



ABORIGINAL FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

The Indigenous Fire Marshal Office Project



Be a Part of the IFMO Project!

After a busy and successful fall hosting community engagement sessions from coast to coast to coast, the AFAC is moving the Indigenous Fire Marshal Office (IFMO) project to the next phase. As we carry this project forward, we are looking to fill positions in a variety of program areas. The IFMO project is 'for us, by us' and we encourage all qualified applicants to apply!

We are looking for passionate, skilled individuals in the following program areas:

- > Project Manager
- > Fire Services Programs and Services Resources
- > Corporate Development Resources
- > Research Director
- > Administration
- > IT
- > Communications

All positions are remote and so we encourage candidates based anywhere in Canada to apply. Positions may be filled using a mixture of contractor and employee agreements, including the potential for secondments, and may be full time, part time or ad hoc.

The postings are for program areas rather than specific job positions; we encourage people to submit an application highlighting their skills and area of interest. If positions are not filled by the dates posted on the website, we will extend the closing date and/or create eligibility lists for future work.

Please see our website for the currently available opportunities and check back frequently for more!

Opportunities will be posted as they become available:

 www.ifmo.ca/opportunities



www.ifmo.ca



info@ifmo.ca



AFAC
12411 Dawson Place
Maple Ridge, BC, Canada
V4R 2L6



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info@ifmo.ca



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AFAC: A Year in Review

As we move into 2020 and take the steps to move the Indigenous Fire Marshal Office (IFMO) project on to the next steps of development, we can look back at what a busy and exciting year 2019 was for the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada (AFAC) and the IFMO project.

Technical Engagement

In July and August 2019, five technical engagement sessions were held to gather expertise from technical groups (i.e., firefighters, infrastructure managers, regional technical services groups) to build on the information gathered and to detail the programs and services that are needed.

Expert advice was shared on the following topics:

- > Defining and achieving standards and codes
- > National Database and data collection
- > Building capacity and training
- > Community advocacy
- > Fire prevention program and service delivery

Community Engagement

Throughout the fall, eight community engagement sessions, with a total of 288 participants, were held across the country and AFAC has released the Indigenous Fire Marshal Office (IFMO) Project Community Engagement Sessions Outcomes Report. These community sessions were an opportunity for community representatives to gather and share their voices to help bring about positive changes for Indigenous communities from coast to coast to coast. The sessions examined three topic areas: Governance Models, Programs and Services, and Managing Expectations.

It came as no surprise that the consensus was that the current provision of fire services for Indigenous communities is inadequate. However, participants were optimistic about the positive changes that the IFMO project is seeking to achieve.

The need to continue to create awareness and communicate with communities about the project was a recurring theme. The importance of creating a culturally astute organization that recognizes the diversity of Indigenous communities was a consistent theme, as was the opinion that this organization represents an opportunity to think outside the box.

As an organization *for us, by us*, participants feel that the IFMO should be non-political and representative of national diversity.



The full reports can be read on our website:
www.ifmo.ca/reports



for us, by us

This is our guiding philosophy. It means:

- > Indigenous-created organization to serve Indigenous communities.
- > Indigenous governance structure developed in collaboration with Indigenous leadership.
- > New, ongoing funding, free of political interference.
- > Fire service careers for Indigenous Peoples.
- > An organization accountable to Indigenous communities through transparent reporting.

Program Development

It has also been a busy year for program development:

- > **National Incident Database:** Work was undertaken with Indigenous technical and community representatives to validate the data elements and reports used by the system. Testing is underway to identify user requirements and needs to facilitate a move towards an operational evaluation of the system this coming year. The system collects data related to the cause, origin and circumstances of fires primarily through a web-based application with alternative inputs where the internet is not available.
- > **Community Fire Safety Assessments:** An environmental scan was done of existing programs that deal with fire safety risks at the community level, followed by the development of a template and process for a program. Evaluation work was done on the draft template with communities in two different regions to incorporate community feedback.

- > **Home Fire Safety Assessments:** An assessment tool and process to assist community residents in identifying potential fire safety risks in the home is being developed. It was tested with different communities to incorporate their feedback and inform the further development of program delivery.
- > **Fire Department Assessments:** An assessment template to create a tool for Indigenous fire departments to use to identify gaps and risks and provide recommendations for mitigation and improvements was developed and tested with several fire departments.
- > **Preliminary Development:** Initial research looked at the potential for programs in the areas of fire investigation, youth fire setter intervention, and interface fire protection.



In April 2020 we will be announcing the next phase of the IFMO project based on our funding and project plan for the 2020/21 fiscal year.



Impacts of Climate Change on Women's Health

It is an undeniable fact that climate change is impacting us all. Erin Myers of the Metis National Council spoke at the Women of the Metis Nation's National Forum on the specific impacts that climate change is having on women and some steps we can all take.

There are three major areas where the effects of climate change have specific impacts on women: heat, food security, and extreme events. Socio-economic factors also impact vulnerability and the population of Indigenous women living in poverty is disproportionately large, making this an especially important topic for Indigenous communities to consider.

HEAT: Increased temperatures and longer periods of intense heat place pregnant women at risk from a variety of health complications for themselves and their babies. Research has found that hyperthermia, or abnormally high body temperature, in early pregnancy may increase the risk of birth defects. Women's bodies undergo a lot of changes in pregnancy, including changes in the way their bodies handle fluids and control their temperature. As a result, they may become dehydrated more easily

FOOD SECURITY: Traditionally, women's role is to support their families with food. When we consider activities such as berry picking, we have seen climate change drive blueberry harvests further north, removing access to traditional food sources. Droughts in other areas lead to increased food costs, which places stress on our women. Furthermore, invasive species are taking over from native fauna and animal migration patterns are changing, which means people are losing their traditional hunting and fishing grounds.

EXTREME EVENTS: In Canada, we see extreme events such as fire, flooding, and tornados with increasing frequency. The standard response to many of these threats is to evacuate the threatened population, often to urban centres. The mental health impacts of evacuation can be more severe on women than men. Women instinctively take on caregiver roles, often volunteering in the kitchens, looking out for Elders, and caring for their own children and perhaps those of others too. This places an increased burden on an already vulnerable population. In an evacuation context, we also cannot ignore the inherent safety risks to young women and girls.

We should not underestimate the mental health impacts of climate change. When we lose land that is familiar to us and part of our story, we grieve for it. In the aftermath of the Slave Lake fire and Hurricane Katrina there were alarming increases in suicides and the prescription of antidepressants and anxiety drugs.

Women are natural leaders and problem solvers who successfully tackle challenges daily. Women have the knowledge and expertise to tackle climate change and can use their skills as natural instinctive caregivers to address this important issue. It is our responsibility as individuals to keep having the conversation and working together. We don't have a choice anymore; we cannot afford debate and to make it political. From eliminating single use plastics in your home to starting a community vegetable garden, every action counts. Look at the little things you can do in your daily life and for opportunities to make changes in your community so that we leave a brighter future for the generations to come.



2020 Conference Attendance: Information Sharing and Relationship Building

The Aboriginal Firefighters Association (AFAC) has started off 2020 with a busy schedule of conference attendance—sharing information, answering questions, and making connections.

AFAC attended the trade show portion of the First Nations Housing Conference in Thunder Bay, ON from February 11–13, 2020. This conference brings together First Nations housing professionals for information sharing and skills development with the aim of developing sustainable communities. The AFAC booth welcomed many visitors including housing officers, governance representatives, businesses, and community members. Those who visited the booth recognized the need for the IFMO and expressed support for the project.

On March 3–4, AFAC attended the Assembly of First Nations National Climate Gathering in Whitehorse, Yukon. This gathering focused on First Nations perspectives on climate change, including how climate changes are impacting existing challenges such as irreversible impacts to the land. AFAC's goal in attending this gathering was to connect with climate change experts in areas that impact fire risks. A primary objective was to learn how climate change may impact current practices of landscape burning for fire prevention. Another goal was to understand how the IFMO can create partnerships and develop community understanding of the impact of climate change from a fire and life safety perspective.

March 10–12, 2020, AFAC attended the 2020 National Housing and Infrastructure Forum in Toronto, ON where we presented an update to the Chiefs Committee on Housing and Infrastructure and spoke with visitors to our busy trade show booth. Hosted by the Assembly of First Nations, this forum is a mix of plenary sessions and interactive workshops where delegates can provide input on the implementation of the First Nations National Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy.



Traditional Fire Management: Learning from Australia

During a recent vacation to Australia, the AFAC Executive Director Blaine Wiggins had the honour of visiting Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) with retired firefighter Uncle Norm Clarke and Inspector Damien Thomas of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES).

Norm was Queensland's first fulltime Indigenous firefighter and is the first Indigenous Australian to receive the Australian Fire Service Medal. Uncle and Auntie are names bestowed on Australia's Indigenous Elders.

"Aboriginal people know about thinning the undergrowth with fire," says Norman. "We know how to identify trees in the bush which burn fiercely, and others which act as a fire retardant." Over the past few years, Australia, like Canada, has seen increasingly intense fire behaviour. This has had noticeable impacts on the landscape as bigger, hotter fires kill the native flora and weeds regenerate faster.

Patrick Coolwell and Darren Burns of Quandamooka Land and Sea Management Agency (QALSMA) spoke about looking after the country, in particular Jarlo Jargu Boma (Striking Fire to Ground) fire management. Fire maintains the land and has been doing so for thousands and thousands of years. Unless the undergrowth is managed, the structure of the vegetation and arrangement of the fuel changes, which puts the cypress trees on the island at risk. Using a mosaic lighting pattern,

traditional fire management practices involve 'cool burning' with slow moving, cooler fires that promote the regeneration of native flora.

Fire response on Minjerribah is a model of collaboration. Under Inspector Thomas' leadership, QFES maintains a relationship with traditional landowners to manage fire incidents while protecting and respecting cultural assets. During a fire response on the island, the QFES Incident Commander works directly with traditional landowners throughout the incident. This teamwork allows for rapid decision making that honours the land and people.

Working proactively, they have created digital mapping of cultural assets that provides fire service personnel with an awareness of priority and no-go areas. For example, at the south end of the island, the cypress trees are of enormous cultural significance. To protect them, most assets are not described, and the map layer can only be accessed by those dealing with an incident on the island and only during the incident.

It is impressive to see the state fire service acknowledging and embracing traditional wisdom. This relationship embodies the reality that we can all learn from each other to create safer communities and achieve the best possible outcomes for any incidents. We look forward to continuing to learn from our brothers and sisters in Australia and to welcoming them to our land to share our knowledge in return.