

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honourable Kevin O'Brien
Minister

FROM: Mike Samson
Deputy Minister/Chief Executive Officer

DATE: April 4, 2012

RE: **Review of Fire and Emergency Services – Newfoundland and Labrador (FES-NL) involvement of the Ground Search and Rescue Incident at Makkovik (January 29 – February 1, 2012)**

I am writing in response to your request that:

1. FES-NL review its participation in the above noted incident to determine whether the Agency and its staff acted in accordance with established standard operating procedure in securing air support for the ground search and rescue operation at Makkovik; and
2. FES-NL facilitate a review of inter-agency protocols and operating procedures involving agencies having a role in the provision of air support services to ground search and rescue operations in the Province.

Ground Search and Rescue in Newfoundland and Labrador

In Newfoundland and Labrador, Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) operations are led by police forces, which are designated as the lead agencies in coordinating any searches for missing persons. When an individual is suspected missing, the police force with jurisdiction assesses and determines if air support resources should assist in ground and inland water searches.

Search and Rescue organizations in the province are volunteer based though they are comprised of highly trained and experienced individuals. In search and rescue operations, GSAR volunteers are engaged by and work under the command of the lead agency—the police force with jurisdiction.

It is through the police that a request for additional assistance can be made of the Province for air support for ground search and rescue operations. FES-NL's Emergency Services Division authorizes air support services from the Department of Transportation and Works' Air Services Division (in Gander) for ground search and rescue missions at the request of policing agencies (RCMP or

RNC). The Air Services Division engages a contracted private operator for this service. The request to provide air search capabilities to a missing person search must come from the Criminal Operations Division of the RCMP (not a local detachment) or the Emergency Management division of the RNC for FES-NL to authorize.

The Provincial Government has a helicopter services contract with Universal Helicopters Newfoundland Limited which provides access to a minimum of 5 helicopters. These helicopters are not capable of night flying. The agreement dictates that helicopter service shall be available at all times during the term of the contract, subject only to adverse weather conditions and can be used by the Provincial Government or anyone named by the Minister for any purpose, including aerial search.

In the event that the contracted private operator is unable to respond (mostly due to inclement weather or night time flying requirements), FES-NL will contact the Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC) in Halifax to request humanitarian air support services for the lead agency conducting the search, either the RCMP or RNC.

Review of the Incident at Makkovik

Part 1 – Role of FES-NL

At your request I have reviewed the part played by FES-NL in the conduct of the GSAR operation that occurred in and around the community of Makkovik during January 29 – 31, 2012. This review consisted of an in-depth analysis of FES-NL's internal event log (attached as Appendix 1) to determine whether the Agency's involvement in this incident was managed in accordance with established standard operating procedures for engagement of air support services (attached as Appendix 2).

I have determined that all actions of the Agency and its staff between the time of the original contact by the lead agency (RCMP) at 8:19 am on Monday, January 29, 2012 and release of the contract air support resource at approximately 12:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 01, 2012 were consistent with established standard operating procedures and protocols.

Part 2 – Review of Inter-Agency Protocols

On February 28, 2012, at the request of the Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC), FES-NL facilitated a meeting of agencies involved in the provision of air support to GSAR operations in Newfoundland and Labrador. The following agencies were represented: Fire and Emergency Services – Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Transportation and Works (Air Services Division), Department of Justice, Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (Emergency Services Division), Royal Canadian Mounted Police (B Division – St. John's) and the Joint Rescue Coordination Center (Department of National Defence – Halifax).

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and review current **inter-agency** protocols and operating procedures. It is important to note that discussion of the internal protocols and decision-making processes of participating agencies were explicitly excluded from this session.

Participants in the meeting were in general agreement that while inter-agency processes used to request air support services for GSAR operations are working effectively, these should be clarified to reflect the following:

- Upon a call for request from FES-NL, JRCC will open a case file, ask reason for inability to use contracted asset and request contact information of Incident Commander.
- JRCC Halifax will evaluate the nature of the request and determine if request is valid and if assistance can be provided. JRCC Halifax will inform FES-NL if able to assist or not and will provide reason if unable.
- If able, resources will be tasked and coordinated with Incident Commander. FES-NL will be advised.
- If unable, FES-NL will be advised.
- If unable to assist, JRCC Halifax may close the case at that time or advise FES-NL to call back after a determined period of time.
- If the call back period of time expires with no further request from FES-NL, JRCC Halifax will contact FES-NL prior to closing the case.
- If JRCC is unable to assist and contracted resources are secured by FES-NL during the call back period, JRCC will expect a call from FES-NL with new information so the case can be closed.
- If the case is still open at JRCC Halifax and the situation changes on scene to dictate that assistance is no longer required, FES-NL will advise JRCC.

FES-NL is now incorporating these clarifications into its standard operating procedures.

I trust you will find the above to address the substance of your request and I remain available to discuss at your convenience.



Mike Samson
Chief Executive Officer

Attachments