
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2004MCAWS0060-000612
July 30, 2004

Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services
Ministry of Forests

NEW SPRINKLER SYSTEMS HELP BC FIGHT INTERFACE FIRES

VANCOUVER – Two new sprinkler units each containing more than 300 sprinklers are being used to help save homes and structures in the Chilcotin Region, said Minister of Forests Michael de Jong.

The units, purchased by the Union of BC Municipalities as part of a \$1 million funding package from the provincial government, are an additional tool to help local governments respond more quickly and effectively to interface fire threats. A third sprinkler unit is expected to arrive in British Columbia by August 6.

This is the first time the new units are being used in B.C. One unit is being used to protect three structures at the west end of Little Charlotte Lake. The sprinklers saved a cabin from fire that was directly approaching the structure on Wednesday night. The other unit is expected in the region today and the Incident Commander will determine its deployment. Each unit can protect up to 30 structures at a time.

“The situation is extreme, but could be much worse without the new resources we have put in place,” said de Jong. “The new sprinkler systems will provide another option for communities to protect homes and buildings in the event of an interface fire in the Chilcotin, and around the province. This year, we also have more firefighters, planes and equipment to respond to B.C.’s summer fire hazard. Our commitment to implement Filmon’s recommendations is reflected by our response to this summer’s wildfires.”

In April, Premier Gordon Campbell committed to implementing all the recommendations of the Filmon Fire Review. This included putting in place five new unit crews, two more air tankers, and \$3 million to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities to improve interface fire management.

The sprinkler units create a wet blanket around a structure and protect the walls and roof from ignition. Last year, the Province borrowed sprinkler systems from Ontario, and they proved to be an effective tool in protecting structures provided there is sufficient notice that fire is approaching. The units are one of a variety of tools, including gel or foam, that can be used to protect structures in interface zones. The three units will be kept at secure Ministry of Forests Protection Branch compounds for deployment as required.

“When fighting interface fires, the number one priority is protecting people, fire service personnel and property,” said Murray Coell, minister responsible for the Office of the Fire Commissioner. “These sprinklers are just one way we are working with local governments to ensure there is a proactive, coordinated and consistent approach for preparations for the fire season.”

“Wildfires can strike quickly and close to home. This initial investment by government will give local jurisdictions access to one more tool in their fire-fighting arsenal,” said Frank Leonard, UBCM president. “Over the coming months, we will work with municipalities and regional districts to support their development of sprinkler systems for their community use.”

Other Filmon recommendations that have been met include the creation of five new Type 1 unit crews to provide up to 100 more firefighters and bring the total number of unit crews in B.C. to 27, restoring them to mid-1990s levels. These highly specialized 20-member crews are currently being recruited and trained for deployment in regions across B.C. They can be self-sufficient for up to 72 hours and can work on a fire line for up to 14 days. The Ministry of Forests has also added two air tankers to supplement its existing fleet of aircraft. The two Convair 580s can fly four hours without refuelling, have a 7,955-litre capacity for retardant and can load retardant within five minutes.

Fire safety and fire prevention are everyone's responsibility. Homeowners living in interface areas are urged to take measures to FireSmart their homes and properties. A FireSmart homeowner's manual and other valuable fire safety information is available at local fire departments and at <http://www.mcaaws.gov.bc.ca/firecom/index.htm> online.

Media contact:	Marisa Adair Communications Director Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services 250 387-4089	Don McDonald Communications Director Ministry of Forests 250 387-8486
----------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca for online information and services.