



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

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

September, 2002

On behalf of General President Harold Schaitberger and the 17,500 professional fire fighters and emergency medical personnel we represent across Canada, the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) appreciates once again having the opportunity to participate in this consultative process that will help guide the Finance Minister in his deliberations over the next federal budget.

The IAFF remains appreciative also of the positive recommendation of the Standing Committee on Finance in 1999 regarding the issue of pension reform for fire fighters. That recommendation gave an important new profile and has helped the IAFF advocate a solution to a longstanding inequity.

Today we are assured that the issue of pension reform for professional fire fighters, in the form of an increase in the annual pension accrual rate for years of credited service, is the subject of a commitment from the Finance Ministry and that this problem will be corrected.

In this submission the IAFF will address two issues of critical importance to Canada's professional fire fighters that are also issues of budgetary consequence for the federal government: national hazardous materials training for Canada's first responders and the need to establish a national Public Safety Officer Compensation (PSOC) Fund to benefit the families of Canadian fire fighters who are killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty.

A year ago, on September 11, 2001, the world was shocked into a new and sinister reality as terrorists struck with devastating results in New York and Washington, demonstrating callous disregard for the lives of innocent civilians and their ability and desire to use weapons of mass destruction on North American soil.

In the days, weeks and months that ensued, the issue of national security came to the forefront in Canada and in the deliberations of our elected leaders. The subsequent series of anthrax attacks in the U.S., and bio-attack scares in Canada, served to heighten this sense of urgency.

In response to this new reality, the federal government made a substantive commitment to national security, in the form of a \$7.7-billion budgetary allocation over the next five years, as announced in the House of Commons on December 10, 2001. This budget amount included specific allocations for first responder training.

It should be noted at this point that the issue of major disaster preparedness is not a new one for the IAFF, and was not developed solely in response to the events of September 11. This is evidenced by a letter written by the IAFF to the Minister of National Defence in August, 2001 calling for additional resources for Canada's first responders to adequately deal with major disasters, including terrorist attacks of an explosive, biological or chemical nature.

But as a result of the attacks on the U.S., the IAFF in October, 2001 drafted a funding proposal, directed at the federal government, for Canadian participation in the IAFF Hazardous Materials Training for First Responders Program. This program, which has successfully trained tens of thousands of U.S. first responders with funding from the U.S. Government, includes components that address chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear response.

Since October 2001, the IAFF has presented this proposal to a number of federal ministries and agencies, including National Defence and the Office of Critical Infrastructure Protection and Emergency Preparedness (OC�PEP), Foreign Affairs (National Security), Transport, Health Canada and the Solicitor General.

In November, 2001 the IAFF appeared before this same Finance Committee to discuss the details about this proposal and the importance of establishing a baseline level of hazardous materials training across Canada, directly in response to the events of September 11.

While the proposal has been well received, none of these ministries, independently or jointly, has yet agreed to provide the necessary funding to get this critically-important training off the ground. In the meantime, weeks and months are passing while this extremely cost-effective opportunity for the federal government to provide badly-needed first responder training remains untapped.

We are aware that the federal government has already targeted a number of federal agencies for funding allotments for first responder training, as provided for in the December, 2001 federal budget, the IAFF continues to push for implementation of our proposal as a means of ensuring a widespread and baseline level of hazardous materials response in Canada, specifically in regard to the threat of chemical, biological and radiological attacks.

Because the curriculum and administration of the IAFF Hazardous Materials Training for First Responders Program are already established, virtually 100 per cent of any Canadian government funding would be used for actual hands-on training of fire fighters and other first responders. The \$500,000 amount contained in the IAFF proposal represents 40,000 contact hours and the training of 1,600 students per year. Because it is a "train the trainer" program, its effects are multiplied.

For example, if 80 fire fighters participated in three initial train the trainer sessions across the country, and each of those participants taught the curriculum to 20 first responders in their home community in the subsequent year, the curriculum would reach more than 1,600 first responders.

With \$500,000 in annual federal funding, Canada's first responder community could be saturated with the appropriate level of training in just five to 10 years.

This funding amount represents a tiny fraction of the \$7.7 billion allocated to national security in the December, 2001 federal budget.

The IAFF Hazardous Materials Training for First Responders Program has been extremely successful in the U.S., where it is jointly funded by four federal departments and agencies and offered free to fire departments and other emergency services. Because the funding is from the U.S. government, Canadian first responders are prevented from participating in this critically-important training.

As the events of September 11 showed, it is a nation's fire fighters who are the domestic defenders in its cities. As Canadian military officials have openly acknowledged, military-based teams are hours or even days from deployment and are therefore not the ones who will be dealing with the immediate aftermath of a terrorist incident. It is the nation's fire fighters and other first responders who will be on the scene first; within minutes of a chemical, biological or radiological attack.

The problem lies in the fact that without the appropriate training, they cannot safely and effectively respond to one of these incidents - and that means the citizens of Canada are largely unprotected from this threat.

We have already provided copies of the IAFF course curriculum to various federal departments, and we are more than willing to provide additional copies of the program, so that its merit can be verified, to any other federal department or agency that requests so.

The IAFF is aware that a process of allocating monies for first responder training has already been drafted and is being implemented at the federal level. We are also assured by the Minister of Defence that our proposal will be considered as the federal government develops its long-term strategy for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) response.

The IAFF strongly urges the Standing Committee on Finance to recommend the specific allocation of funding for the IAFF Hazardous Materials Training for First Responders Program as a financially advantageous means of significantly enhancing the nation's ability to respond to the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

Politicians are quick to join Canadians in thanking fire fighters for their service to their community, and for the sacrifices they are prepared to make at a moment's notice in the name of protecting the lives and property of Canadians.

A more appropriate way to recognize the important role of professional fire fighters would come in the form of better job protections and a concrete recognition of the sacrifices that fire fighters are prepared to make on behalf of Canadians.

There is no act more noble than laying down one's life for the sake of others; bravely putting oneself in harm's way so that others might escape danger. The ultimate example of this kind of sacrifice was seen in New York City on September 11, 2001, when terrorists attacked the World Trade Center. As workers attempted to flee the burning wreckage of the two office towers, the city's professional fire fighters were heading in the opposite direction – directly into the doomed buildings – in their duty to protect the lives of their fellow citizens. They did not hesitate or show fear in the face of danger. They rushed into those buildings fully aware that this brave act may be their last. For 343 of them, it was.

As the events of September 11 shocked the entire world, the deaths of those fire fighters resonated loudly throughout the fire service, not only because of the special bond that all fire fighters share, but because fire fighters everywhere know that they too, when called upon, are prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice. Canada's professional fire fighters are prepared to lay down their lives to protect the lives of their fellow citizens. When they do so, it is in service to all Canadians.

For those outside the fire service, the actions of fire fighters on September 11 created a new awareness of the dangerous nature of the profession, and the sacrifices that fire fighters are prepared to make at a moment's notice. As a nation grieved the loss of these fire fighters, thoughts turned quickly to their survivors; families that had lost their primary breadwinner and more than 1,000 children suddenly left fatherless on that fateful day. Would these families, in the face of their grief, also face financial burdens after losing in most cases their main source of income? How would the financial security of these families be ensured?

Since 1976, the United States government has recognized the sacrifice made by fire fighters who are killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty, and recognized their families' need for financial security, through a Public Safety Officer Benefit (PSOB). The PSOB is a one-time federal payment to the family of a fire fighter who is killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty.

It is an indexed payment directly from the federal government to the fire fighter's family, regardless of whether the fire fighter was employed at the municipal, state or federal level. The U.S. government implemented the PSOB because it understood that national recognition of a fire fighter's sacrifice was the right thing to do. It did not hide behind jurisdictional arguments.

When it was implemented in 1976, the U.S. PSOB provided \$50,000 to the family of a fallen fire fighter. Several years later, it was increased to \$100,000 and indexed for inflation. At the time of the World Trade Center tragedy, it stood at slightly more than \$150,000.

On October 26 2001, in direct response to the needs of the families of the 343 fire fighters who died on September 11, U.S. President George W. Bush signed into law an increase in the PSOB to \$250,000, retroactive to January 1, 2001.

Canadian fire fighters who sacrifice their lives while protecting the public currently receive no recognition from the Canadian government. There is no national recognition of their sacrifice or attempt to address the financial burdens their families will face. Only ten per cent of Canada's professional fire fighters have been able to negotiate some form of death benefit with their employer; and in the majority of cases it is not enough to address the financial security of their survivors. Since 1970, more than 110 professional fire fighters have died in the line of duty in Canada without any kind of national recognition or attempt to address the financial burdens their grieving families faced after losing their primary source of income.

The IAFF calls on the federal government to create a national Public Safety Officer Compensation (PSOC) Fund in Canada as a way for a grateful nation to acknowledge the sacrifice of a fallen fire fighter and to diminish the financial burdens faced by the fire fighter's family. This fund should be organized, not as a charity, but as an automatic and direct payment from the federal government in the form of an indexed benefit.

In support of this position, the IAFF submits that:

- When fire fighters risk their lives and safety in the course of their duties, they do so in service to all Canadians
- The establishment of a PSOC Fund would allow a grateful nation to recognize the tremendous sacrifice made on their behalf by a fire fighter killed or permanently injured in the line of duty, and to diminish the financial burdens faced by the fire fighter's family
- Unlike other workers, fire fighters do not enjoy the right to refuse an unsafe workplace. Fire fighting is inherently dangerous, with more than four times the rate of job-related deaths as the private sector (1998 data)
- The average age of a fire fighter who died as the result of a line-of-duty injury in 1998 was 43
- The issue of the financial security of a fallen fire fighter's family is deserving of a nation-wide standard. It should not depend on the collective bargaining process.

As the establishment of a PSOC Fund has not yet been accepted by any federal government department or agency in Canada, the families of the nation's fire fighters stand to suffer financial hardship in addition to the grief they will face after the loss of a loved one. In the past, the federal government has used jurisdictional arguments to avoid addressing this issue. However, there has never

been clearer evidence that this form of national recognition and compensation to the family of a fallen fire fighter is the right thing to do.

The IAFF calls on the Standing Committee on Finance to recommend the establishment of a national Public Safety Officer Compensation (PSOC) Fund in Canada.

Once again, the IAFF appreciates this opportunity to participate in the pre-budget consultation exercise of the Standing Committee on Finance. We look forward to presenting our views in person before the Committee this fall and answering any questions about these issues of importance to Canada's professional fire fighters.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Lee
Assistant to the General President for Canadian Operations
International Association of Fire Fighters