



House of Commons  
CANADA

## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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PACP • NUMBER 044 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

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EVIDENCE

**Wednesday, December 2, 2009**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Shawn Murphy**



## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

On behalf of all members of the committee, I want to welcome all the witnesses here today.

The meeting was called pursuant to the Standing Orders to deal with chapter 7, emergency management, Public Safety Canada, of the fall 2009 Report of the Auditor General of Canada.

The committee is very pleased to have with us this afternoon, from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, of course the Auditor herself, Sheila Fraser. She's accompanied by Wendy Loschiuk, Assistant Auditor General; and Gordon Stock, Principal.

From the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness we have Mr. William Baker, the Deputy Minister and Accounting Officer. He's accompanied by Mr. Myles Kirvan, the Associate Deputy Minister; and Daniel Lavoie, the Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Emergency Management and National Security Branch.

From the Privy Council Office we have Stéphane Larue, Director of Operations, Security and Intelligence.

Again, welcome, everyone.

We'll start with opening statements. Ms. Fraser, you have five minutes.

Thank you very much.

**Ms. Sheila Fraser (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General of Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We thank you for this opportunity to discuss chapter 7 of our fall 2009 report on emergency management at Public Safety Canada.

As you mentioned, I'm accompanied today by Wendy Loschiuk, assistant auditor general, and Gordon Stock, principal. They are responsible for our audits of national security and public safety. This audit examines emergency management, and in particular the coordination role of Public Safety Canada.

I would like to start by saying that we are pleased with the responses of Public Safety Canada and the Privy Council Office to the recommendations noted in our chapter. They have agreed with each of the recommendations addressed to them, and have committed to taking corrective action.

Let me also emphasize that we recognize that the role of Public Safety Canada is very challenging. In 2003, Public Safety Canada was created to coordinate an overall federal approach for emergency management in an environment where departments have traditionally managed their own responses to emergencies within their respective mandates. Today, however, emergencies such as floods or forest fires, or human-induced events such as power blackouts or cyber attacks, could quickly outstrip the ability of an individual department to respond. The emergency could also quickly escalate beyond a single department's mandate.

In 2007 the Emergency Management Act was enacted to improve coordination on the part of the federal government, in cooperation with provinces and municipalities, by clarifying the leadership role of Public Safety Canada, as well as the responsibilities of other departments for emergency management.

[Translation]

We found that Public Safety Canada has had difficulty exercising the leadership necessary to ensure that federal emergency management activities are coordinated.

It has taken the necessary first steps by drafting the interim Federal Emergency Response Plan—a framework that outlines a decision-making process to be used to coordinate emergency response activities.

However, we found that work on developing this plan has been ongoing since 2004, and it has not yet been formally approved by the government or endorsed by all departments. As well, many of the needed operational details that specify how a coordinated response should happen have not been reviewed or updated.

We found that Public Safety Canada needs to improve the guidance it provides to federal departments for their emergency management plans. Once in place, it should analyze these plans to ensure that they provide the basis for a coordinated response.

For example, we noted in the chapter the need for guidance on preparing and responding to potential chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or explosive events. Although Public Safety Canada issued a strategy in 2005 that outlines federal rules and responsibilities, it has not developed the operational protocols or agreements on how the departments involved should work together in a coordinated manner.

We found that Public Safety Canada has had difficulty exercising the leadership necessary to ensure that federal emergency management activities are coordinated. It has taken the necessary first steps by drafting the interim Federal Emergency Response Plan, a framework that outlines a decision-making process to be used to coordinate emergency response activities. However, we found that work on developing this plan has been ongoing since 2004, and it has not yet been formally approved by the government or endorsed by all departments. As well, many of the needed operational details that specify how a coordinated response should happen have not been reviewed or updated.

• (1535)

[English]

Public Safety Canada has made considerable progress in setting up its government operations centre. The centre provides better communications between departments on the status of potential and ongoing emergencies. Confusion can occur during emergencies if decision-makers do not have a full picture of what's actually happening on the ground. The government operations centre helps to reduce this confusion by providing decision-makers with a common set of facts.

Under the 2007 act, Public Safety Canada is to promote a common approach to emergency management for first responders. Public Safety Canada has assisted groups in developing standards for personal protective equipment and has completed a draft document on communications interoperability nationwide. However, we found that the federal government could do more to promote the use of standardized equipment and share the costs with first-responder groups. Officials told us that it has not done so because of a lack of resources; however, one third of its budget remained unspent.

Public Safety Canada is also the lead federal department for coordinating the protection of Canada's critical infrastructure. Public Safety Canada is working with provinces, territories, and the private sector to develop an implementation plan for its proposed national critical infrastructure strategy and has taken the first step in drafting the strategy. It has identified 10 main infrastructure sectors and a federal department to head each one. However, progress has been slow and it has not yet determined what infrastructure is critical at the federal level or how to protect it.

[Translation]

Threats to essential computerized infrastructure, or cyberthreats, are increasing and Canada is certainly not immune to them. Disruptions could have damaging consequences to our computer and communications networks that would also impact our electrical grids or energy distribution networks.

As we noted in our chapter, progress to determine what needs to be protected and how has been slow until this past year, and at the time of our audit Public Safety Canada was just developing the key elements of a national cyber-strategy.

Public Safety Canada has provided us with a copy of their draft action plan to respond to the findings in our chapter and implement our recommendations. We found that their action plan is thorough and that it specifically addresses the concerns we raise in this report. The committee may wish to ask the department whether progress on

obtaining formal agreement for the Federal Emergency Response Plan remains on track.

Before concluding, I would like to remind committee members that I recently sent a letter to the chair on issues related to this audit. It summarizes our assessment of actions taken by Public Safety Canada and others in response to our 2005 audit that included emergency preparedness. It also contains the follow-up information on some of the recommendations issued by your committee in its June 2005 report on national security.

[English]

Mr. Chair, we thank you for your attention, and we would be pleased to answer any questions the committee members may have.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Fraser.

We're now going to hear from Mr. Baker, the Deputy Minister of the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

**Mr. William Baker (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm delighted to be here with members to address chapter 7 of the Auditor General's report on emergency management, an important responsibility of Public Safety Canada.

I'm accompanied by Myles Kirvan, Associate Deputy Minister of Public Safety; Daniel Lavoie, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister of Emergency Management and National Security; and Stéphane Larue, from the Privy Council Office, Director of Operations for Security and Intelligence.

The Government of Canada's first priority is protecting the safety and security of all Canadians. Given the variety, complexity, and changing nature of the challenges facing us today, we recognize the importance of preparing for disasters and emergencies of all kinds.

We're pleased that the Auditor General noted that progress had been made in improving federal emergency coordination through the government operations centre, and that steps have been taken towards promoting a consistent approach to critical infrastructure protection and developing a cyber-security strategy.

• (1540)

[Translation]

But clearly many challenges remain before us. I have reviewed the chapter on emergency management and agree with its recommendations.

In response, the department has developed a management action plan with clearly articulated deliverables and timelines that address the five recommendations. We are confident that we will be able to make significant progress on all of them over the coming years.

Specifically, there are three areas where Public Safety Canada needs to raise its game.

[English]

First of all, a common theme running through the report is the need to develop policies and programs to clarify Public Safety Canada's leadership and coordination role. We will be seeking government approval of the federal emergency response plan, and we will do that as soon as possible. This will reinforce the understanding that federal departments have of their respective responsibilities, of the coordination role of Public Safety Canada, and where and how we are to cooperate in emergencies.

Secondly, the department needs to strengthen relationships with its stakeholders. That includes provincial and territorial governments, and the various private, not-for-profit organizations and agencies that have a role in emergency management. We remain committed to working with them, as closely as necessary, and productively as possible, and intend to expand that collaboration in the coming year.

[Translation]

Three, the department needs organizational stability. The report noted that we have had difficulty in attracting and retaining senior managers to provide direction and leadership. Addressing these issues will be a key priority to ensure that experienced and knowledgeable people are in place.

[English]

Planning, relationship-building, and organizational stability are clearly the three areas where the department will focus in the coming year. In doing so, I'm confident this will address the Auditor General's recommendations and strengthen the foundation upon which we carry out our mandate.

Mr. Chair, my colleagues and I would be pleased to take any questions from any of the members with respect to the report. Thank you for the opportunity to make these opening remarks.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Baker.

We're now going to go to the first round of eight minutes, and we're going to start with Ms. Crombie.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.):** Thank you.

Mr. Baker, I indeed have many questions for you.

Obviously the Auditor General has criticized Public Safety Canada for not exhibiting or demonstrating the kind of leadership we needed to coordinate emergency management. So why were there no policies and procedures developed since your creation to clarify and coordinate this leadership role? Why did it take so long to come to this point? Why wasn't there an action plan developed until now, and why did you never get the interim plan endorsed?

**Mr. William Baker:** If I may, Mr. Chair, first of all, we're dealing with Public Safety Canada, which is of course a relatively new organization. It was set up at the very end of 2003. The Emergency Management Act received royal assent in 2007, which clarified the role of Public Safety Canada in this regard.

Work has been done, and I think in all the areas there are documented steps that have been taken to accomplish the type of outcome that you've described. What we need to do is drive these things home clearly, get to the point of having final products that are

confirmed by federal partners, provinces, territories, and others with whom we work, and in some cases we need to make sure that we have cabinet approval with respect to these products.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Nonetheless, it has been six years. Why do you think cabinet approval has been so long in forthcoming?

**Mr. William Baker:** If I may, I think with respect to the federal emergency response plan, which is a core document here, there has been a working document available for some time right now that Public Safety Canada had developed with other departments and agencies involved in emergency management. We're using that for all intents and purposes as the guidance document, but I think the Auditor General correctly pointed out that for it to have the effect it should, we need to ensure we have government support for the roles and responsibilities set out there, and that's exactly what we're seeking.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** So you don't have government support?

**Mr. William Baker:** We will. As I indicated in my opening remarks, we have a product ready to go. I'm looking forward to an early opportunity to discuss this with the minister and seek cabinet approval.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Did Public Safety Canada play a coordinating role in H1N1? Was the preparation for the pandemic deemed a success?

**The Chair:** Point of order, Mr. Young.

**Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC):** Chair, I don't think we want to go down this road. H1N1 was a pandemic, it was not a national disaster. So we're really getting off the topic of dealing with national disasters.

● (1545)

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** The chair allowed it before, and it's referenced in the report.

**The Chair:** What's your response, Ms. Crombie?

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** You had allowed it in a previous discussion; and secondly, and more importantly, the Auditor General notes it in her report.

**The Chair:** Okay, I will allow the question.

If the department was not involved in the H1N1 response, and I'm not sure they were, Mr. Baker certainly won't be continuing the discussion. I'm not aware that they were. I understand they weren't, but I'll let him speak for the department.

Go ahead, Mr. Baker.

**Mr. William Baker:** Mr. Chair, as I think everyone is aware, the Minister of Health is leading the federal response to H1N1, and that includes the department as well as the Public Health Agency of Canada. They're working with provinces and territories on the Canadian pandemic influenza plan.

Public Safety Canada does indeed have a role. Our job is to provide leadership and coordination of a whole-of-government response, which means a few things. One is that we have led the efforts to ensure that all departments and agencies have pandemic plans in place in the event that we reach a level of criticality where operations are affected.

In September of this year we assessed the pandemic readiness levels for federal institutions that provide critical services to Canadians, and we undertook a second round of those assessments in November. Of the 49 institutions responsible for the delivery of critical services to Canadians, they now show a strong degree of overall readiness and we're quite pleased with the effort that has gone into that.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Do you think a more coordinated government response would have helped the vaccine distribution to the provinces?

**Mr. William Baker:** Any question around the vaccine or the medical response would best be left with the Minister of Health and the department.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Thank you.

Did Public Safety Canada ever meet with—

**The Chair:** On a point of order, Mr. Shipley.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The members opposite went on for weeks on end about H1N1 in the House of Commons. The Auditor General can clarify for us, if she would, whether part of this audit had anything to do with the H1N1 process, because in the end, quite honestly, as the opposition member will know, it actually has worked very well.

The situation with H1N1 has been looked after. The shots are out. The vaccines are getting out to all the people who need it.

So I'll clarify that I don't think the Auditor General made reference in this report, in terms of the audit on H1N1.

**The Chair:** You asked the question and Mr. Baker has indicated—and I'll ask him to clarify—that his department was not involved in the vaccine delivery.

Is that correct, Mr. Baker?

**Mr. William Baker:** Absolutely. The Department of Health and the Public Health Agency have had the lead on this. We've been a supporting organization dealing with pandemic readiness plans.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Crombie.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** I'm not going to waste time arguing with Mr. Shipley about how well this was delivered or not, but clearly most people have not received their inoculation. We ordered the vaccine three months after the rest of the world. Nonetheless—

**The Chair:** Please stick to the report. You have a certain amount of time to ask the witness questions.

I'd ask that the interruptions be limited, please, too.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** I'm sorry about the nature of the discussion. I really want to examine this from an emergency management perspective, which is what we're here to discuss.

So did Public Safety Canada meet with provinces and territories during the current H1N1 and assess how the government could have provided more leadership? And how often did these meetings take place, especially with respect to distribution from an emergency management perspective?

**Mr. William Baker:** As a point of clarification, the role of Public Safety Canada was to ensure that we had complete and thorough pandemic readiness plans for federal departments and institutions. They would be relevant in the event that the incidence of H1N1 was such that delivery of critical services in the country and the federal response was limited.

We developed plans. We did testing of those plans. We undertook a number of exercises to make sure that, for instance, in the event that 30% to 40% of the workforce was ill, you could still carry on critical government services.

That was our role. It's in respect of pandemic planning. And of course we have a facility to monitor events should that have occurred. Fortunately, as we speak, we have not found ourselves in that situation.

• (1550)

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Thank you.

My final question is on the lapsing of your budget, on your \$58.5 million budget. A third of it—almost \$20 million—lapsed in each of the past two years. Can you tell us why that was and what happened to the money? Does it go back into general revenue?

**Mr. William Baker:** Yes, I'll be pleased to respond to that.

There was indeed a lapse in 2008-09 of some \$19 million on a base of \$58.5 million. Some of that money was declared surplus at the beginning of the year in order to contribute to, effectively, a management reserve. This is a typical practice in government, a certain set-aside.

Some of the money went into a secure communications interoperability project, which was tied to a specific initiative. Some of it was indeed declared surplus. We also transferred some of the money for accommodations and support of emergency management regional operations, because, as members may be aware, we have a regional infrastructure in place. The final part of this was some of this went to help our provincial and municipal partners undertake exercises.

I can tell you that—

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** And there was also a lapse there, I noticed.

**Mr. William Baker:** There was indeed a lapse in that area. I can tell you that when we look at the spending pattern for 2009-10, we will not experience, by any means, the same lapse.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** So let me just get this clear. You had a \$17 million budget for exercises in national safety management, and half of that wasn't spent in over three fiscal years. Then there was also the other lapse. There were two lapses of \$20 million over two years? Are those two separate lapses that occurred?

**Mr. William Baker:** No, the exercises would be part of the overall budget of emergency management.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Part of the overall \$20 million?

**Mr. William Baker:** That's correct.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Am I done?

**The Chair:** No, half a minute.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Okay, I'll keep going.

Why don't we talk about critical infrastructure. I saw it in your action plan. You've created a draft strategy. Can you discuss how you plan to protect critical infrastructure?

**Mr. William Baker:** Sure. We have indeed developed a draft strategy in concert with provinces and territories. It's quite well advanced.

In terms of the specifics around that, if you don't mind, I'll turn to my colleague, Miles Kirvan.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Do you want to address cyber-security while you're at it, in that case?

**Mr. William Baker:** Sure, I'd be pleased to address cyber-security right now and then turn it over to my colleague.

I'm really quite pleased with the progress the department has made over the last number of months on cyber-security. We are now at a point where we have been working with departments and agencies and have developed, I think, a very complete and comprehensive cyber-security strategy. We will soon be in a position to discuss this with the ministers affected and bring it forward to the government for consideration, but I'm quite confident that it will be in reasonably good shape.

Now, this is a strategy. The implementation of the measures that the government will have to take—any country has to take to respond to cyber-security—is not the type of thing that can be handled immediately. This will take a multi-year investment plan.

**Mr. Myles Kirvan (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness):** With respect to the critical infrastructure strategy and action plan, the strategy itself and action plan are the product of a federal-provincial-territorial consensus, if I can put it that way. The Auditor General mentioned that it hasn't been through the final approval yet. That is, we think, very close at hand.

There was a meeting of deputy ministers in September where this was discussed and there was consensus there. So it's just actually going through a federal-provincial-territorial ministerial approval process at the moment. It was very much generated from there.

Among all governments it recognizes ten critical infrastructure sectors, such as energy and utilities, finance, food, and so on. These are all set out. It sets a way forward in terms of information sharing and information protection. This is quite important, because in the critical infrastructure area, when you're dealing with, let's say, utilities or certain other manufacturing sectors and so on, there's information that they also want to make sure is part of this enterprise. This is so they can protect some information that is inherent to the protection of their own business interests.

There's also an action plan. So there's a strategy together with the action plan going through an approval process now, and the strategy actually sets out the steps: what you're going to do in year one and what you will do in year two when you get to assessing the risks and running the exercises and making sure that it's working and functioning well.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kirvan, and thank you, Ms. Crombie.

We're now going to go to you, Monsieur Roy, *pour huit minutes*.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I must say that I am very concerned about the Auditor General's report. You have said that you agree with the recommendations, but I find that things have not progressed all that much. Basically, if you want to protect Canadians, you first have to identify the risks they might be facing. In today's world, there is a constant and significant change in the nature of those risks. For instance, I am thinking about the climate change we are experiencing, particularly in my region, where there are some 130 public sites, including roads and villages, that might be hit by flooding, etc.

What exactly have you done in terms of risk assessment? And I am not talking solely about physical risks, because I believe that prevention work also has to be done.

In terms of agriculture, you have spoken about food safety. Consider the issue of wheat farming. At some future date, climate change might disrupt a significant part of our country's grain production, and we might be seeing that happen very quickly, because our climate is now changing extremely quickly and we cannot foresee the impact of that over a 10- to 15-year period. We will have to deal with increasingly dangerous natural disasters. And I am not talking about breakdowns in information technology or one-off things like terrorism and cybercrime. I am talking about changes in our natural environment.

Allow me to give you a very concrete example. In a city like Toronto, let us suppose that temperatures remain extremely high for three or four days, a week even, as was recently the case. Have safe places been identified to accommodate people with respiratory problems? At one point, when temperatures were very high and smog alerts were in effect, shopping malls were used in the Montreal area. Can we assure Canadians that they will be effectively protected against the hazards arising from climate change? That is something of great concern to me.

I find the report unsettling. Indeed, it has been difficult for you to exercise leadership, and not only because of the problems you faced in recruiting staff. Is there cooperation among the departments concerned? And are you cooperating with the appropriate departments in all provinces as well as major cities such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver?

**Mr. William Baker:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, it is important to note that emergency management is a provincial jurisdiction, and that the federal government assumes certain responsibilities. We are working in close cooperation with other federal and provincial agencies and departments in order to identify all the risks that might affect the country. In my view, the cooperation is excellent. Since I started to work at Public Safety Canada, only a few weeks ago, I have found that there is a lot of support among the federal community with regard to emergency preparedness.

As for the example that you mentioned, I would, with your permission, Mr. Chair, ask my colleague Daniel Lavoie to respond.

**Mr. Daniel Lavoie (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Emergency Management and National Security Branch, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness):** Thank you. I would like to come back to the issue of cooperation. As recommended by the Auditor General, the approval of the Federal Emergency Response Plan will significantly contribute to maximizing the support we can obtain. It is a very good recommendation, which we support and which will help us move forward.

We do not have major issues, but it is often better not to have any issues at all. You raised a number of examples earlier, including issues such as farming, erosion and flooding. A number of levers are pulled as part of the emergency management process. Municipalities are the first to react; followed by the provinces. There is much discussion with our provincial colleagues. In the last three years, we have re-established a committee that had lost its sense of direction, but is now up and running. I am referring to the FPT committee of senior officials responsible for emergency management.

We had a discussion no later than yesterday. We are cooperating on a long list of issues. A problem affecting one province will have an impact on its neighbour, because neighbouring provinces will help each other out in the event of major problems. Since this also affects the federal government, it is in our best interest to come up with solutions. A lot of work is being done in terms of prevention. We have done much prevention work with individuals. You might have seen the advertising campaign entitled “72 hours... Is your family prepared?”, which targets individual Canadians. First, we prepare individuals, then we deal with municipalities.

We can develop programs or a process to ensure that, in the event of an uncontrollable disaster, the citizens affected will have quick access to the appropriate services—whether provincial health care services, or services for small and medium enterprises provided by Industry Canada or assistance from HRSDC. We have come together to develop such a process.

I would like to come back to your example when you spoke about farming. We have an ongoing planning process with regard to evolving risks. A part of the 2007 Emergency Management Act clearly indicates that the Minister of Public Safety has specific responsibilities and that each government minister is responsible for analyzing and assessing the risks within their portfolio. Who better than the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to inform us of the actual risks within that sector? He is also responsible for assessing the situation.

Therefore, the Auditor General recommended that we provide the department with more assistance so that it can effectively carry out its responsibilities.

• (1600)

**Mr. Jean-Yves Roy:** That is what I find concerning. At present, departments do not have their own committee to inform them of potential risks. Unfortunately, in the majority of disasters, Public Safety only intervenes after the fact. There is no prevention, and that is what I am concerned about. The best example of that is what occurred at Rivière-au-Renard, in Quebec. Everyone knew that it was a flood area, but people were allowed to build their homes there.

**Mr. Daniel Lavoie:** Cases like that are acted on at the local level, much more so than at the federal. In general, only the largest emergencies are managed by the federal government.

[English]

**The Chair:** Merci, Monsieur Roy.

I want to remind all members to keep their questions short and relevant.

To the witnesses, I ask you to keep your answers precise and succinct.

Mr. Christopherson, you have eight minutes.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you all for your attendance today. It's good to see you all from the AG's office again.

I've mentioned before that in a previous life part of my portfolio responsibility was then called “emergency measures”. It's getting a little stale. It was about 15 years ago, and I accept that. But at least I have some familiarity with the issues and how they work and what the interrelatedness is of the various pieces.

I have to tell you that right from the get-go, as a parliamentarian, I'm outraged. As a citizen, I'm worried, to say the least. Since 9/11, much of the world has been turned upside down, particularly with regard to anything involving security.

Our government and governments like ours around the world have approved billions of dollars in expenditures in tightening up and trying to deal with all the various pieces of public security, given the age we live in. To find out that, for instance, the one main document, the federal emergency response plan, is not there, and you have been working on it since 2004 and it's still not approved, that's where the outrage is coming from. It's not as if this is new. I read your comments, deputy, in your bullet point on page 3, “...clearly many challenges remain before us”.

I reviewed the chapter on emergency management, and agree with all of its recommendation. Yeah, well, so what? So did your predecessors, and they didn't do anything about it. We need something from you that's going to give us a sense that it really will happen. I'm not seeing it in these documents. When I looked at the updated report that we got from the AG, going back to the audit in 2005, to see how many things were identified then that remain unresolved or unsatisfactory—to use the Auditor General's term—I counted them up. There were nine areas that overlapped between the study in 2005 and now, and six of those are unsatisfactory. That's six out of nine recommendations from a 2005 audit, when you started in 2004, and we're eight years out from 9/11. All I get is that you know you have challenges and you'll get on top of it. That's just not going to wash.

Let's deal with this one as an example. Let's deal with this federal emergency response. Right from the get-go, here's what I don't understand. Help me get this. The federal emergency response plan is not approved by the government. Therefore it doesn't have the sanction of government. Yet according to the documents here, it's deemed to be final. It's the document you use. That tells me, as an ordinary citizen, as a parliamentarian, that if something happened right now and BlackBerry's started buzzing in this room, that you would immediately reach to that plan, and it would be what you worked from. Because you deem it to be final, we can feel secure that it's going to deal with the issues as they need to be dealt with.

Yet on the other hand, it's not final enough to go to the government. It's final enough for us as citizens to rely on that plan to be there, to show us what we should do when the emergency hits, but it's not final enough for the government to approve it. On your dateline in your action plan, I see "as soon as possible," after you've already had one audit condemning you in 2005 for not doing exactly the same thing you're being condemned for now.

Something's missing. I've been around long enough. There's a piece of this that is missing, and I don't know what it is. There's something stopping you from taking it to government. There's some reason government doesn't want to put its final hands on, or you haven't resolved enough issues to answer the questions at the cabinet table, which would tell me the document is not ready for us to rely on as citizens if an emergency hit.

Help me understand how we got here, why you didn't react adequately after the 2005 audit, and why we should feel confident that a document you say is final is not good enough for the cabinet to put their fingerprints on and say yes, this is the plan. Help me understand.

• (1605)

**Mr. William Baker:** The member is raising a number of legitimate concerns, but we have to take these one at a time. There has been work on a federal emergency response plan for many years. Officials concluded that for all intents and purposes the plan was in good enough shape by June 2008. I believe that was the date. The prevailing thinking at the time was that it was sufficient to have a plan that was shared with departments and agencies, a plan that all parties were working from.

The Auditor General's report raises an important and justifiable point: to give this plan the weight it needs, government approval should be in place. We agree with that, and we will be seeking it. This is not to suggest that the plan is deficient in any way. I have looked at the plan, and I don't believe it to be deficient. It's not everything, of course—plans trigger other plans, and they trigger other events—but I think it is in reasonable shape. We will have to put it to the minister.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** When?

**Mr. William Baker:** I don't want to pass judgment on what ministers might think. They have to have an opportunity to review it.

When we as officials say "as soon as possible", it's understood that we cannot dictate when items will go before ministers and cabinet for approval. But Minister Van Loan has said that this will be

given sufficient priority. I'm confident that we have a product that is in position to be approved in short order.

• (1610)

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Have you taken anything on this topic to cabinet before, as a report to be approved, and had it sent back? Or has nothing gone to the cabinet table in all these years?

**Mr. William Baker:** To my knowledge, the federal emergency response plan has not gone forward before.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Help me to understand. I'm outraged, but I'm trying to be as fair-minded as I can. Help me understand, what is it that still needs to be done before it can go to cabinet?

**Mr. William Baker:** I do not think anything more needs to be done, nothing in the way of refining the plan.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt. I don't want to be rude, but I'm short of time.

We're talking about the security of the country. You folks are one notch down from having the Minister of National Defence come into it. That's what scared the hell out of me when I was the minister. I know what's there. If you tell me it's in that kind of shape, why hasn't it been in front of the cabinet a long time ago?

**Mr. William Baker:** I think the operating assumption was that the plan as it stood was sufficient, because it was being used at an officials level.

I agree with the Auditor General, as does the minister, that this is not sufficient. We need to ensure that this enjoys the support of government.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I'm sorry, I want to stay with this. It's the main plan. I'm going to be a bit like a dog with a bone here.

I don't understand why it hasn't gone to cabinet if it's in such good shape. You say it's in a final condition. We all recognize that it was done by humans, so it's not perfect. But if it's as good as it's going to get, why would it not go to cabinet in its current form? What needs to be done? And why is the minister not running with this?

This is what I don't understand. This should be motherhood. Everything else about security seems to be motherhood. In the era we're in, often that's the case. But what about the official plan for us to deal with emergencies? Why was that not a political imperative? Why was it not an imperative for you to get it approved, particularly since the Auditor General already went through this once in her audit in 2005?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Baker.

**Mr. William Baker:** Just to repeat, we're going to seek that approval at the earliest opportunity. One should not assume that nothing was done, just because the plan was not approved. This plan has been in the hands of officials for some time now. They have been operating according to that plan in developing work. Our people have not been sitting on their hands, and we will seek this political approval as soon as possible.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Thank you, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. Shipley.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses and of course the Auditor General for being here again today.

Just to start off, we have been very fortunate in this country not to have had many national emergencies. We've had a number of regional emergencies and we've not had national emergencies.

I can speak a little bit about involvement in the development of a local emergency plan. And we talked about this, actually, the first time the Auditor General was here. I have some appreciation about this, quite honestly, and I listened to my colleague David, who raised valid points.

I also have a complete appreciation for the complexity and time it takes to bring a plan together. When I'm looking at a plan that went from 2003 or 2004 to 2007, in that time Public Safety Canada was formed and in 2007 the Emergency Management Act was brought forward. With that came a sort of emergency response plan.

I know there is a lot of textbook theory that goes into a plan, and every time there is an event, there is then a review of what happened on that event. Lessons learned come from those, and the good ones are put into the plan and the bad ones are taken out. So I will always believe that an emergency plan is a living document.

Looking at the living document in terms of timing from 2003 to 2009, in 2003 I don't remember a lot about the issues around cybersecurity at that time—and in fact I'm not sure it was in the old file. So in terms of some of the earlier discussions that actually happened around agriculture in 2003, I can tell you that in 2003 the issues around biosecurity and genetics were not what they are today. Those are evolving. They are not simple. They are very complex.

I'm not defending unsatisfactory issues. I'm just trying to illustrate to the public and to those of us here that I have an appreciation for the complexity and the timing because what I'm understanding is that we now have a draft action plan.

As you have presented to us now, there is actually an action plan, and this is the timing in which we are going to try to resolve it. Earlier in your comments, sir, you talked about some of the issues, the things we are hopefully going to be able to deal with in this year. I wonder if you could comment in terms of the action plan and how you are going to meet those schedules you have put in place. Some of them, quite honestly, are fairly significant.

• (1615)

**Mr. William Baker:** We have, as you are aware, provided the Auditor General's office, and I believe members of this committee, with a detailed action plan on addressing each of the five recommendations. Clearly some of the items raised in the Auditor General's report predate that report and they have a certain history to them.

Our focus right now I believe is where it should be, which is on here and now, what do we need to do over the coming while to get the country in shape with respect to emergency management and to ensure that Public Safety Canada is exercising the necessary leadership that has to occur.

I can tell you I have reviewed in detail this departmental action plan. We have brought this to our departmental audit committee, which includes people who are external advisers. I am confident that this is thorough and that the timelines are reasonable, although I must tell you, as deputy minister, I will be pushing hard to see if we can get some of these things done even sooner, recognizing that it's not the only thing we do. But certainly I'll be seeking to see early implementation of all of these recommendations, and we will move forward on this. In fact, I look forward to reporting on progress on our implementation of these in the months and years to come.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** In the implementation of the action plan, in your presentation you said there are three specific areas where Public Safety Canada needs to raise its game, and you listed them. Basically, just to shorten it up, one was to develop policy and programs to clarify public safety leadership—so basically, leadership. The other one is to strengthen relationships with stakeholders, and I may have a separate question on that one. The third is organizational stability.

I just want to go back, because not everyone has the issues in terms of the action plan. Can you say that those three are going to be addressed in some detail within your action plan over the next year?

**Mr. William Baker:** Absolutely. Those three themes come directly from the items raised in the Auditor General's report and in our action items that have been identified. In the vast majority of cases we expect to experience significant progress, meaningful progress, in the coming year.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** If I could just go to the second one, it talks about relationships with stakeholders and goes back to being able to complete and make satisfactory some of those issues that... This is one, actually, being a bit unsatisfactory about being able to accomplish those things in a strategic federal, provincial, and municipal forum. Can you talk to us a little bit about how you actually deal with that relationship?

You have a federal government and you have all these departments. Each of those departments actually has a link down to a regional department. That regional department has some sort of link that reaches down to either a county or a city or a local municipality in terms of their plan. So actually it may be a regional disaster, but I can tell you the federal government will get called in for help. But I'll tell you, the guys who are sitting around the council table locally are the ones who are carrying a lot of that.

I'm trying to understand that development of relationships, which is so important to get the understanding that when something happens, actually the book gets pulled out and there's an action plan in place. How do you build that relationship so that you have credibility, so that you've built credibility with all those regions and the municipalities, so that it's a plan that can be followed and has credibility to it?

●(1620)

**Mr. William Baker:** You're raising an important point. Provinces have jurisdiction for emergency management, but it's recognized that sometimes provinces don't have the capacity. Sometimes the emergency transcends provincial or territorial borders, or sometimes it's in the national interest. We have mechanisms to work. The emergency management function within public safety has regional offices. The main reason for those regional offices is to work with provinces on their development of plans to put in sequencing that needs to take place. That relationship seems to be working very well.

Something that was mentioned in the report is the exercises that have been conducted. Those would involve federal, provincial, municipal, and in some cases even other players. We've done a number of these over the last few years to try to bring it to life, albeit in somewhat an artificial circumstances, because these are exercises, and my understanding is that the relationship with the provinces is really quite excellent.

I could say one thing. This is going to be a good year to get people's attention. We've been all focused on H1N1 pandemic planning, we have Olympics coming up, and there are a lot of exercises going on, particularly the province of British Columbia, the federal government, and so on. We're readying for a G-8 and a G-20. This is focusing everybody's attention on emergency management, and I think that's going to be very helpful in advancing our progress.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Before we go to the second round, there are a couple of areas I do want to pursue, Mr. Baker.

I have to somewhat agree with Mr. Christopherson. I'm reading the performance report, and it's not what I'd consider favourable. There are a lot comments here about the lack of leadership, the lack of a plan, the lack of any kind of coordination. When you go back and look at the audit that was done back in 2005, you see that the auditor at that time made nine recommendations about emergency preparedness. I can appreciate that the department was established only in 2003, but still it was a coordination of other functions of government. The audit was done. These were recommendations that the agency or the department agreed to fulfilling at the time. You told Canadians that you would do it, and you didn't do it. And now when we see the follow-up, it's "unsatisfactory", "unsatisfactory", "unsatisfactory".

Then the committee at the time held a hearing. We made six recommendations. Five of them came back unsatisfactory, that you haven't done it.

My conclusion, Mr. Baker, is that this is a department in some difficulty. But what really concerns me, and makes me quite annoyed—

**Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC):** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, would you make it clear whether you are taking an opposition slot in the questions right now? Or are you acting as chair to pre-empt a spot?

You're certainly taking a very partisan position right now, and you have not made clear whether this is an opposition time slot or not.

**The Chair:** This is "The chair has a few questions", Mr. Duncan. That's been the practice of this committee. I know you're not on the committee, but that is how—

**Mr. John Duncan:** It's certainly not the practice in my committee.

**Mr. Terence Young:** On the same point of order, Chair, I've been on this committee for a year now. I've never said anything before, but since Mr. Duncan has raised the issue... Your practice is to generally take two or three or four minutes every meeting with either somewhat partisan or fully partisan questions, which effectively adds about three or four minutes to the Liberal time in the committee. That's not what we agreed to for our standing orders for this committee in the first place.

●(1625)

**The Chair:** Mr. Christopherson has a point of order.

**Mr. Terence Young:** I wasn't finished, Chair.

**The Chair:** Oh, I'm sorry.

**Mr. Terence Young:** We never said anything about it because we think you're a good chair otherwise, but now that Mr. Duncan has raised it, I believe he's right. I believe you're effectively adding to the Liberal time with these questions at this time on this matter.

I did want to get that on the record.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Christopherson.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Thank you, Chair.

I respect that Mr. Duncan is not part of the committee, and that Mr. Young has been here in the past. The only person who has served on this committee longer than I have is the chair.

If I go back to the days when I first got here, it was Mr. John Williams, a Conservative, who was the chair. All the time I've been here, it's been built into the timing formula, and understood, that the chair is more than just a traffic cop in terms of us speaking, just because of the nature of the work we do here.

If you think it has spilled into partisanship, fair game, but the role that the chair is performing right now is not unlike that of the chair at almost every meeting we've had, going back to Mr. Williams, who was a Conservative.

If the reports are negative and it looks like it's opposition partisanship, then I would ask you to remember the nature of what we do. The auditor's reports are critical in some areas, and it's our job, collectively, putting our partisan hats aside, to get at the core of the issues and make recommendations to make Parliament work.

So I am going to defend the chair, because this is exactly the culture that was here when I arrived under Mr. Williams, who was the Conservative member. Much of the way in which we conduct ourselves is as a result of the culture that he developed—much, I would add, to the betterment of Parliament.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I'm going to continue.

I've made the point, Mr. Baker, that this is a department in considerable difficulty, in my opinion. But there's another point I want to get at.

I read your performance reports. I have for the past two years. What really bothers me, as a member of Parliament, is that the fundamental role of every member of Parliament, government and opposition, is to hold the government to account. And when I read this, I find nothing to identify the challenges the government has. There's nothing about the recommendations previously made by the Auditor General. There's nothing that would elaborate on the current recommendations. It's 38 pages of self.. When you read this report—and I did read it—you read that everything is very positive in this department; it's a great department; you're doing a tremendous job; you have no challenges; you have no risks; it couldn't be better.

Now, this goes not only to your department but to every department: I am so frustrated at these performance reports that are really not serving the purpose for which they're intended, and that's as a means of reporting to Parliament. With all due respect—and please, you've only been there three weeks, and you have an excellent recommendation—this process of the performance reports I find disturbing.

Have you read this report? I know that you've only been there three weeks, so perhaps I'm being a little unfair to you, but my submission to you, and I'll ask for your comment, is that this does not reflect the reality of the department. Do you agree with that?

I also want to get a comment from the auditor on that point.

**Mr. William Baker:** Mr. Chair, first of all, it's been six weeks—

**The Chair:** I apologize for that.

**Mr. William Baker:** —so I'm fully accountable for my actions here.

I have read it recently, in the context, frankly, of my orientation into the department.

I take your point. We will be informed by the Auditor General's report, the views of the public accounts committee, and so on in preparing future iterations of this. All I can say is that we will endeavour to make sure that this reflects more accurately, perhaps, what the current status of development is in the area of emergency management.

To go back to your first point, we agree with the Auditor General, as does the minister, that Public Safety Canada has a ways to go in demonstrating the leadership we need to exercise. I must point out that when you see, recommendation by recommendation, “unsatisfactory”, that does not mean that nothing is being done. It means that in the judgment of the Auditor General, or the public accounts committee, not enough has been done to get us over the line to be considered satisfactory.

I think we need to recognize that a lot of work has taken place. Is it enough? Absolutely not. We are here today with an action plan and an absolute commitment to move this forward and be able to deliver more positive results in the future.

● (1630)

**The Chair:** Do you have any comment on the point I made about the performance report, Madam Auditor?

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** Chair, I would just add that certainly in all the audits we have done on performance reports per se we have found generally that there has been an issue with balance, that departments are not presenting sufficiently the risks and the challenges they're facing or some of the things that may have gone wrong. It tends to be rather more self-congratulatory.

I would point out for the committee that one performance report that has indicated difficulties in the past and less than satisfactory performance has been the report of the Canada Revenue Agency, where Mr. Baker was previously the commissioner. Perhaps we could have hope that Public Safety Canada's performance report will be more balanced.

**The Chair:** I did make that point, Madam Auditor, that Mr. Baker comes to the committee with an excellent reputation.

Second round, Mr. Lee, five minutes.

**Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make sure the chair knows he has the support of members on this side of the table. And I can assure members opposite, by my recollection, that our chair is no more aggravating to government members than was Leonard Hopkins in the 1980s and John Williams. Leonard Hopkins was a Liberal in opposition and a great MP, as was John Williams in opposition, as a Reformer and as a Conservative.

In any event, there goes a minute of my time, in support of the chair.

One of the items identified by the Auditor General was the absence of developed departmental emergency plans. I know that Public Safety Canada, of course, isn't responsible for the development of those, but it does collaborate in the development, and I think the Auditor General reported there was zero. I'm just wondering if, in your collaborating leadership, you've been able to develop any departmental emergency management plans to date.

**Mr. William Baker:** I think I can speak with pretty good assurance that all departments and agencies have disaster recovery plans in place, business continuity plans. As I indicated in my opening remarks, one of the roles of Public Safety Canada—and it's a role we are exercising to a greater extent than before—is reviewing those plans. We've gone through two rounds of review, and each one, I'm pleased to say, resulted in improvements. Not that many days ago we took stock, and there was still a handful of departments or agencies where the plans were not quite up to par, and I understand just in the last number of days they've made the necessary improvements to get us there.

We are exercising the role that is envisioned for Public Safety Canada to go back to departments and agencies and review those plans. We're also giving them self-assessment tools, because they want to know how they're going to be assessed. We're certainly not shy in terms of providing the feedback, and I'm certainly not shy, as the deputy minister, in bringing it to the attention of any of my colleagues if their plans require improvement. But their response, I think, has been quite encouraging, in terms of the quality of the plans they are preparing.

**Mr. Derek Lee:** Do you ever finish? Do you ever sign off on a departmental emergency management plan? Do you ever get to the point where I was when I was in grade one, and the teacher put a gold star on the chart, or a red star, that this is a good student and he gets a red star? Or a badge in Boy Scouts. Do you ever get to that stage?

**Mr. William Baker:** Not stars.

We do provide assessment. I think we have to be careful that Public Safety Canada is not the one to determine that a department has or has not completely met the grade, because at the end of the day, individual departments and their ministers are responsible for their business continuity plans. So we provide feedback in terms of pointing out weaknesses, but ultimately they have to follow through. They are following through—

**Mr. Derek Lee:** With respect, Parliament is relying on you to be the experts. Surely, if it's leadership, you have to be able to tell them they're up to par or they're not. I appreciate that you have an ongoing exercise of reviewing their plans.

If you feel it's fine, I wouldn't mind if the next time the Auditor General did her tour, you could show her that you have a chart that shows above the line and below the line. I'm sure she'd look at that.

Can I ask you another question? Because of perhaps our lack of awareness of the organic nature of these plans and protocols, because there aren't a lot of them—I haven't seen one, and the Auditor General may still be looking for some—for purposes of advising or notifying, is there any protocol in existence between the Government of Canada and all its departments or its partner agencies across the country in relation to, for example, a weather event or an earthquake event or a terrorism threat?

What triggers or what arrangements exist to allow the federal government, with all of its resources, to notify an agency that there's a problem in the pipeline, whether it's the weather, or the earthquake about to happen or a terrorism threat? Can you tell me that?

•(1635)

**Mr. William Baker:** Sure. I can give a brief response. In that particular case, we have what's called the government operations centre. That is an operational component of Public Safety Canada.

This government operations centre receives input from any number of sources, whether meteorological monitoring stations or intelligence sources, with respect to events that are occurring, and it produces reports with respect to any developments. There's a gradation, depending upon the severity of what is occurring.

Actually, I would point out that in her report the Auditor General acknowledged that that function on the part of Public Safety Canada was making some meaningful progress. We still have a ways to go.

It's a relatively new centre, and we're getting all of the linkages in place, but I'm encouraged again that we have support to do that. It is the institution that we will be relying on to monitor events surrounding all major events in the country.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lee.

Mr. Young, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Terence Young:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Baker, I want to thank you for assuring the committee that there is a draft plan in place that is a fulsome and robust plan. It's my impression that if the draft plan's approved, in fact the plan we have right now might end up being the final plan anyway, although it still doesn't have that seal of approval.

I think it's important to point out that this is the plan that worked the only time it's ever been needed, which was with the Manitoba floods. I think it's important on this committee not to be inflammatory.

I also recognize in hearing your testimony today what a massive challenge it is. You also talked about the changing nature of it. I also understand that the departments can't be compelled, that it's a cooperative exercise as well.

How many parties have to be at the table to get this plan approved? Is it all the provinces and the territories, or is it the departments? How big an operation is that stage?

**Mr. William Baker:** There are really plans at different stages. We have plans at the federal level, federal emergency response plans and so on, and systems to guide the response of federal institutions moving forward. In that particular case, our leadership is pretty secure in that regard. We exercise it through reporting, through committees at different levels, deputy-level committees, assistant-deputy-minister-level committees, which Monsieur Lavoie chairs, for instance.

With the provinces, of course, you don't have the stick of—

**Mr. Terence Young:** No, it's a cooperative.

**Mr. William Baker:** It's a cooperative. They have their own responsibility. But as I said earlier, in terms of work we've done on critical infrastructure, protection plans and so on, they've been extremely interested and are working closely with us, as we are with them, to come up with a common approach.

**Mr. Terence Young:** Thank you.

You mentioned the Olympics, the G-8 and the G-20. How many different kinds of emergencies and disasters does such a plan have to be able to address?

**Mr. William Baker:** Mr. Chair, we call it an all-hazards plan. Under such a plan, you try to capture generically the types of hazards that might occur. Obviously there are different types of natural disasters. As we can imagine, a natural disaster can take on hundreds of forms, so you try to have a reasonable approach in terms of articulating those, with the understanding that at the end of the day, the particular disaster that occurs may be somewhat different from what was contemplated, but we have enough of it covered for purposes of planning.

**Mr. Terence Young:** I think Mr. Kirvan said that you need consensus from the provinces and territories to finalize the plan. Is that correct?

**Mr. Myles Kirvan:** Yes. I was referring, in that case, to the national strategy and action plan for critical infrastructure. In that case, that was actually worked on by all provinces and territories and the federal government, with Public Safety Canada leading it. It's a consensus process so that all ministers of all governments will be onside, not only with what the actual strategy is but with how it then rolls out. We'll all be part of it together.

That's very important in terms of working with those sectors, with the private sector, and with other aspects of civil society.

•(1640)

**Mr. Terence Young:** If you need consensus, I can understand why a plan might be delayed in its approval. Although it might be a fulsome or robust plan that might be perfectly workable, given that it has to be approved by 14 governments together, I understand the delay.

Mr. Shipley talked about a living document. I agree. It's something that has to be changed and updated, ad hoc almost, at any given time. Can you tell me how that might be done, Mr. Baker?

**Mr. William Baker:** I think our intention with the federal emergency response plan with respect to critical infrastructure and so on is that those would be updated, probably on an annual basis, if not more frequently.

We've just, for instance, done exercises related to the Olympics. Members are probably aware of Exercise Gold, which took place a few weeks ago. They involved federal and provincial governments, VANOC, the municipality, and so on. We learned from those exercises, and we will take that learning to modify the plans that go into it. Part of it is more of a static redo that will occur. Part of it would be building on our experiences.

**Mr. Terence Young:** I have a question for the Auditor General, because I know that she was feeling lonely there for a while.

You stated in your report that there has been considerable improvement in the government operations centre. I wonder if you could please describe what it's supposed to do, what progress has been made, and how it can improve.

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** Thank you.

Chair, if you'll allow, I would ask Mr. Stock to respond to that.

**Mr. Gordon Stock (Principal, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, Justice, Office of the Auditor General of Canada):** Basically, as the deputy has already stated, the government operations centre provides consistent information to different departments so they can act on decisions. In an emergency, the same set of facts can be communicated to a number of different people.

As we noted in the chapter, it has developed quite well over the last few years. There are some things that still need to be improved upon in terms of the overall ability of the government in the operations centre. If it is a long-term emergency of high risk that continues for a long period of time, they may not have all the resources they need to deliver against it. But for the operations they have seen, they have definitely received good feedback from

departments in terms of the kinds of communication they are providing in emergencies.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Stock.

We'll go to Madame Faillie *pour cinq minutes*.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faillie (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. How much time do I have? Five minutes? Thank you.

Earlier, Mr. Young asked a question about the status of the plan's approval. Could you prepare a province-by-province table showing the approval dates, i.e., when the provinces approved your plan, and submit it to the committee along with a copy of the correspondence you conducted with Quebec?

I would think that you could provide us with that fairly quickly because the information is at your disposal.

[English]

**Mr. Myles Kirvan:** As I understood the question, just to reiterate, in terms of the approval process for the plan, there was a meeting of deputy ministers that occurred in September. There was consensus to move ahead with the approval. All the provinces and territories are engaged in that now at the ministerial level. We're very close to completion. We are just waiting for the completion of it.

In terms of Quebec, Quebec has been part of that exchange as well, intergovernmentally.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** So you can provide us with that information fairly quickly.

You do not have that information?

[English]

**Mr. Myles Kirvan:** I'd have to get some clarity on that. Maybe what I can say is that as soon as we have final approval, there's going to actually be a ministerial announcement made, with all the provincial and territorial governments, to release it.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** You had a meeting in September. When will you be receiving the approval?

•(1645)

[English]

**Mr. Myles Kirvan:** I think it's safe to say it will be very soon—a very short timeframe.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** Do you think that could be by December 31, if the committee ensures follow-up?

[English]

**Mr. Myles Kirvan:** I can't hold any provincial government to that, but it will be very soon. Once all the ministers have done that, I think you'll see an announcement as a result.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Does that also include the settlement of claims for which the federal government had agreed to make payment? Does that include financial compensation which had been agreed upon with the various provinces?

[English]

**Mr. Myles Kirvan:** No, this is the critical infrastructure plan. It's focused on critical infrastructure.

I think the honourable member is referring to the disaster financial assistance arrangements, which is the current contribution plan. It has been in place and been well-respected for many, many years, with a formula for when the federal government makes—

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** No, sir, in fact I just wanted to deal with an issue that is very important for Quebec.

In 1998, Quebec experienced the worst storm, the ice storm crisis. More than 12 years have elapsed since then. Earlier, my colleague Mr. Shipley talked about credibility. In order to have credibility with the provinces, with the various governments and various authorities, we need to first and foremost resolve these outstanding issues.

When will Quebec obtain compensation for the ice storm crisis? The federal government made a commitment to compensate the Government of Quebec.

[English]

**Mr. Myles Kirvan:** On the ice storm, there are two components: one is federal, and the other is the Quebec government one. It was a very complex claim. It took a substantial period of time to pull elements of the claim together, which is entirely understandable.

There was a huge claim from Quebec. Interim payments have been made to Quebec over the years, and if my memory serves, it has been over half a billion dollars to this point. In terms of actually finalizing it, there are still discussions going on. There are audits that have been done. An exchange of information is still going on. It will be the last one from the ice storm that is finally settled.

It was the biggest event we've had. We've been working very closely with Quebec on it, in a very cooperative way, and interim payments have been made.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** When will the final payment be made?

[English]

**Mr. Myles Kirvan:** I'm not really in a position to say; it will depend on the ongoing exchange between the two governments. But I can tell you there has been very cooperative work between both levels of government.

**The Chair:** Merci.

Mr. Schellenberger.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I'm very pleased to be filling in today. This is different, as I mainly sit at the front end of the table. But I am very pleased to be here today.

As a former volunteer fireman, I understand emergencies and disasters to a limited degree, and I've taken part over the years in training. And as a former municipal councillor, I understand the chain of command from the bottom up, or let's say the front line, the people who actually deliver the Emergency Management Act at the source. Mr. Shipley and I were both on municipal councils, so we do understand—in rural Ontario, anyway—how those things work.

In the action plan provided to the committee it states that Public Safety Canada will develop standard operating procedures with each province and territory and the respective public safety regional office.

Can the Deputy Minister for Public Safety describe the number of hours that go into these negotiations? How labour-intensive is this process?

**Mr. William Baker:** Mr. Chair, as a relatively new person in the public safety portfolio, I haven't participated in those myself. With your consent, I will ask Monsieur Lavoie to respond.

**Mr. Daniel Lavoie:** Thank you.

We will be working with each province. You just talked about Ontario, which is different from Quebec or Newfoundland or the Northwest Territories. We will be looking at clarifying the authorities, the governance, the roles and responsibilities of the emergency management office of that province, their operations centre, our operations centre, and our regional office, to see how this will mesh during an emergency. Then we'll talk about the basic elements that will define how we will work together: situation awareness; risk assessment; impact analysis; the planning, either contingency or action in terms of response; logistics; and public communications. We will put that into standard operating procedures that will reflect all of this and will define the relationship between the federal government and the provincial authorities.

So that's how we're going to do that. We will do that regionally with each government. It will be tailor-made.

• (1650)

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger:** Thank you.

Are the majority of main responders across the country volunteers, or at least it's not their main occupation, who would be coordinated then by the local government? Would the bulk of them be volunteers, or are they police, for example?

**Mr. William Baker:** Mr. Chair, I don't know of anybody here who has the statistical split. Suffice it to say that from Public Safety Canada's point of view and our management of this area, it's a distinction that doesn't matter to us in that respect. If a municipality chooses to have volunteer emergency first responders, so be it. We will work with them and provide tools and training. It's available to either.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger:** As mentioned in your action plan, can you give an example of the type of information that the emergency support functions document would contain?

**Mr. William Baker:** With permission, I'll again ask Daniel, who could give you some more expert testimony on that.

**Mr. Daniel Lavoie:** The federal emergency response plan describes the overall approach, but if there is a problem that involves significant disruption of, let's say, the transportation system, obviously we will turn to the Department of Transport and ask them to work on that specific transportation problem. They will be the lead for the emergency support function of a government emergency for transportation. Industry Canada will be responsible for telecommunications. We've identified 13 of these and have given the responsibility to certain departments where they indeed have the expertise.

This will take the shape of a document anywhere from 10 to 15 pages in length that will describe what we can expect of them, how they're going to go about it. This will be part of the federal emergency response plan.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger:** Thank you. And thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Schellenberger.

Mr. Christopherson, you have five minutes.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm going to follow along lines similar to those of the previous speaker, but I will also mention that like Mr. Shipley and Mr. Schellenberger, I served in an even earlier previous life on Hamilton city council and our regional council, so I know that this issue of one first responder department being able to communicate with another is huge. It's huge within a city, within the region, within the province, interprovincially, and also between nations.

If you're in Windsor or Detroit and you've got a major disaster, it's not unusual for them to call on each other. In fact, I know they have compatibility agreements, and only the federal government can ultimately enter into binding agreements there.

The fact that the standards haven't been issued is huge to me. I noted that Mr. Shipley said that the local councils have the carriage of a lot of this, and they do, including fire, police, paramedics, and water treatment centres. You mentioned the transportation system; first responders are still local.

I want to get clear on something and drill down a little further. I'm confused, and maybe you can help me clarify. In the document that the Auditor General sent around that has the comparison of the 2005 audit, on the second page...

I know my time will run out because I'm so bloody long-winded, but I want to say that the most optimistic thing in all of this, deputy, is your being there. I was part of this committee when it reviewed the work you did at the revenue agency, and it was impressive. I accept that you've only been there a little while. It's a problem that we have deputies coming in and out, and that alone is a problem, but really the brightest light in this whole thing is your being there. I'm really counting on you to show us what you showed at revenue and to deliver the goods here. I just wanted to say that.

However, I also want to get clear on this. In dealing with recommendation 2.163, it talks about what was found in 2005. It rates it as unsatisfactory. It says:

Public Safety Canada has promoted the development of certain national standards, but none had been issued.

Then when I look at paragraph 7.46 on page 19 of the Auditor General's report, it says, and I quote:

Public Safety Canada officials told us that its role is not to establish standards but to assist first responder groups that purchase and use the equipment to develop their own standards.

That's fine within a small municipality, but it starts to break down when communities merge, as mine did. Interprovincially and internationally, if you don't have common standards across the board, either these local purchases are going to wait until you're done or they're going to make a purchase and then maybe find out that it's not the right equipment.

Municipalities can't make those purchases over and over, so help me understand: are you issuing standards? If you aren't, why not? If you are, why aren't they done?

• (1655)

**Mr. William Baker:** Mr. Chair, the issue of lack of standards is indeed problematic, and it comes down to several areas.

Equipment is the first consideration: there's the question of whether one phone or one piece of equipment can talk to another. There is also the network. Then there's the language, and in this area it's not just official languages; in some jurisdictions they'll say they've got a three-eight going on, while somebody else might say they've got a flood going on. We're working on a number of those.

I think the response largely comes down to jurisdiction as well. I'm quite certain the federal government cannot prescribe those types of standards to provinces, so I think the strategy that's been adopted is a wise one: we're working with the Canadian Standards Association and the Canadian General Standards Board, which have legitimacy with all of these jurisdictions, to come up with a standard.

My understanding is that work is progressing very well, and we're hoping to get to the point of having that determination before the end of 2010.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** You're saying it will be the end of next year.

**Mr. William Baker:** Well, it's December 2009 now.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Here's the problem. It was identified in 2005. Municipalities that were going to purchase equipment may have seen hundreds of millions of dollars spent on equipment across Canada that may or may not be compatible with what may ultimately be determined.

I understand you can't force a standard down, but I've been to provincial, federal, and territorial ministers' conferences at which there would be an understanding in the room that we needed a common standard and that the lead would be the feds. If the feds don't do it, then the locals... Again, it's all the municipalities, all the provinces; I don't understand why it's not a bigger priority. Why hasn't it already been done?

**Mr. William Baker:** Well, Mr. Chair, making progress on this is certainly a priority with respect to our action plans.

We shouldn't assume that nothing has been done. Through the ongoing work we have with provinces and through the Canadian Emergency Management College that we use to train first responders and so on, there's a collective wisdom around what the right things to use are, but it is by no means consistent. I agree with you; we need to get there.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** But your predecessor was here in 2005 and made the same commitment about the same problem. It's not like we haven't been here before, sir.

**Mr. William Baker:** With respect, our focus here is on what's now and what we will do. We have set out an action plan that I stand by.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Christopherson. Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Mr. Duncan, you have five minutes.

**Mr. John Duncan:** Thank you.

I've listened with great interest. We have national emergencies and preparedness, regional emergencies and preparedness. We also have local emergencies and preparedness. I know that much of the discussion here has revolved around the federal and the provincial/territorial. There's a lot of stuff happening at the municipal level, and I know we've had some emergency simulation exercises in the area I represent.

We've also had the corporate sector do some very interesting things that didn't cost them a lot but have a major, significant, positive impact on what could be brought to bear in terms of resourcing during an emergency. That could be a local emergency or a regional emergency. I could even see it transpiring at a time when it could be somewhat of a national or multi-regional emergency. I'll describe one example.

We have a community of 5,000 people with its own airstrip that is part of a three-centre hub that has about 10,000 people. One of the major operators there is a helicopter company. They have redone their hangar and office facilities with geothermal, wind power, rain collection, and they can move their aircraft out and basically house the entire population that might be displaced. They've done all that with no reward other than good corporate citizenship. I'm just wondering if there has been any thought about how to maybe reward this kind of thinking or behaviour.

Have we even inventoried this kind of thing? Because I think it would be nice to know for any greater emergency planning, for any preparedness, where these facilities are.

• (1700)

**Mr. William Baker:** If I may, Mr. Chair, I will not speak to the inventory because I don't know. I'm going to ask my colleague. I doubt it. In fact, he's confirming that my suspicions are correct.

The department administers a number of grants and contributions programs as support, but to my knowledge they do not go to the private sector. They go to non-profit organizations and different entities. I would suspect for that particular company that it has its own business continuity plan. It wishes to remain viable in the event

of an emergency and perhaps even develop some business opportunities at the time of an emergency.

That's great. I'm delighted to hear that, because you're right. We have been talking about the federal government. We've talked about provinces and territories and municipalities, but at the end of the day, when it comes to critical infrastructure in this country, so much of it is administered through the private sector. I'm pleased to hear that. We'll take you up on that suggestion as to how we can get a better handle as to what the private sector is doing. I think that would be helpful in our planning.

**Mr. John Duncan:** Related to the private sector, the energy and utility sectors have critical infrastructure. We're a big country, and we have infrastructure everywhere. It can't all be critical, but any part of it would possibly break the link.

Who is defining what is critical, and what are the complexities involved in that?

**Mr. William Baker:** First of all, working with, initially, federal departments and agencies, we identify what are the critical sectors. We've also identified who are the federal leads. Obviously when it comes to the transportation sector, it's not us. It's Transport Canada, and we engage them to work with other levels of government as well as non-profit organizations, and in some cases, I'm sure, the private sector, to look at the plans to ensure the continuity of critical services inside the country.

I suspect—I have not been personally engaged in this—that this is indeed an elaborate process to get those in place. I can tell you that we have those plans for all of the critical sectors. To say that they are complete in every way, no. Work needs to continue on that.

**The Chair:** Thank you, John. Your time is up. I was trying to get your attention, but your time is up. Thank you.

Ms. Crombie and Mr. Lee, five minutes.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Since we're all talking about local municipal examples, I want to share with you that November 10 was the 30th anniversary of the Mississauga train derailment. And I think we'll all agree that there was an exemplary and impeccable demonstration of leadership by Mayor Hazel McCallion.

I have to say that I don't know where the leadership is going to come from on upcoming events like the 2010 Olympics and the G-8 and the G-20. Can you give us some confidence that there is an emergency response plan, and tell us who will be coordinating and leading the emergency preparedness, or our response, to ensure public safety for these events?

• (1705)

**Mr. William Baker:** Certainly.

When it comes, for instance, to the Olympics and the G-8 as well, those two events in particular, the Prime Minister has named a special coordinator for security planning, who is housed in the Privy Council Office. He is working with all of us and we are providing critical support to him, Mr. Elcock, in the development of very elaborate plans with respect to contingencies, response plans, and so on, with respect to the Olympics, the G-8, and so on. The accountabilities are very clear with respect to those events you have named, and we are implicated fully.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Will the emergency response plan be approved by then?

**Mr. William Baker:** I'm going to speak to the Olympics. It's the one that's probably most in sight.

We have been working with them. We've just conducted perhaps the most elaborate exercise that certainly I'm aware of, as a public servant, called Exercise Gold, which took place over a week and actually longer, involving all jurisdictions—VANOC and so on—to look at different scenarios. We were there. I was there. Daniel was there constantly to look at how we respond to all manner of hazards—natural disasters, terrorist-type activities, and so on—to see if we have a structure in place that works on a timely enough basis.

That was not the first exercise. That was the final exercise, Exercise Gold, and we were all encouraged by the results.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Who ultimately is responsible for imposing leadership decisions and taking on the lead? Who will be the ultimate decision-maker?

**Mr. William Baker:** With respect to the Olympics or—

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** In emergency response planning. Hazel McCallion rallied the troops. She provided unprecedented leadership. Who is that one individual who will champion any emergency response?

**Mr. William Baker:** It depends. In the case of an event that occurs in a municipality—

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** On a national level, obviously.

**Mr. William Baker:** On a national level under the Emergency Management Act, which builds on the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Act, the Minister of Public Safety has overall responsibility for managing at a national level, and part of that is of course supporting the work of provinces, whether it's through disaster financial aid or through working on joint business continuity plans. So in terms of the federal government, the Minister of Public Safety obviously has the responsibility in that regard. But if you look at the experience with any particular event, there is going to be the involvement of many.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** In terms of chemical, biological, radioactive, nuclear, explosive, etc., do you feel that the appropriate protocols and policies will be in place should we ever face that sort of threat?

**Mr. William Baker:** Work is continuing. Pardon the acronym, but CBRNE has been part of our planning exercises. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which is of course an agency within the public safety portfolio reporting to the minister, has overall responsibility for dealing with those incidents.

We are busy doing some additional work cataloguing the capacity available in the country to respond to those events, because they could be potentially disastrous. And that also includes making sure we are fully aware of the capacity south of the border that might be available to help us.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Mr. Lee would like to ask a question as well.

**Mr. Derek Lee:** Thank you.

The audit shows alarmingly high rates of staff turnover within your ministry. We're all curious. Is there anything the committee should know about why you've got turnover rates that are huge? That's got to impair your work and it has to be related to the history here. But there must be something you can tell us about why, and if you can't, then maybe you have some more homework to do.

**Mr. William Baker:** Mr. Chair, first let me make an observation and then consider the way forward.

The statistics quoted in the Auditor General's report are correct. The statistic about movement of employees is all-inclusive. For 2008-09, 13% of the employees in the emergency management area actually left the Department of Public Safety or left emergency management but stayed elsewhere in public safety. If you include all of the churn, that's pretty normal. Now, 13%, I would suggest, is high. My experience at the Canada Revenue Agency is that we were at around a 5.5% to 6% departure rate.

As to what we're going to do in that regard, first of all it's about having a clear way forward for emergency management, a concrete set of plans and deliverables, an accountability framework that lines up around it, having the right people in place—we've been doing some staffing in the emergency management area to ensure that we have the team to get the job done—and recognizing and rewarding those who are delivering the goods. I think that's the kind of work environment you create to try to mitigate this in the future.

I as deputy and the executive management team have had good discussions about what we can do in public safety and emergency management as well.

● (1710)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lee.

Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Mr. Shipley, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Thank you.

I may just share my time with my colleague, if I run out..

I was wondering, witnesses, where the federal government sits in terms of authority for developing the emergency plans, when working with the provinces and the regions. I think it was clarified that this is a voluntary process. It's like the three-legged stool a little bit: if you pull one leg out, likely the emergency plan on the broad scale isn't going to work very well.

Where does the authority come from for the federal government, in terms of having the provinces and the municipalities or regions come onside?

**Mr. William Baker:** Looking at the Constitution Act and the division of responsibilities, this isn't really a question of pure authority. The authority for emergency management primarily rests with provinces, unless, of course, it's a matter of federal jurisdiction, federal properties, or something in the national interest that transcends provincial borders. So the strategy really is to work with a common interest, with provinces that all recognize the risks that are there, on how we can best work together to provide our combined effort to address these.

Municipalities are not shy in asking for provincial help. We saw floods in British Columbia recently. Provinces are not shy—nor should they be, and we certainly wouldn't want them to be—in seeking federal assistance. That's recognized. It's on that basis that we move forward. We're all looking at the same thing at the end of day, and for the same citizens.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Yes, and I respect the fact that everyone wants to have an emergency plan. It's new in some areas. There is a belief that we have an emergency plan across Canada, maybe for every province, but also municipality; yet it isn't there. Some of the larger areas have more resources to do one. It is certainly an understanding that we will have one, and it's the best thing for Canadians, no matter where you are.

Where does a clear delineation of responsibilities lie, and who determines it, in terms of the municipal, provincial, and federal responsibilities?

**Mr. William Baker:** Mr. Chair, as I understand it, events typically occur locally first, whatever may happen—a flood, an explosion, or whatever—and then there's a process whereby successive levels of government are engaged at the request of the other levels of government. The municipality would ask for provincial help; the province could come to us.

Suffice it to say, though, that no one is sitting around waiting for the phone to ring on these. The reason we have a regional structure of emergency management personnel across the country is that they're in regular contact with provincial and, to a degree, municipal emergency management personnel, so that we can deal with this in real time and try to provide the assistance that is required.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Thank you. I think that helps explain the process to everyone a little bit; that those requests, I think likely 98% of the time, unless the event has some immediate national context to it—or a high percentage of the time—will always start at the municipal or local level and work their way up.

**Mr. Stephen Baker:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** So that everyone understands the federal plan, it may kick in instantaneously, or it may not kick in for three or four days. Would that be true?

• (1715)

**Mr. William Baker:** It may be. Suffice to say, the federal government would not be passive in that regard. We would be aware through the government operations centre immediately that there's an issue. We would establish a media contact for purposes of monitoring the situation—there's an escalation process here—and we would become engaged at an official level. There might be a point at which a formal request would go at a political level, but we would make sure that the proper contacts are in place.

**The Chair:** There are 45 seconds left.

**Mr. Terence Young:** Thank you.

The Auditor General highlighted the inter-departmental assistant deputy ministers' committee for emergency management. I was impressed when I first heard about it. I viewed it as a sort of SWAT team, people who are ready to sit down when an emergency occurs and get the plan into action.

Is that correct? Maybe you can just tell us how it works.

**Mr. William Baker:** I would suggest probably not a SWAT team.

Daniel Lavoie represents Public Safety Canada and actually co-chairs that interdepartmental committee—with the Privy Council Office, in fact. The whole idea is to make sure that you have a common community of interest of senior officials who are sufficiently seized with the importance of emergency management, have credibility within their organizations, and can get these plans rolling and get action on the plans as needed.

When it comes to a response to a particular emergency issue, it wouldn't be an ADM committee. They may be involved in different parts of the response, but really, at that point you're looking at the locus of the issue, at who the first responders are, and making sure that they have support.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Young.

We have a few minutes left. I believe Madame Faillie has another question that she wants to ask, so I'll allow her.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** It is, in fact, Mr. Roy who wants to ask the question.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Roy.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Roy:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My question is for you, Mr. Baker, because I am very concerned about the federal department's ability to respond to emergencies.

I will give you two examples I am aware of. In June 2004, the Coast Guard had two hydroplanes for dealing with air disasters at the Vancouver Airport. The first hydroplane broke down and then the second one did. Because the propeller was manufactured in Germany, it took three weeks before one of the hydroplanes was up and running. However, had there been a disaster at the Vancouver Airport, we would have been unable to respond during this three-week period. Let us be clear about that.

I will give you another example. After September 2001, we learned that, on the west coast, in British Columbia, the radar system was totally ineffective because there were many holes. I know that there are people from British Columbia here. Had there been a terrorist attack, we would not even have seen it coming, as was the case with this boat that carried a multitude of illegal immigrants to the coast.

To what extent do you check the validity of the information provided to you by the departments?

I have another example for you, this time dealing with the east coast. At one point, the Canadian Coast Guard had not even planned to purchase enough oil, and as a result, the ships had to remain at the dock. Indeed, the ships did not have enough oil to be able to be sent out to sea.

These are very tangible examples of incidents that we have experienced and discovered over the years. Personally, I am far from feeling safe. I am sorry.

**Mr. William Baker:** Mr. Chairman, obviously, I am not going to comment on specific examples.

Nevertheless, if you were to look at what we are doing currently in the area of critical infrastructure planning development, you would see that our objective is essentially to have concrete plans that make it possible for us to continue operating essential services right across the country.

**Mr. Jean-Yves Roy:** To what extent do you make certain that the departments are providing you with serious information, namely, that they are capable of responding seriously?

Are they not kidding you when they say that they are able to do these things although they do not necessarily have the required equipment?

**Mr. William Baker:** We do have an opportunity to review the plans. We have an opportunity to provide feedback to the departments on this matter. And if there is a problem, it is our role, it is my role, and that of the Privy Council Office as well, to encourage them to do all that is required.

[English]

**The Chair:** I want to go back to one point that was raised before, Mr. Baker. We talked about retention of senior staff, which is very important for the operation of a department as complex as the department you're now in charge of. Related to that is the retention of deputies. I think the average tenure of a deputy in Ottawa—I don't have the latest figures—is around two or two and a half years. Since Public Safety Canada was established, the average I think has been three years, or a little higher than that.

It's always been the contention of this committee that the tenure of deputies is not long enough to operate in such a complex and large and difficult department as you operate in. You've been around Ottawa a long time. I know you can't say much, but I want to ask you anyway what your feeling is on that issue, because you have been thrown into some difficult situations before.

• (1720)

**Mr. William Baker:** I wish there were more deputies around. I don't want to speak for the clerk, but the clerk has also spoken on this matter. Ideally, we'd like to have the opportunity for deputies to stay in their positions longer. We're dealing with a demographic challenge that affects us all. We're trying to manage the team of deputies as best we can, given the circumstances and the needs of the day. I think we'd all agree that ideally we'd all like to be in our positions longer.

**The Chair:** We have another few minutes left, if anyone has any other questions.

Mr. Christopherson.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** This a follow-up, deputy, to your comments about how much your department benefited from the exercises that you did. I accepted all of that and I don't question any of it. However, I want I read from the Auditor General's report. On page 17, it says:

Since April 2005, Public Safety Canada has coordinated five federal exercises, shared in the coordination of eight multi-jurisdictional exercises, and participated in an additional two exercises. However, we found that exercises were designed to meet the training objectives of individual departments, rather than to test the government's overall coordination or readiness for a national emergency against identified risks.

Can you give us some assurance that this refocusing will be part of what you extrapolate from these exercises? What we're hearing is that as much as you got out of it, there was still a core piece that was absent.

**Mr. William Baker:** I can only agree with you. I've had a chance to look at a couple of the reports that came out of the exercises. First of all, I can assure you that they are taken seriously. The reports are comprehensive in reporting what worked and what didn't. Can we go further in enlarging what we learned from those exercises? Yes. We'll be looking for opportunities. In fact, we've had some discussions about creating a compendium of these exercises from a best-practice point of view, so that they can be put to greater use.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I believe that's what they're doing in New York. They're still doing follow-up from 9/11, looking at how it was that communications broke down. The plan breaks down when you can't communicate with your partners. The coordination, the anticipation of things breaking down and not working, how do you manage that? I think they're still sifting through what happened on that day and studying how they can improve.

**Mr. William Baker:** Thank you for the suggestion.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Does anybody else have a quick question?

Ms. Crombie.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Does Public Safety Canada have a relationship with the Public Health Agency?

**Mr. William Baker:** We have a relationship with all departments and agencies in connection with our duties. We work with all organizations to ensure that proper plans are in place, monitoring events and helping to organize a response if such a response is necessary.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Did you coordinate with them during the H1N1 crisis?

**Mr. William Baker:** The Department of Health and the Minister of Health have the lead on the health response. Our role, and it's been an active role, is working with departments and agencies and other levels of government to look at whether we have decent business continuity plans in place in case the H1N1 virus cripples the country.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Were there meetings between the agencies at any time?

**Mr. William Baker:** At a federal level?

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Yes.

**Mr. William Baker:** There are regular meetings on H1N1 management that occur at many levels.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** With your department as well?

**Mr. William Baker:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Madame Faille, a short question.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** A little earlier, you said that you had communicated with the various departments. Have you identified the essential services pertaining to public security in the various departments?

• (1725)

**Mr. William Baker:** Yes, we have identified critical sectors to ensure that we have a plan for these sectors.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Have all of the human resources positions been staffed?

**Mr. William Baker:** The branch responsible for emergency management is in the process of hiring other people. I must confess that we will be spending the budget that has been allocated to us this year.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Merci, Madame Faille.

That pretty well concludes our time slot, colleagues.

Before I ask the witnesses for their concluding remarks, on behalf of every member of the committee, I want to thank all of you for being here today.

The protection of citizens is the fundamental responsibility of every government. Sometimes in western developed countries we seem to be losing sight of that fact. Certainly the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness plays a vital role in the operations of this country. The department has some challenges, but we are confident that they will get those challenges behind them.

We want to thank you for your work, Madam Fraser and your officials, and Mr. Baker and your department.

Before we adjourn, I am going to ask the Auditor General if she has concluding remarks, and then I'm going to turn to Mr. Baker.

Ms. Fraser.

**Ms. Sheila Fraser:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the committee for their interest in what we believe is an important and serious issue. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we are pleased with the response of the department. They appear to be committed to taking action and have developed an action plan that we believe addresses our issues. Even though I may not be around, I suspect that the office will go back at some time to follow up on this report.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Fraser.

Mr. Baker.

**Mr. William Baker:** My colleagues and I are pleased to have had an opportunity to answer your questions. This an incredibly important area of government endeavour, and we will do what it takes to make sure we're fulfilling Parliament's expectations.

**The Chair:** Again I want to thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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