

Debbie Schulz

From: Info E-Box
Sent: February 24, 2022 2:05 PM
To: Debbie Schulz
Subject: FW: Contract Fire Services

From: Kristopher Liivam
Sent: February 24, 2022 10:31 AM
To: mailbox@acrd.bc.ca; inquiries@rdbn.bc.ca; crdreception@crd.bc.ca; mailbox@cariboord.ca; info@ccrd.ca; info@rdck.bc.ca; info@rdco.com; inquiries@csrd.bc.ca; administration@comoxvalleyrd.ca; cvrd@cvrd.bc.ca; info@rdek.bc.ca; info@fvrd.ca; district@rdffg.bc.ca; information@islandstrust.bc.ca; info@rdks.bc.ca; info@rdkb.com; info@rdmw.bc.ca; inquiries@rdn.bc.ca; info@ncrdbc.com; info@rdno.ca; Info E-Box <info@rdos.bc.ca>; prrd.dc@prrd.bc.ca; administration@qathet.ca; Info@slrd.bc.ca; tyates@srd.ca; tyates@srd.ca; info@scrd.ca; admin@tnrd.ca
Subject: Contract Fire Services

Please direct this email to the Regional District Board Members,

With the memories of last year's fire season still fresh in everyone's mind, I was wondering if you had a chance to discuss with the BCWS about why they left 1000 fire fighters idle in Alberta and NE BC last year? In 2019, I was asked to present at a "Dragon's Den" for BCWS about providing contract engines. The OFC (now BCWS) Director of Structural Protection flat out said they were not interested in interrupting the business relationship they have with the BC Fire Chiefs and IAFF. This was even after my efforts of trying to assist in 2017 and 2018 with the wildfire situation then.

This is not an exaggeration as there are numerous oilfield and wildfire contract fire services which are active and want to be involved. In NE BC, there is Firemaster, Safety Boss, and Trojan Safety who had resources available but were given the cold shoulder. In Alberta there are another couple dozen fire fighting contractors. This capacity is due to the Canadian Oil and Gas Industry Recommended Practices for Pumping Flammable Fluids. Because of this unique IRP, Alberta and NE BC have a very high concentration of for hire fire fighters and equipment. Many of whom also are active in their community volunteer fire halls, or were former members of provincial wildfire agencies. This is a situation not seen anywhere else in the world.

My competitors and I have tried relentlessly for over 10 years to be part of the solution but are rebuffed. Last year [I went public on this to the CBC](#) . BCWS and CFFC implied that a fire fighter who goes through 16 weeks of NFPA 1001 Fire training and years of experience is inferior to a college student who goes through 10 days of training. Granted an oilfield fire truck is useless on top of a mountain, but those units could be used in wildland urban interface and wildland industrial interface situations. They are equipped with large fire pumps, premixed foam in a CAFS delivery system, and also deploy dry chemical. At the very least they could have transferred municipal fire fighters from protecting individual assets, like saw mills, and moved them to the front line. Pricing was not an issue, as all the companies I spoke with all would have respected the BC Interagency Rate Sheet.

As far as I am aware, only 1 Alberta contractor was deployed for BCWS with 5 fire trucks and a SPU 2 Trailer to West Kelowna. They set up their SPU 2 trailer that night, and in the morning they were told to demob and head back to Alberta. Apparently, it rained 0.5mm and was justification to release these resources. A few days later a community on the west side of Okanogan Lake suffered a devastating loss of around 80 homes. Why these resources were not redeployed is a serious question that should have been asked. I completely understand supporting BC contractors first, as I make noise when BC contractors come to Alberta, but at the same time when all the resources are out and entire

cities and towns are being evacuated all over the place it would be more than reasonable to request resources from across the rocky mountains. For example, in 2020, when High Level and La Crete were threatened, multiple SPU contractors were deployed from BC because all resources available were out. If the fire fighting contractors of Alberta were fully deployed there would be a traffic jam of fire trucks crossing the mountain range!

One of my lead fire fighters got deployed through FNESS to instruct wildfire fuel mitigation and what he told me was exasperating! He was at a First Nations community to do the practical portion of the course. He informed me the village was evacuated due to wildfire threat for two weeks at this point and there were no fire fighting resources visible for the 5 days he was in the community. Eventually 2 SPU teams arrived but did not deploy their equipment because they did not want to remove the fuel load around the homes, so these students went around and moved the fuels away from the homes then the SPU teams finally set up their sprinklers. As mentioned above, with this brigade strength of fire fighters available, there should have been no reason to leave any community under protected.

Last year, I was able to source 8 Airport fire trucks, 2 Pump and Roll fire engines, 8 brush trucks, 3 sprinkler units along with 40 fire fighters (1/2 of whom were First Nations) and made these resources well known to BCWS. As well, I could have sourced another 10-15 more fire trucks from a rental agency. I was asked to provide pricing but was never called back (pricing would have been nearly identical to the Interagency Rate Sheet). One must wonder, with the calls for fire fighting resources coming in from across the province, bringing in fire fighters from around the world, why were these resources only 13 hours away left sitting? I am just one small contractor, so imagine what the larger contractors could have brought forward.

As well, everyone should be asking what is the plan this year if the Canadian Armed Forces are deployed on a NATO mission to Europe? The Federal Government's sledgehammer will be taken out of the tool box and its hard to drive a stake with a ballpein hammer. If there is no concentrated effort to produce a plan before wildfire season heats up, then this year could be another disaster.

One should also question why some fire services are so eager to go out on deployment and not keep the resources their rate payers paid for at their home base? With the extreme fire conditions last year, one should ask why any fire chief would be so eager to risk their own community's safety to treat the community's fire service like a for profit enterprise with crews and equipment gone for months on end? Especially since the existence of contract fire fighting resources are well known to BCWS? Did anyone question if their Underwriter Fire Survey Rating could be affected by the deployment of engines, tenders, and fire fighters? Is there a liability issue for the regional district if an insurer looks into a residential fire and asks where the equipment is that should have responded and the answer is they were out making money somewhere else? The concept of mutual aid is really meant for smaller situations like a barn or sawmill fire, not sending volunteer fire fighters away for months on end. Numerous volunteer fire services from across Canada are having a hard time retaining volunteers, and situations like this drive up burn out rates. I hope you ask your respective fire chiefs these pointed questions. Do not get me wrong, I hire a lot of volunteer fire fighters and their experience and training is top notch, but I do not take so many that it creates a risk to the community.

Hopefully, 2022 will give your communities a break from natural disasters but if the need arises, we hope to be there to assist.

Regards,

Kris Liivam, CRSP
President



