

INTERPRETATION BULLETIN  
Office of the Fire Commissioner

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August 21, 2012

**Minimum Training Standards for Volunteer Firefighters in British Columbia**

**Purpose:**

Clarification of the Office of the Fire Commissioner's position and interpretation of the Provincial Training Standard is offered in response to requests received from local authorities wishing to establish policies and standards for their volunteer fire departments.

**Background:**

The Fire Services Act states in Part 1, Section 3(3)(b) under the duties of the Fire Commissioner that the fire commissioner must, for fire suppression, do the following "establish in consultation with the advisory board and subject to the minister's approval, minimum standards for selection and training of fire services personnel"

December 2002 was the last time the Fire Commissioner carried out this responsibility when Minister's Order No. 368 was introduced. The content of the Order was as follows:

"Further to the authority granted by Section 3(3)(b) of the Fire Services Act, the training standards for fire service personnel in British Columbia are those published by the National Fire Protection Association, effective January 1, 2003."

This Order remains in effect today.

**Discussion:**

When introduced, the training standard for fire service personnel was not a mandatory requirement that local governments and local authorities with fire departments were required to adopt.

The Provincial Training Standard was intended to provide local governments with a standard that was well-established and widely accepted internationally, a standard that was well-defined and readily accessible to those responsible for the training of firefighters.

The intent of the Standard was that local governments and local authorities could adopt, not adopt or adopt in part the standards laid out in the NFPA 1001: Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications identifies the minimum job performance requirements for career and volunteer fire fighters whose duties are primarily structural in nature.

Past-President Bruce Hall of the Fire Chiefs Association of British Columbia at the time the Provincial Training Standard was introduced, made the following statement to his membership "Every Fire Service has an obligation to exercise a "Standard of Care" when providing their services and, as such, should adopt a training standard and carry out a training program. Although the fire service is free to adopt any training standard it may wish, the Service must be able to justify the choice. The policy to use NFPA training standards is a defensible decision."

### **Discussion (cont.):**

Hall further stated “It also should be noted that the NFPA Standards indicated by the Ministerial Order are only those referring to the training of fire service personnel. They do not deal with the operation of a fire service.

It is recommended that all Fire Services should commence a review of their Bylaws and Policies to ensure that they are up to date with references to the NFPA Standards and those which they wish to adopt either in entirety or partially.”

### **Opinion of the Fire Commissioner:**

- It is the opinion of the Office of the Fire Commissioner that the comments of Chief Hall are still relevant and provide appropriate guidelines for local governments and authorities to apply with respect to the fire departments in their communities today.
- The Office of the Fire Commissioner encourages all local governments and authorities to review the bylaws and policies they have in place relative to the safety of their firefighters and the training they facilitate through the budgetary process.
- The bylaw that approved the introduction of fire services should be reviewed to ensure it reflects the services they wish their fire department to deliver.
- Policies should be reviewed to ensure they reflect an appropriate standard for the training provided to their firefighters.
- The policies should also clearly indicate who is responsible for the training of the firefighters. The local government and authority must ensure that the individual who is given that responsibility is fully conversant with the WorkSafeBC Regulations, designed to ensure that firefighters carry out their duties in a safe manner.
- The Office of the Fire Commissioner stresses that decisions regarding fire department training are the responsibility of the local government or the local authority and that the province does not dictate what Training Standard should adopted by them.
- The Fire Commissioner will assist local governments and local authorities upon request. Part of the mandate for the Fire Commissioner is to provide advice and recommendation to assist with the provision of fire protection services.
- The Fire Commissioner encourages local governments and local authorities to consider the following topics on an ongoing basis with respect to the provision of fire protection services. Risk-assessment of fire protection district, fire service delivery options, firefighter training programs and the safeguarding of firefighter safety.

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Interpretation Bulletins are distributed by the Office of the Fire Commissioner, in order to provide direction for the application and interpretation of the Fire Services Act, and pursuant regulations.

## Local Authority Firefighter Training Program

1.	Does your local government have a bylaw to establish the fire department or if you are a registered society does your constitution and bylaws provide the mandate to establish a fire department?	Yes/No	
<p><b>Note:</b> If the answer is “no” the fire department will not be considered by the Office of the Fire Commissioner for deployments under the provincial mobilization plan.</p>			
If Yes, what functions is the fire department authorized to deliver?			
<b>Functions:</b>		<b>Functions:</b>	
Fire Suppression:	Yes/No	Rescue Operations	Yes/No
– Structures (incl. chimney)	Yes/No	– Structures	Yes/No
– Vehicles	Yes/No	– Vehicles	Yes/No
– Beach	Yes/No	– Embankments	Yes/No
– Bush	Yes/No	– Water	Yes/No
– Forest	Yes/No	Hazardous Materials	Yes/No
– Flammable liquids/gases	Yes/No	- Assessing only	Yes/No
First Response Medical Aid	Yes/No	- Limiting exposures	Yes/No
Mutual Aid	Yes/No	- Full Response	Yes/No
Public assist	Yes/No	Other:	
2.	Is there a Policy statement determining if the Fire department will provide either a Defensive/Exterior or an Offensive/ Interior Structural Attack Type for Fire Suppression?	Yes/No	
3.	Is there a Policy statement determining the Training Standards to which the Fire Department will train?	Yes/No	
<p><b>Note:</b> If the answer is “no” the fire department will not be considered by the Office of the Fire Commissioner for deployments under the provincial mobilization plan.</p>			
If Yes, what standards have been adopted for the fire department?			
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
- Full NFPA compliance with IFSAC &/or ProBoard certification	Yes/No	- Accredited training for other functions e.g. First Response,	Yes/No
- NFPA compliance with no required certification	Yes/No		
- NFPA compliant material based E.g. IFSTA, Jones and Bartlett, Delmar, etc.	Yes/No		
4.	Is your Local Authority/Registered Society registered with WorkSafeBC?	Yes/No	
<p><b>Note:</b> If the answer is “no”, the fire department will not be considered by the Office of the Fire Commissioner for deployments under the provincial mobilization plan.</p>			
5.	Who coordinates firefighter training?		
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
- Fire Department Chief officer	Yes/No	- Contractor	Yes/No
- Fire Department Training Officer	Yes/No	- Individual subject matter experts	Yes/No
- Regional/District Training Officer	Yes/No	- Other	Yes/No