

E-COMM 911: BRITISH COLUMBIA'S LIFELINE

A GUIDE FOR B.C. MUNICIPALITIES

**BY THE EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS
PROFESSIONALS OF BC (CUPE LOCAL 8911)**



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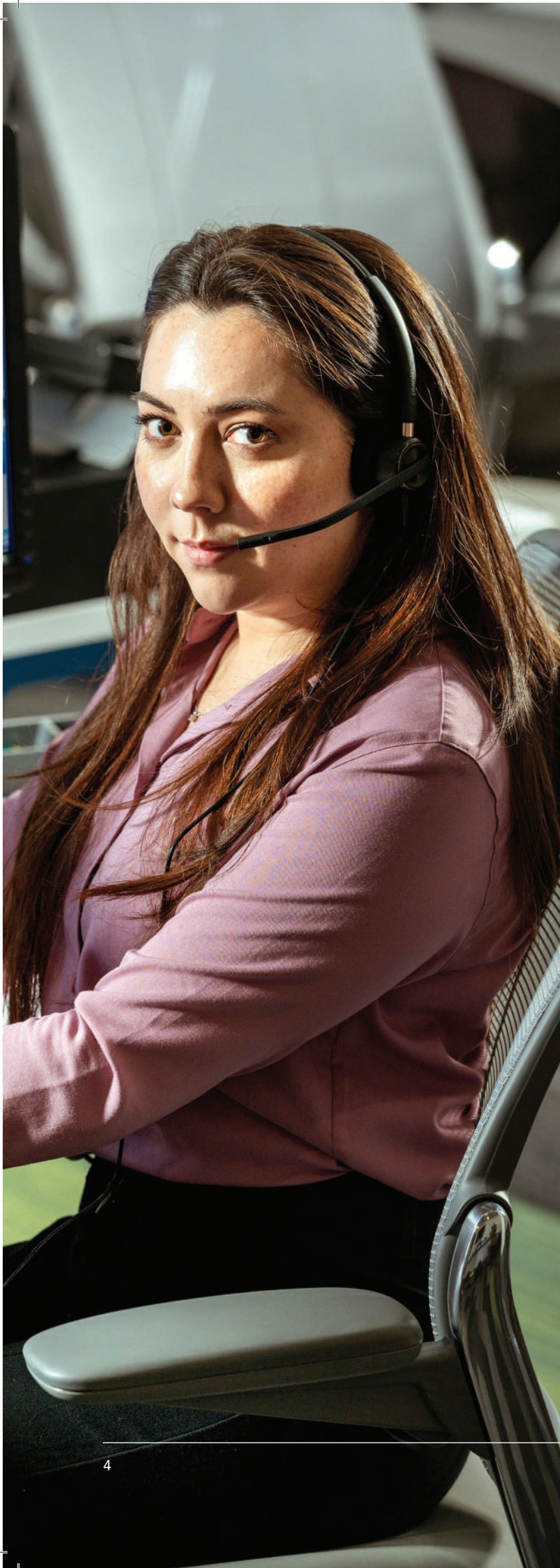


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the province's main provider of emergency call-taking and dispatch services, E-Comm 9-1-1 provides an essential public service to British Columbians. However, this service has suffered from a lack of consistent standards, unpredictable funding, and unclear lines of responsibility. As a result, the service cannot always respond fast enough when British Columbians need it most.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The provincial government should establish response standards for emergency communications services.
2. The provincial government should create a cell phone levy for emergency communications services.
3. The provincial government should conduct a governance review of emergency communications services.





WHAT IS E-COMM 9-1-1?

- Established in 1999, E-Comm 9-1-1 is a non-profit corporation governed under the *Emergency Communications Corporations Act (1997)*. It is owned and governed by various municipal, regional, and provincial emergency services.
- E-Comm 9-1-1 is the first point of contact for 99 per cent of the callers who dial 9-1-1 in B.C. and provides 9-1-1, call-taking and dispatch services for 25 regional districts, 33 police departments and 40 fire departments.
- CUPE Local 8911 represents approximately six hundred E-Comm employees.

WHAT DOES THE PUBLIC EXPECT?

- British Columbians who call 9-1-1 expect their call to be answered immediately. They expect that critical information will be gathered accurately and that, consistently across the province, they will quickly receive the help they need.
- British Columbians who call the non-emergency line expect a knowledgeable and timely response from call-takers, who can support them or direct their call as needed in an efficient manner that meets or exceeds a consistent standard throughout B.C.



Recommendation 1:

That the provincial government establish consistent service and response standards for emergency communications in British Columbia.

Service Standards

There are currently no service standards in British Columbia that set how a call should be handled or how quickly an emergency call needs to be answered. This lack of standards is a contributing factor in calls not being answered immediately and has led to inconsistent caller experiences for those seeking help from emergency services throughout British Columbia.

The National Emergency Number Association (NENA) and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) are both internationally recognized organizations that set fact-based standards for emergency communications. By establishing consistent service and response standards, the government will ensure that this emergency response system is resilient, reliable, and capable of meeting public expectations when people call for help.

The NENA standard is for 90 per cent of all 9-1-1 calls arriving to be answered within 10 seconds and for no call to be left unattended once answered.

The NFPA standard for fire emergencies is for 90 per cent of calls to be answered in less than 15 seconds, and crews dispatched in 90 per cent of events in less than 60 seconds.

Recommendation 2:

That the provincial government create a cell phone levy with the revenue to be provided by municipalities targeted for emergency communications services.

Funding

Contributing to the difficulties in B.C.'s emergency response system is a reactive funding formula that is not keeping up with increased service needs. Emergency communications services need stable and sufficient funding to meet service standards and provide the staff resources necessary to respond to call surges caused by emergencies such as heat waves, forest fires, floods, or earthquakes.

Currently, funding for emergency communications comes primarily from contracts with dozens of municipalities. Municipalities have limited revenue sources and a wide range of responsibilities. The resources required to respond to current rates of emergency and non-emergency call volumes are outpacing the rate of inflation. For example, calls in January and February 2023 increased by 15 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively, over the same months in 2022.

Municipalities need responsive funding to ensure that calls are answered in times that meet provincially set standards. A cell phone levy, which exists in other provinces, would be connected to phones making calls for 9-1-1 service. This type of levy would provide municipalities with a stable and responsive revenue source to fund these operations as required to meet changing demands.

Recommendation 3:

That the provincial government conduct a governance review, with relevant stakeholders, for emergency communications services in the province.

Governance

B.C.'s emergency communications services system is plagued by unclear lines of responsibilities and a patchwork of governance systems. A governance review would develop recommendations for new structures, ensuring both stability for the current state of 9-1-1 services in the province and more opportunities for innovation to incorporate new technologies and additional services, such as mental health supports, into the province's emergency response system.

One of the root causes of inconsistent service in British Columbia is that governance structures intersect while not being held to any standards. Additionally, as the system is currently structured, all levels of government—federal, provincial, regional, local, and police boards—have separate responsibilities for the emergency communications system but have little awareness of each other's responsibilities.

A governance review with stakeholders would lead to recommendations that ensure consistent and reliable emergency communications services across B.C. These recommendations would ensure stability for 9-1-1 services in the province while allowing for innovation to incorporate new technologies and additional services, such as mental health supports, into the province's emergency response system.





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