

JOINT MUNICIPAL FIRE SERVICES COMMITTEE BULLETIN

MUTUAL / AUTOMATIC AID AGREEMENTS

Mutual aid is an essential element of emergency preparedness. Mutual aid ensures that adequate resources will be available when emergency requirements exceed the capacity of local responders.

A formal, written mutual aid agreement between service providers offers a framework that enhances the collective ability of firefighters and first responders to safeguard lives, homes and businesses.

Mutual aid agreements enable service providers to respond simultaneously and work together seamlessly on every type of incident, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries.

These agreements can accelerate response times, facilitate service delivery and potentially lead to cost-sharing efficiencies. A formal, written agreement can also provide certainty and circumvent disputes.

The Fire Services Stakeholder Committee is comprised of representatives from the following organizations:

- Association of Municipal Administrators, NS;
- Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing;
- Fire Services Association of Nova Scotia;
- Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities; and
- Office of the Fire Marshal.

For more information regarding mutual aid agreements or the work of the Fire Services Stakeholder Committee please contact: fireservices@amans.ca

More information can be found in the *Municipal Government Act - Guide Respecting Fire and Emergency Services*

Why are Mutual / Automatic Aid Agreements so important?

Mutual / Automatic Aid Agreements help address:

- The terms and conditions governing reimbursement for use of equipment, supplies, facilities, property, services, and other resources provided under an agreement;
- The procedures for requesting mutual aid or receiving automatic aid and resources;
- Who has authorization to accept a request for mutual aid; and
- The level of personnel, types of equipment, and resources to be made available during an emergency.

These Agreements help to manage risk by:

- Ensuring that an adequate number of firefighters are available to operate safely and effectively;
- Indemnifying mutual aid partners from any liability from alleged negligence occurring during a mutual aid response;
- Stipulating the party responsible for the provision of member benefits in the event of an accident; and
- Specifying the mechanism for dispute resolution should a dispute or material disagreement arise between signatories to an agreement.

As a representative of your municipality or village, do you know?

- Oral or “handshake” agreements lack the legal safeguards of formally written mutual aid agreements?
- What the service capabilities of your local fire and emergency provider are and if there are service gaps?
- If your municipality or village has copies of all mutual aid agreements to which it is not a signatory?
- How long it has been since your municipality or village reevaluated the mutual aid agreements for which it is a signatory?

As a representative of a fire department do you know?

- If your fire department has a written mutual aid agreement with other fire departments, has it been reviewed by your municipal unit and does the municipality have a copy?
- What the command and control structure is when your assets and personnel are deployed to a mutual aid call?
- Whose departmental general operating guidelines (GOGs) are observed when responding to a mutual aid request?
 - Is a system in place that will keep command informed of who is responding?
 - Is your department equipped with the necessary means to log incoming crews into the incident?
- If your insurance provider is privy to mutual agreements for which your department is a signatory?
- When was the last time your department conducted joint training with a mutual aid partner?
- If specialized equipment is available to you in your municipality or surrounding municipalities should the need arise?