



***International Association of Fire Fighters  
AFL-CIO, CLC***

**Submission to the Standing Committee on  
Finance – Pre-budget Consultation**

**September, 2005**

## 1. Executive Summary

The International Association of Fire Fighters, AFL-CIO-CLC, represents 19,600 professional fire fighters in Canada; men and women who put their lives and their health on the line every day in order to protect the lives and property of their fellow citizens. The IAFF appreciates this opportunity to bring our views forward during the pre-budget consultation process.

Two important themes cited by the Standing Committee in defining the focus of the 2005 Pre-budget Consultation are investment in human capital and in physical capital. The two issues we bring forward for the Committee's consideration constitute significant investments in these areas, to the benefit of all Canadians. The two issues the IAFF raises this year are issues we have brought before the Committee before. They are critical but unresolved issues affecting professional fire fighters and the citizens of Canada. These issues are:

- **Federal funding to implement the IAFF Hazardous Materials Training for First Responders and the IAFF Emergency Response to Terrorism: Operations programs in Canada, and**
- **The establishment of a national Public Safety Officer Compensation (PSOC) benefit for the families of fire fighters who are killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty**

An investment in training that will enable fire fighters and other first responders to safely and effectively protect Canadians from the aftermath of a hazardous materials incident, an emergency of a Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear nature or any other kind of major emergency is a prudent and badly-needed investment in the protection both human capital and physical capital.

An investment in the financial security of the families of fire fighters who are killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty is an investment in human capital that Canadians are surely prepared to make on behalf of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice on their behalf.

A cost estimate for Canadian implementation of the IAFF Hazardous Materials and Emergency response to Terrorism: Operations programs, as identified in an October, 2001 proposal by the IAFF, is \$500,000 annually. Importantly, 100 per cent of this funding would go toward hands-on training, as the curriculum and program infrastructure are already in place, and this level of funding would result in the training of approximately 1,667 first responders annually. As a starting point, the IAFF advocates the funding of a single-site demonstration of the program in a selected Canadian city, with IAFF instructors and course materials, at an estimated cost in the range of \$15,000.

With regard to a cost estimate for establishing a national PSOC benefit in Canada, the IAFF proposes that a one-time benefit of \$300,000 per family would be an appropriate starting point. Approximately 10 to 15 Canadian fire fighters die annually due to workplace accidents and illnesses, including cancers that are officially deemed occupational. This would equal \$3 million to \$4.5 million annually in total payments to the families of fallen fire fighters. If extended to police officers and other public safety officials, an additional annual allotment in the area of \$2.1 million for a PSOC benefit would be expected, based on an average of seven police officers killed in the line of duty each year cited by the Canadian Professional Police Association.

## **2. National Hazardous Materials and Chemical, Biological, Nuclear and Radiological (CBRN) Training for Canada's First Responders**

Four years have now passed since the events of September 11, 2001 made the issue of national security a top priority in Canada. In the time between then and now, major budget allotments amounting to billions of dollars have been made in the area of national security, and entire government departments have created, recreated and reorganized.

Despite all this, the shocking truth is that the federal government has failed miserably in a critically-important area of national security: giving those who will be first on the scene of an attack the training they need to safely and effectively protect the citizens of Canada from the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

Whether it's a biological or chemical agent, or an explosive, radiological or nuclear device such as a "dirty bomb," the frightening reality is that Canada is not immune to the threat of terrorism. And on top of the threat of terrorism, it is now publicly known that deadly chemicals, radiological materials and dangerous biological agents such as anthrax are being transported on city streets every day.

The International Association of Fire Fighters has advocated improved major disaster training and preparedness for many years in Canada; since before the events of September 11, 2001. This is evidenced by a letter the IAFF sent to the Minister of Defence on August 1, 2001 urging him to improve the nation's ability to respond to a major disaster including one of a CBRN nature.

The events of 9-11-01 illustrated that terrorists have the will – and the ability – to conduct a major terrorist attack on North American soil. Also illustrated on that fateful day was that it is not the military, but a nation's professional fire fighters who are its first line of defense against a major disaster of terrorist origins.

Military officials themselves acknowledge that military-based teams that are trained to respond to terrorist incidents are hours, if not days, from deployment. In contrast, a city's fire fighters are on scene in minutes, in any kind of emergency, large or small. They are a nation's domestic defenders.

But what if they are not adequately trained to respond to an emergency of a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) nature?

A survey of Canada's professional fire fighters conducted by the IAFF in early 2005 revealed the shocking truth: not only is CBRN response training non-existent in a vast majority of Canadian cities, but many professional fire fighters also lack the ability to respond safely and effectively to even the most basic hazardous materials incidents.

The IAFF survey indicated that only 19 per cent of Canadian affiliates have the training and equipment necessary to respond to a CBRN incident in their city. A shocking 75 per cent have little or in fact no CBRN response training at all. And that means millions of Canadians remain vulnerable to the potentially-devastating aftermath of these kinds of attacks.

The federal government has acknowledged its responsibility to protect Canadians from the aftermath of terrorist attacks by creating a federal Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and allocating millions toward initiatives designed to improve disaster mitigation

and emergency response. Yet it has failed miserably in terms of delivering widespread CBRN response training to front-line first responders such as fire fighters.

The federal government's failure to adequately address these concerns is spelled out in a March, 2004 report of the Senate Committee on National Security. The Committee's report reads like a recipe for disaster – federal agencies ignoring the needs of municipalities and first responders, local caches of emergency supplies unknown to local authorities and provincial governments gobbling up emergency preparedness funds intended for municipalities. Time and time again, the report details jurisdictional squabbles and communication breakdowns at the federal level when it comes to national security. And in the meantime, more than three years after the events of 9-11, the federal government still does not have an effective plan to protect Canadians from the aftermath of a terrorist attack of a CBRN nature.

Chapter 2 of the April 5, 2005 report of Canada's Auditor General, titled *National Security in Canada—The 2001 Anti-Terrorism Initiative — Air Transportation Security, Marine Security, and Emergency Preparedness* is particularly damning in terms of what it says about Canada's failure to train first responders in the wake of September 11, 2001, as illustrated by this excerpt:

**2.164 Little training completed for first responders.** Budget 2001 allocated \$59 million over five years to the training of first responders; six departments, led by OCIPEP, were tasked with developing a CBRN training program for first responders. Of the Budget funding, \$11.2 million was allocated to OCIPEP's Emergency Preparedness College and \$21 million to Health Canada. We expected to find training programs based on risk assessments, with their delivery structured to ensure that training was timely and efficient.

2.165 We found problems with the CBRN first-responder training program. Federal training has been delayed significantly, and only a small number of first responders have been trained in Canada's major urban centres. The structure of the training is also a concern.

2.166 The Emergency Preparedness College, in partnership with the other federal departments and agencies, was to design and deliver the joint CBRN training program. A four-level program of CBRN courses was designed, with the first two levels (awareness and basic training) focussed on raising awareness of a CBRN incident and surviving exposure to CBRN agents. The next two levels (intermediate and advanced) deal with intervening in and neutralizing the event and are directed to the traditional first responders in fire, police, and emergency medical services. Health care providers such as hospital workers were not included in the College's specialized CBRN-response courses, even though the submission requesting funding for the training program had specifically identified the specialized training needs of health care workers.

2.167 We expected that a training plan and schedule would be linked to threat scenarios and associated casualties, that training of higher-risk cities would be addressed as a priority, and that a timeline would be established for achieving the desired capacity. Although the College did not request a formal threat and risk assessment by region until April 2004, it did use available intelligence to identify higher-risk cities and did give them priority in initial access to training. The problem that arose was in the volume of delivery of the training.

2.168 The lowest levels of training are the introductory and basic courses, which familiarize first responders with threats but do not teach mitigation techniques. The joint training group estimated that about 100,000 first responders required the basic level of training. By October 2003, the College had piloted its basic course in Fredericton, New Brunswick, and in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The College told us it has also trained 176 trainers to give the basic course. To date it has issued 474 training kits to these instructors. Subsequently, the College planned to deliver the kits on CD-Rom. It has now informed us that the course will be delivered through e-learning on the Web. The College also proposes to deliver its introductory course on the Web.

2.169 The higher-level courses are aimed at training first responders in how to work in a CBRN environment. A strategy has not been developed to link the training needs of a first responder team to a target level of response capacity. Nor has the College addressed the need for refresher training and retraining to allow for staff turnover.

2.170 The course design suffered from the fact that a concept of operations for dealing with a CBRN event was not developed. Neither the Emergency Preparedness College nor its CBRN courses currently provide training in the incident command system, even though a number of provinces use such a system to govern their response to a CBRN event as well as PSEPC's new National Emergency Response System (NERS).

2.171 The funding request stated that OCIPEP would co-ordinate the CBRN training initiative in collaboration with the RCMP, Health Canada, National Defence, and others. We were told that Health Canada started developing its own course for medical personnel in July 2003.

2.172 The request for training funds estimated the target population for the intermediate course at 6,000 first responders, with 2,000 targeted for the advanced course. The College, with its federal partners, does not have an adequate plan to deliver timely intermediate and advanced CBRN training to the first responders it identified who need training. By fall 2004, the College had given 134 first responders its intermediate course and 63 its advanced course. The College plans to provide the intermediate course in Ottawa five times a year and hopes to expand its offerings in the future.

2.173 **Recommendation.** Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, together with the other federal departments and agencies mandated to train for chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear response, should revisit the objectives for providing training to first responders and the delivery of the training.

The need for this training in Canada is immediate, and it is real, as illustrated by at least two frightening incidents: in March 2005, a van transporting anthrax and other viral agents to a research centre was involved in a serious traffic accident in downtown Winnipeg, causing serious alarm in the city until emergency crews were able to verify that the deadly packages had not ruptured. This incident mirrored a May, 2003 situation in Guelph, Ont., where a van carrying six cases of radioactive materials was involved in a traffic accident at an intersection and overturned.

These incidents demonstrated that biological and radiological materials are being transported on our city streets, and that accidents involving these materials do in fact happen, anytime and anywhere. In the case of the Guelph accident, none of the fire fighters who rushed to the scene

had received any radiological or other CBRN response training at all. Fortunately, none of the materials leaked, otherwise the situation could have been deadly for fire fighters and members of the public. What is just as shocking is that in 2005, two years after this incident, Guelph fire fighters have still not receive any radiological or other CBRN training.

What is more disturbing is that a 2004 request from the Guelph Fire Department for federal CBRN response training was denied. The department was told that existing teams have priority for federal training and that it would be years before any space would be available.

The Winnipeg and Guelph incidents also serve to illustrate that incidents of a CBRN nature can and will happen anywhere, and not just in Ottawa, Toronto or another of the small number of other Canadian cities that have CBRN response teams in place.

While the lack of first responder training in CBRN response is an alarming scenario, there is a cost-effective solution to the issue of first responder CBRN and hazardous materials response training in Canada. The IAFF Hazardous Materials Training for First Responders Program and Emergency Response to Terrorism Operations Programs have successfully trained tens of thousands of first responders in the U.S. to a recognized level of response.

But because the funding for these programs comes from the U.S. government, Canadian first responders are prevented from receiving this urgently-needed training. IAFF analysis shows that annual funding of just \$500,000 would reach approximately 1,667 first responders a year. Because they are train-the-trainer programs, the effects of the training are multiplied as participants deliver the course to first responders in their home community.

The \$500,000 funding proposal represents a tiny fraction of the \$7.7 billion that was allocated over a five-year period by the federal government in December, 2001 for enhancing national security. And because the curriculum administration for these IAFF programs are already in place, virtually 100 per cent of federal funding would go directly toward instruction.

The IAFF has been told again and again, by sources inside and outside of government, that our proposal, at a cost of \$500,000, is simply too small to be noticed; in other words it's "flying under the radar." We are told that if we tack on a zero at the end of our cost projection, we'll get more attention from the federal government. But we refuse to upwardly revise the estimated cost of our proposal for this or any other reason. It is simply not necessary.

In September 2003, after discussions with the IAFF, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) endorsed the IAFF position on federal funding for hazardous materials and Weapons of Mass Destruction training for first responders. The FMC represents hundreds of Canadian municipalities, from the largest cities to the smallest townships and villages, in every province in Canada.

Years and years are passing while this cost-effective opportunity to significantly increase the number of first responders trained to safely and effectively protect Canadians from CBRN incidents goes untapped.

The IAFF calls on the federal government to fully recognize its responsibility for national security and the protection of Canadians and immediately provide funding to enable Canadian first responders to participate in the IAFF Hazardous Training for First Responders Program and the IAFF Emergency Response to Terrorism Operations Program. This funding could be provided by the federal government through existing budgetary allocations through the Ministry of Public

Safety and Emergency Preparedness (PSEPC), or jointly between PSEPC and Health Canada, National Defence and Foreign Affairs.

### **3. The Need for a National Public Safety Officer Compensation (PSOC) Benefit**

Fire fighting is a dangerous profession. Studies confirm that those in the profession suffer the highest rate of job-related illness and injury of any occupation, the result of innumerable hazards they encounter every day in the course of protecting the lives and property of Canadians.

On any given call, a fire fighter may be required to enter a burning and damaged structure or other confined space that is choked with toxic smoke, or respond to highway accidents or other medical calls where they can be exposed to infectious diseases. Additionally, several forms of cancer are now recognized as occupational diseases in fire fighters. Since 1970, more than 160 professional fire fighters have died in the line of duty in Canada, and in the years 2000 to 2004, 40 fire fighter deaths were attributed to job-related cancers. The average age of these fire fighters was just 54.

Fire fighters are aware of these risks when they choose the profession. Fire fighters are also aware that they are the nation's first line of defense in the event of an attack of a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear nature on Canadian soil. Fire fighters are prepared to face these dangers and they are prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice without hesitation in order to save the lives of Canadians.

There is no greater example of the sacrifice that fire fighters are prepared to make on behalf of their nation than the events of September 11, 2001 in New York City. When terrorists attacked the United States, it was municipal fire fighters who were first on scene, rushing into the burning, twisted wreckage of the two towers in the hopes that lives might be saved. Sadly, 343 of those fire fighters made the ultimate sacrifice on that fateful day.

As a nation grieved, thoughts turned quickly to their survivors; families who in most cases had lost their primary breadwinner. How would the financial security of these families be protected? Who would ensure they would be able to meet their financial burdens in the wake of these tragic circumstances? In the United States, the federal government has taken a responsible role and since 1976 has administered the Public Safety Officer Benefit (PSOB). This indexed benefit is immediately available to the families of public safety officers who are killed or disabled in the course of their duties.

The U.S. government did not hide behind jurisdictional arguments when it created the benefit. It recognized that implementing the PSOB was the right thing to do. The benefit is available to all public safety officers, regardless of whether they are employed municipally or federally. First implemented at \$50,000, the benefit was increased to \$250,000 after the events of 9-11 and now stands at \$275,658.

The Canadian government still does not feel it is appropriate to recognize the sacrifice of a fallen fire fighter or address the financial security of his or her family. Instead, the federal government continues to hide behind jurisdictional arguments as a reason to avoid implementing a public safety officer benefit.

The Canadian government continues to argue that because most fire fighters are municipally employed, it is up to municipalities to provide some appropriate form of compensation. The truth is that only a minority of professional fire fighters have been able to bargain this kind of benefit,

and even so, it is in many cases just a token amount – not nearly enough to realistically address the needs of a grieving family that has lost a major source of income.

Among those fire fighters who have been able to negotiate a line of duty death benefit, a typical benefit is two years' continuation of the fire fighter's salary, which is enough to keep the surviving spouse and their family in the family home for two years. Then what?

If a fire fighter dies at age 43 – the average for fireground line-of-duty deaths - even \$300,000 is less than 25 per cent of the income that the family would have received over the next 17 years if that fire fighter had worked until age 60. Why should the family of a public safety officer who gave their life on behalf of Canadians suffer any financial penalty?

The financial security of the family of a fire fighter who is killed or permanently disabled on behalf of Canadians should not be in question, and it should not depend on the uncertainties of the collective bargaining process or the province in which they live. It is deserving of an equitable national standard; a minimum base amount that would apply to all fire fighters on top of any line of duty death benefit they may be eligible for locally.

For more than a decade, the federal government has used the argument of jurisdiction to avoid acting to implement a national PSOC benefit in Canada. In the absence of any specific legislation, regulation or agreement preventing the establishment of a national PSOC benefit in Canada, the IAFF respectfully rejects the jurisdictional argument and asserts that it is a question of 'will' on the part of the federal government, along with additional education about the need to implement the benefit.

The IAFF also points to existing examples of federal government oversight in parallel areas, for example the annual memorial ceremony on Parliament Hill in Ottawa for peace officers killed in the line of duty. Many of those who are memorialized at this national ceremony were municipal employees, as are fire fighters. This ceremony takes place adjacent to a permanent national memorial to fallen peace officers on Parliament Hill, which includes plaques inscribed with the names of fallen peace officers and a gazebo. Canada's Solicitor General has participated actively in this ceremony in the past.

In fact, the annual national ceremony for peace officers on Parliament Hill was instituted (1978) in direct response to the July 11, 1977 death of Const. David Kirkwood – a member of Ottawa's municipal police force.

While this national ceremony and special day of remembrance for fallen peace officers are entirely appropriate, and fitting tributes to the sacrifices they have made, the IAFF is not asking for a national memorial but a nationally-instituted benefit to ensure the financial security of a family that has lost a primary source of income as the result of a sacrifice made on behalf of all Canadians.

The national jurisdiction is important to a PSOC benefit for public safety officers because a national benefit, as opposed to the existing patchwork of municipal or provincial survivor benefit provisions, would ensure a consistent, national standard for recognizing the sacrifice of a fallen fire fighter.

It must also be noted that in the case of a terrorist attack, which would constitute an act that threatens national security and an act against the nation, it is municipally-employed fire fighters

who will be first on scene; acting as the first line of defence and protecting Canadians from the aftermath of such an attack.

In June 2003, the IAFF drafted a comprehensive discussion paper which proposed a model for a national PSOC benefit in Canada. The document illustrated that there is no reason a benefit modeled after the U.S. PSOB cannot be established in Canada. This paper is available online at [www.iaff.org/politics/ca/content/testimonies/PSOC.htm](http://www.iaff.org/politics/ca/content/testimonies/PSOC.htm).

Canadians are proud of their fire fighters and appreciate the profession on a national scale. In January 2005, an independent poll confirmed for the fourth straight year that Canadians trust fire fighters more than any other profession. A full 97 per cent of Canadians trust fire fighters.

The IAFF calls on the federal government to establish a national Public Safety Officer Compensation benefit in Canada as an appropriate way for the nation to recognize the sacrifice made by a fallen fire fighter and to address the financial security of the fire fighter's family. This benefit should be established in the amount of \$300,000 and function as a direct, indexed benefit to the fire fighter's family.

As the Canadian government continues to avoid addressing the need for a national PSOC benefit, the families of the nation's fire fighters stand to endure financial hardship in addition to the grief of losing a loved one. It is time for the federal government to stop using jurisdictional arguments and implement a national PSOC Benefit to benefit the families of Canadian fire fighters killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Targeted and sensible investment in human and physical capital is the sign of a healthy and growing society. A government could not contemplate a more important form of spending than one which improves the safety and security of its citizens, or one that recognizes a sacrifice made on behalf of the safety and security of its citizens and ensures that a grieving family does not ensure financial hardship as a direct result of that sacrifice.

Our proposal for Canadian implementation of the IAFF Hazardous Materials Response and First Responders programs would satisfy what has been widely and credibly identified as a dangerous shortfall in the nation's emergency preparedness regime, and in an extremely cost-effective manner.

A budgetary allotment for the creation of a national Public Safety Officer Compensation benefit would demonstrate that Canada on behalf of its citizens is prepared to come forward and in a meaningful way recognize the sacrifice that a fallen fire fighter has made on behalf of his or her fellow Canadians.

Every year, during the IAFF Canadian Legislative Conference, professional fire fighters from across Canada come to Ottawa to lobby their MP to act on federal issues they consider to be priorities. In May 2005, fire fighters met with 133 MPs. A full 87 per cent agreed with the IAFF position on Hazardous Materials and CBRN training; only one MP actively opposed our position. Similarly, almost 75 per cent supported the IAFF position on a PSOC benefit and agreed it should be established; only 2.6 per cent actively disagreed with the need for this benefit.

We respect the concept that an MP speaking individually does not represent the views of his or her party or the government. But surely this should serve as a strong indication of the merits of

our arguments and the will of those who have been elected democratically to reflect and implement the will of Canadians.

These two proposals constitute relatively small investments in budgetary terms for the federal government but immense investments in human and physical capital to the benefit of all Canadians. We respectfully urge the committee to recommend to the Minister of Finance that the necessary budget allotments for these proposals be included in the next federal budget.

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