



## STAFF REPORT

**To:** Fraser Valley Regional District Board

**Date:** 2025-12-04

**From:** Tarina Colledge, Manager of Emergency Management

**Subject:** EMCR Financial Guidelines Update

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### RECOMMENDATION

This staff report is presented to the Electoral Area Services Committee to provide an update regarding the ongoing evolution of emergency management legislation and the associated financial guidelines. The report outlines recent developments in this area and highlights the challenge of predicting the implications for the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD). This report is submitted for information only and contains no staff recommendation.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Province of British Columbia has delayed regulatory updates related to emergency management until 2027. However, there is an intention to proceed with changes to financial guidelines before the spring of 2026. These changes are scheduled to occur ahead of the alignment with the Compensation and Disaster Financial Assistance Regulation (CDFAR), representing a shift from previous findings and commitments. This report provides relevant historical context, discusses the current status, and considers potential next steps for the FVRD.

### BACKGROUND

Since 2019, British Columbia's disaster and emergency management statutory framework has undergone significant modernization. The creation of a standalone ministry, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR), signalled the Province's commitment to emergency management. In November 2023, the new Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA) came into force. As a result, a comprehensive review and modernization of provincial emergency management documents, policies, and processes are required to align with the EDMA.

## Phase 1: Legislative Review (2016–2019)

- January 2016 – Emergency Management BC (EMBC) published the “Prepared and Resilient” discussion paper, initiating a formal review of the Emergency Program Act.
- 2019 – The Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) and EMBC began working with the Flood and Wildfire Advisory Committee.
- October 2019 – EMBC released “Modernizing BC’s Emergency Management Legislation” and opened a public comment period.

## Phase 2: Engagement & Feedback (2020–2022)

- January 2020 – Public comment period closed.
- August 2020 – The “What We Heard” report was published.
- September 2020 – EMBC released a new Finance Guide without prior engagement.
- December 2020 – The British Columbia Association of Emergency Managers (BCAEM) submitted feedback; FVRD provided input through reports and letters.
- January 2021 – FVRD Chair reported to Ministers.
- May 2022 – EMBC (Operations Division) Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) committed to halting the process for meaningful input and correlation to regulatory updates.

## Phase 3: Ministry Creation & Regulatory Updates (2022–2025)

- December 2022 – EMCR was established as a standalone ministry.
- October 2023 – EMBC released a discussion paper on regulatory updates.
- November 2023 – The new EDMA was brought into force.
- January 2024 – Engagement feedback on regulations closed (35 written submissions received).
- July 2024 – The Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation (LAEMR) was repealed; the Compensation and Disaster Financial Assistance (CDFA) regulation remains in force.
- Summer 2024 – UBCM convened the Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC); FVRD was accepted, but engagement has not focused on compensation and disaster financial assistance.
- September 2025 – Regulatory updates were delayed until 2027.
- November 2025 – EMCR indicated that financial guideline changes would proceed before spring 2026.

In 2020, the Province attempted to reduce their costs associated with emergency claims by updating the Financial Assistance for Emergency Response and Recovery Costs for Local Authorities and First Nations guide (originally created in 2005 and last updated in 2008, commonly referenced as “Financial Guidelines”). This guide was intended to provide more detailed information than what is available in the Compensation and Disaster Financial Assistance Regulation.

The 2020 version of the Financial Guidelines was released without engagement, consultation, or notice, and without time for budget planning. There was an expectation for local authorities to immediately adjust their disaster and emergency-related spending practices, despite no concurrent changes to the regulation the guide is meant to interpret. Some of the “financial clarifiers” in the guide extended into operational matters overseen by local authorities, prompting several—including

regional districts—to submit written feedback to the Premier, the responsible Minister, and key parties such as the UBCM and one another. Local authorities perceived the 2020 update as substantial, while provincial staff viewed it as a clarification of policy intent and closing interpretive gaps.

Staff presented a corporate report to the Board on January 14, 2021, highlighting inconsistencies between the new EDMA and other statutes governing regional districts, such as the Local Government Act and Community Charter in relation to the financial guide update. Early concerns included:

- Compensation thresholds for Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) shift lengths
- Potential limitations on EOC expenses without pre-approval from EMCR
- Ineligibility for overtime for staff working in EOCs
- Ineligibility of compensation for staff supporting Emergency Support Services (ESS)
- Increasingly specific considerations regarding evacuation cost eligibility

FVRD provided letters and feedback to the UBCM president, the Premier, and the Ministry, and shared its feedback with other regional districts and member municipalities. In response, Assistant Deputy Minister Maley (EMBC) distributed a letter to all local authorities indicating the process would be paused and revisited in alignment with an update to the relevant regulation.

## Current Situation

EMCR has confirmed that updates to financial guidelines will occur ahead of regulatory alignment, with engagement limited to three webinars. This approach may affect the planning and budgeting processes of local authorities.

## DISCUSSION

Despite the commitment made in 2021 to pause the development of new Financial Guidelines and revisited them in conjunction with an update to the relevant regulation, EMCR has brought back the 2021 Financial Guidelines with the intention of adopting them ahead of the development of a new Compensation and Disaster Financial Assistance Regulation. According to EMCR, the updates are needed to improve clarity and consistency.

The ministry held three targeted web-based engagement sessions between October 2–17, 2025, and **has since published another “What We Heard” report specific to this engagement series and its targeted questions.** EMCR plans to share a new version of the Financial Guidelines along with training webinars in February 2026, and to implement the new guidelines by March 2026.

However, this process is continuing without regard to the budgeting and work planning cycles of local authorities, making it difficult to incorporate changes into financial plans due to the ambiguity and timing of these updates, or hold space for staff training sessions without more information.

## Key Highlights of the 2025 “What We Heard” Report

The engagement process revealed widespread support for modernizing EMCR’s Financial Guidelines, but persistent structural challenges remain, particularly for regional districts and smaller communities:

1. Fixed contractor price limits are impractical in many locations. Small and remote communities often have only one contractor—or sometimes none at all—making it impossible to obtain multiple quotes. Local prices also vary significantly.
2. The equipment price guide (Blue Book) is outdated and limited. It is difficult to access (must be purchased), does not reflect real-life costs, and omits common emergency equipment. Rural areas often lack local suppliers entirely and disasters affect supply and locality of resources.
3. Purchasing equipment may be more cost-effective than renting. Communities beyond urban centres face long waits and high delivery fees, making ownership of basic gear like generators and pumps more practical and economical, additionally, rental houses do not exist in many small and rural areas.
4. **“Standby pay” rules are generally supported but require simplicity.** Clearer rules are needed, but templates and rapid approval processes are essential to avoid administrative burden.
5. Small communities lack surplus staff. During emergencies, there is often no one available to cover regular duties that are left unattended.
6. Transition rules from response to recovery are confusing. Different EMCR staff provide inconsistent guidance. Regional districts often experience funding declines because much of **their land is “private” or Crown land, yet public-safety work is still necessary on these lands in order to comply with the mandates set forth in EDMA.**
7. Provincially required paperwork needs simplification and flexibility, and an overall reduction in the demand from EMCR staff for non-essential documentation. Online forms will help, but small or remote communities need alternatives for submitting forms without internet access, as well as clarity on when a form is required. Disasters may affect telecoms and internet and not-internet based options must remain for disaster resiliency.
8. Set-price packages for EOC staffing costs raise serious concerns. While some support this approach due to the absence of guidance, most with experience in this area highlight issues relating to the Employment Standards Act, collective agreements, and employment contracts, others worry it will not cover actual costs, particularly for extended emergencies or remote areas with higher expenses. Optional use is preferred.

In summary, smaller and remote communities, as well as regional districts, require flexibility, clear rules, and reduced paperwork due to limited staff, contractors, and equipment compared to urban counterparts.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FVRD

- Potential misalignment between financial guidelines and current regulations
- Potential costs that are no longer compensable
- Increased variable approvals from EMCR staff for funding requests
- Increased administrative burden for compliance
- Increased approval delays during critical need in an EOC

- **Need for proactive engagement to ensure that FVRD's interests are represented**

## **COST**

There are no direct costs associated with this report at this time. However, cost predictions remain impossible due to the lack of available information from the Province. It is anticipated that there will be new pressures when activating an Emergency Operations Centre, as well as longer claim processes and increased scrutiny of claims following EOC demobilization, which may take years to resolve, and may come without additional financial support to handle the multi-year post-event claims process.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is too early to make definitive predictions regarding the impact of the pending changes. The anticipated updates to the Financial Guidelines will largely influence the decision-making of provincial staff during emergencies, despite the absence of matching changes to the relevant regulation—the Compensation and Disaster Financial Assistance Regulation. Staff will provide further updates as information becomes available.

## **RESOURCES**

- [Emergency and Disaster Management Act \(EDMA\)](#)
- [Compensation and Disaster Financial Assistance Regulation](#)
- [BC's Emergency Management Modernization](#)
- [Financial Assistance for Emergency Response and Recovery Costs for Local Authorities and First Nations guide](#)