

WHO TAKES CARE OF THE EVACUEES?

When we read about a forest fire, flood, hazardous waste spill or another emergency or disaster that forces people to evacuate their homes, we often follow the story closely and with a sense of fascination. To some, this daily or in many cases hourly need to monitor the progress of the disaster and rescue work may seem like an unnatural curiosity. In fact, it is a very normal human response.

Though a disaster may not be happening in **Lillooet**, it may be affecting other people in our country, province or even in a neighbouring region, and we know there is a possibility that our community could go through the experience of another forest fire. As we follow the progress of the disaster and the people affected by it, we often wonder if our region would be as prepared to deal with a similar event. Local fire fighters, police and emergency responders are equipped to handle emergency and disaster situations, but what happens to those who have been evacuated? Is there a plan in place to help people who cannot return to their homes?

Fortunately, in British Columbia the answer is yes. Municipalities and First Nations communities are required to develop an emergency plan for their community, and that includes a plan for Emergency Social Services. In **T'it'q'et**, this has led to the creation of our local ESS Team.

ESS is a province-wide, community based emergency response program that is responsible for taking care of the immediate needs of people affected by disaster. Working together with various community agencies, ESS volunteers help provide short-term (usually 72 hours) assistance to people displaced by emergencies or disasters. ESS volunteers provide food, clothing, shelter, and reunification with families or other loved ones, as well as other services required to preserve the well being of people in the community.

ESS volunteers work as part of a team, and team members receive the training necessary to assist their communities in the event of a disaster. ESS teams are supported by the provincial government through the ESS Program Office of the Ministry of Human Resources. The province provides broad leadership and coordination in the delivery of ESS and will, upon request, assist communities overwhelmed by a disaster. ESS teams also work in cooperation with the Provincial Emergency Program (PEP) of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, which is responsible for establishing the overall emergency response framework for BC.

To become an ESS volunteer, please contact **Stephanie Barney or Susan Napoleon at (250) 256-4118**. Even if you are not able to become a volunteer right now, your support for those people who do contribute their time and energy towards ESS is always appreciated. Please see the attached "Need for ESS Volunteers" informational release.