation, whether it's from environmentalists – everybody is starting to coalesce around the idea that prescribed burning is better than the conflagration that you had this summer. But of course it has to be done under the best of circumstances, not just indiscriminately. I think it will be important for us to understand where a regional government will be coming from on this issue.

And finally, I too was taken by Jennifer Pannier's circumstances and after she had left, it was suggested to me that the \$4M that the provincial government has put for sort of special circumstances, things that fell between the cracks so to speak, might be a source. So you might put her in that direction and I am going to personally try and talk to the insurance company involved and just see if there is an understanding on that issue. But if you would do that, that would be very helpful.

SS And she has I think already put her name in. I have encouraged her. I think they are working with – the city has a fund as well – so I think she is entered there.

On the question about information as far as a local politician, towards I think it was the second or maybe a week and a half into the process they started to have daily media events and I started to attend those, we were invited to attend those, so that I think did improve as well. And the issue of the prescribed burning actually the Central Okanagan is also looking at alternatives. There are new machineries out there that do clean up all of the debris and we in fact, this week had a demonstration happening at our community. So we are looking at other alternatives, but recognizing that the whole issue of our forests has to be looked at.

Thank you very much and hopefully you have enjoyed your stay here.

GF Absolutely. Thank you very much.

GF I have one other presenter, Kim Stinson. Good evening. Welcome.

Kim Stinson:

I just phoned the other day to find out what exactly it was that you were looking at, and if I would be appropriate to speak, so to speak. I am still not sure if it is, but what the heck, I am going to go anyway.

On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, myself and my family were evacuated from our home. My family consists of four people, all adults, twenty-six horses, three dogs, five cats and a goat. My home is our business. Our business is our way of life. We remained out of our home and business until September 22<sup>nd</sup> when the alerts were lifted. Today is the 99<sup>th</sup> day from the evacuation start – not that I am keeping track, I did actually have to count to figure that out.

The first thirty days were spent wondering and waiting to see if we had a home or a business to go back to.

The next eighteen days were spent trying to accommodate the people who had bookings with the business and hadn't cancelled, and preparing a report for the fire recovery centre.

October 8<sup>th</sup> I turned in a nine page report detailing the loss of my business from being shut down to the recovery centre.

Then I was patient and I waited. Fourteen days went by and I had no answers. I had made numerous phone calls and no answers, except political open-ended ones. Twenty days went by and I needed answers. Do I or don't I qualify. I had the feeling that there was going to be no help and I desperately needed to know where else I could go.

Twenty-eight days after I dropped off my report I had an answer. No, you don't qualify.

When I suggested that the recovery centre offer up some options as to where else I might go, it was suggested to call the Red Cross. Having food, shelter and clothing, I didn't think I qualified. Then it was suggested that perhaps I could go to a bank that was offering interest-free loans. I explained that I needed to recover the lost profit from my business and a loan really wouldn't work.

At this point, the lack of response, condescending tones and highly inadequate information started to get the best of me. In response to my frustration I was then informed that counseling is available.

Today is 99 days from the evacuation. It's 69 days since we returned home. And it's 51 days that I have been looking for an answer other than no.

My name is Kim Stinson and I am the owner/operator of 8 Mile Ranch, located on Highway 33, just East of Kelowna. I am a 29 year resident of Kelowna and a 15 year business operator. I have talked to the fire recovery centre numerous times. As I said, I have given them a report, I have talked to the Minister of Agriculture and while they need a letter – but they will cover half of my feed bill. I have talked to the Chamber of Commerce – who is the voice of business in Kelowna, but well, they need a letter in order to consider acting for me. And I have talked to the Producers' Assistance Fund but I don't qualify. And I have talked to provincial hardship grants and I probably don't qualify but I might as well apply anyway. I have talked to the MLA office and sent them my report and they were kind of surprised at my situation.

I have tried to contact city hall by e-mail, phone calls to the Mayor and councilor and have gotten no response. I have talked to insurance companies regarding what is being covered for people, what's not, and what loss of business insurance is, because I didn't have any and never heard of it – and I found out that it wouldn't have covered me anyway. I have talked to the Chairperson of the Okanagan Fire Recovery Society and got a really big no from them. Then I finally phoned the Red Cross and I actually got some assistance. In total so far I have talked to ten different organizations and I couldn't count how many people along the way.

I understand it is this Board's review to how things have been handled, and I am not here to cry a river or beg for help – although help would be cool – I feel the need to explain what I have been through in an attempt to fix the wheel because from where I sit, it's broken. After going through the ordeal that is, or was, the Okanagan Mountain Park fire and having survived it, the aftermath should not be this difficult. I have talked to many people who also have my concerns and problems. I have talked to many people who wholeheartedly agree with what I see as problems but as of yet I have not been able to gather people together to attempt a solution for us. I see a multitude of committees and organizations out there handling funds from government and private donations and I see them as spokes on a wheel – but the wheel doesn't turn until it has a hub.

I have come before your Review Board to emphasize that in the future when a disaster like this happens, a group needs to be formed that will deal with helping people get on their feet and back to normal. This group can consist of people who are trained to respond to people suffering from trauma, this group in essence a hub, would be responsible for finding out who needs assistance and on what level. They would take the information gathered from the people, compare it to the information from funding groups, and put the appropriate funds with the appropriate people. They would not be responsible for any funding, just the hub of information. This hub would assist the people by allowing them to concentrate on rebuilding their lives, and know that they will be looked after. The people would not have to chase leads, dig for information, contact a multitude of organizations and suffer further stress and

frustration. It would all be handled with one meeting, one report, and one application. The committees and organizations offering financial help would be benefited, not by having to turn people away, not by being inundated with questions and concerns, and would only have to contact the hub group to find out where the money is needed next. They would not have to work on applications or criteria and could focus on the fund raising factor. This would eliminate the concerns by the public regarding where the funds are going and the handling of donated funds. It would also eliminate the cracks that are being formed between the funds' criterias that is allowing people to go unaided.

Thank you.

GF Thank you, Kim. I am sorry to hear of your frustration but it is obvious that you are experiencing it.

KS And it's difficult because you – in my situation – I come back from the evacuation and I did manage to have some groupings come through so at the same time I lost enough profit in my one month out of the two peak seasons to seriously damage my business, and to add on to that, the added expense of feeding my horses. So the loss that was suffered was enormous and you want to get back to normal, you want to get back home, you want to focus on the business, you want to try to get things going as fast and as smoothly as you can – but at the same time you are getting open-ended, you know, we are not sure, we'll look into that – you are made to feel you are the one ever asking the question.

I went to the fire recovery centre because well, it's the fire recovery centre. But it was an illusion. I thought if I took them a report they would help me find the funding needed. Instead they just came back and said no, you don't fit our criteria. We are only looking after businesses that burned down. It makes you want to go get a match. The frustration that is involved is hard to comprehend and I really think that if there was a group like I suggest, that looked after the people and wasn't involved with the funds, because the funding that I am finding out – I have found six groups so far handling different funds – and they are overlapping where the money is going and that creates a huge crack. And I know I am not alone, I know I am not the only one in the situation, but I can't find the other people either.

GF Well there was a person earlier today that has a bed and breakfast that lost several weeks of bookings as a result – so, it's the same thing.

KS Yes, and I also understand that there is a lot of people trying to find relief that are suffering because tourism was down, and that is a whole different ball game. I was forced to shut down. We were forced to leave our home and business. When we evacuated my dancehall was decorated for a wedding the next morning. And luckily the groom was a fireman and could sneak in and get

the decorations and food out. You know – so they pulled it off. But if something could be done so that if this happens in the future, people don't have to go through what we have had to go through in that regard it would make me a bit happier of a girl.

GF Well, I think it's fair to say that this isn't really within my mandate, but everything you have said has become a part of the public record and will be an appendix to the report so people will read it and hopefully people will have some answers for it.

KS Great, thank you.

GF Thank you.

Now I don't believe we have any others who have registered to speak and that would bring us to the end. But is there anyone here who wishes to come forward?

If not, then thank you very, very much. I think we have gone well over forty presentations in the last two days here in Kelowna so there has certainly been plenty of interest and I thank you all for coming out and participating. I can assure you that it will be an important part of the input to our report.

Thank you.