



Emergency dispatchers field calls from the E-Comm building in Vancouver. More money must be spent on improving 911 service, a disaster preparedness report recommends.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Major effort needed to reverse apathy about earthquake planning

New report calls on more government spending to prepare for disaster

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All levels of society must work to reverse a deep-seated apathy to earthquake preparedness in B.C., according to a report commissioned by the B.C. government.

Ottawa and Victoria need to give more money and more authority to Emergency Management B.C. and local governments so they can fulfil their responsibility to prepare for what scientists say is an inevitable major quake, said the report released Thursday. And more money and staff are needed for a long-term, sustained public education campaign.

"On the whole, British Columbians, and the majority of their institutions, have either not made earthquake preparedness a priority, or have been unable to make significant progress on addressing this issue," said the report, written by Henry Renteria, former head of California's Office of Emergency Services.

He was appointed a year ago to consult the public and governments on the issue.

Renteria noted that his findings are consistent with a provincial auditor general's report released in March 2014, and added that "the majority of the preparedness gaps and recommendations outlined in previous reports appear to remain valid today."

The auditor general had warned: "Given the province's current level of preparedness, a sustained commitment ... is needed if we are going to minimize the loss of life and other devastating impacts expected from a catastrophic earthquake."

The Ministry of Justice issued a news release Thursday insisting it is taking "significant strides toward improving disaster preparedness in B.C."

The province cited, in part, a recent upgrade to the Provincial Emergency Notification System to get tsunami notifications faster to emergency managers in B.C.'s coastal communities and media so that citizens can be alerted.

This spring, the province will study the 911 service, including a look at emerging communications technologies, and will

launch a public education campaign to "inform and empower" residents to be prepared for emergencies and disasters.

Ocean Networks Canada will receive \$50,000 to support research for tsunami mapping to assist long-term planning in vulnerable communities.

Other recommendations of the Renteria report:

- The province must get the private sector involved in emergency management planning, including setting out legal requirements.
- There needs to be better analysis of structures and areas at risk in an earthquake by the province, local authorities, the private sector, First Nations and the public.
- There must be more spending on improving ways to communicate with the public in an emergency, including 911 improvements.
- There must be a higher emphasis, including money, on preparing urban search and rescue teams, and setting up systems to allow for rapid damage assessment.

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