

Community Readiness Public Engagement What We Heard Report Summary



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Executive Summary:

What We Heard Report: Community Readiness Initiative

In the face of increasing hazards such as flooding, debris flows, drought, wildfires and extreme weather in the Central Okanagan, being prepared for emergencies is crucial for everyone's safety and well-being. The **Community Readiness Initiative** was launched with the aim to understand the level of preparedness of Central Okanagan residents and businesses, and their communication preferences during emergencies.

From April 15 to May 31, 2024, we asked the community to share their experiences and ideas about emergency preparedness. To establish context, we asked how residents would cope in an emergency, such as living without electricity or tap water for 3-7 days, handling sudden evacuations, communicating during emergencies, and pre-registering for the province's emergency support services program.

The initiative included a short questionnaire, an online platform for sharing ideas and stories about neighbours helping neighbours, and an "Ask an Expert" feature. We also attended five community events across the region, as well as four RDCO open houses in the Electoral Areas to provide information on emergency preparedness and promote community engagement opportunities and additional services provided by the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO).

The public input received will shape the RDCO's emergency management communication, and additional operational feedback shared with Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) officials will support the safety of our communities within the region. This report summarizes what we heard from community members during this initiative.

Staff from RDCO and the Regional Emergency Program extend their appreciation to everyone who participated and a special thank you to the regional partners that supported this work. The input will enhance the collective preparedness for emergencies, contributing to a safer, stronger, and more resilient future for all who live, work, and visit the Central Okanagan.

Purpose

The public input received during the Community Readiness Public Engagement will shape the strategic communications plan to support the Regional District of Central Okanagan's (RDCO) Emergency Management Program (the Program) focusing on community readiness in response to the modernized Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA). These legislative changes will require bolstered resources in the four phases of emergency management, including mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Public Engagement Approach

The methodology for public engagement was designed to take into account four main drivers:

1. RDCO Board's Emergency Preparedness Strategic Priority
2. The Program's role in promoting preparedness in their communities directed by EDMA
3. Establishment of a three-year Regional Emergency Program Communications Strategy
4. Timely incorporation of community input gathered during the National Emergency Preparedness Week.

A mix of public outreach activities was available in-person and online through yoursay.rdco.com. Input was collected through a questionnaire, and emergency preparedness ideas and stories were shared.

Throughout the engagement period, we received 1,464 questionnaires, 79 ideas contributed to the Ideas Wall, seven questions for “Ask an Expert” and one story. Visitor highlights include 3,600 total visits to the website, with 1,500 engaged, 1,900 informed and 3,000 aware of the initiative.



What We Heard

Key Themes

Key themes from the open comments in the questionnaire related to emergency preparedness were reviewed and correlated with the goals and objectives of the emergency management communications plan and they include:

-  **Goal 1: Residents will know where to get information about a current Central Okanagan emergency.**
 - **Theme:** Need for an Emergency Notification System to alert residents about necessary preparations.
 - **Theme:** Desire for more public announcements and education on emergency preparedness.
-  **Goal 2: Residents will prepare for future emergencies.**
 - **Theme:** Importance of accessible and clear emergency preparedness documentation.
 - **Theme:** Suggestions for bulk purchasing and selling emergency supplies at wholesale prices to residents.
-  **Goal 3: Residents will support their neighbours to better prepare for an emergency.**
 - **Theme:** Encouragement for local hubs, like public schools, to serve as resource centers during emergencies.
 - **Theme:** Promotion of community-based initiatives like fire prevention assessments and neighbourhood-based programs.
-  **Goal 4: Increase trust between members of the community and Central Okanagan emergency officials.**

- **Theme:** There is a recognition and appreciation for the work of emergency responders and operations and the support they provide.
- **Theme:** The need for visible initiatives to enhance community safety through emergency preparedness communication.
- **Theme:** Calls for better communication and transparency from emergency officials.

These primary themes highlight the community's priorities and concerns, providing valuable insights for aligning future communication plans with public expectations.

Additional themes:

Based on the comments shared in the questionnaire and ideas submitted, there was additional input related to emergency preparedness:

1. **Preparedness Kit:** Concerns about the expiry of materials in an emergency preparedness kit and the cost of maintaining one. Suggestions include creating staged lists of items to gather over time, making these lists widely accessible, and providing clear information on what to prepare for and how.
2. **Education and Awareness:** More education and awareness on emergency preparedness, including fire prevention assessments, understanding the reasons behind the recommended supplies, and learning from past experiences.
3. **Special Needs:** Concerns were raised about the needs of vulnerable populations, including those with disabilities, seniors, and those with pets. Suggestions include making accessible buses available for non-drivers, accessible hotel rooms, or power generators for people on vents or oxygen generators. Additional suggestions included extending support or designing outreach for these groups.
4. **Community Involvement:** The importance of community involvement in emergency preparedness, such as forming neighbourhood emergency groups and involving residents in emergency operations/preparations, i.e. workshops.
5. **Evacuation Planning:** Concerns and suggestions about evacuation planning, including having a checklist for businesses, knowing where to go during an evacuation, and having a plan for different scenarios like quick evacuation or sheltering in place.
6. **Feedback on Surveys/Questionnaires:** Feedback on the survey or questionnaire itself suggests more open-ended questions for more data collection.
7. **Specific Suggestions:** These include eliminating open wood-burning fires in backyards, enforcing municipal bylaws for property maintenance, and stopping traffic in certain areas to reduce risk.
8. **Property Maintenance:** The need for more tree trimming and maintenance of public properties was mentioned. A community-based program to pick up debris at no cost was suggested.

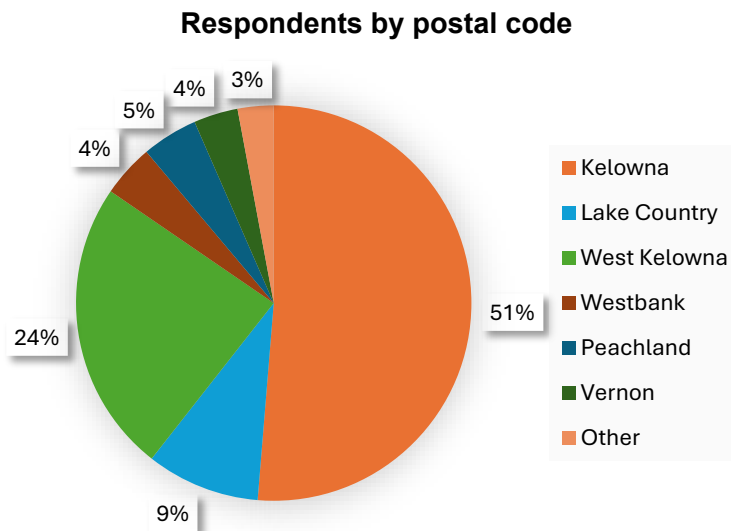
These themes highlight the importance of clear communication, community involvement, and ongoing education in emergency preparedness. People clearly value practical, actionable advice that they can implement gradually and at a reasonable cost.

Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire was open to the community from April 15 to May 31. Although results are not statistically significant due to the opt-in nature of participation, the high completion rate of questionnaires provides a decent level of confidence in the snapshot of attitudes, motivations, and barriers specific to emergency preparedness in Central Okanagan communities.

The following highlights are noted below. For complete results and comments, see *Attachment 2. Community Readiness Questionnaire Response Report*.

Submissions by postal code areas



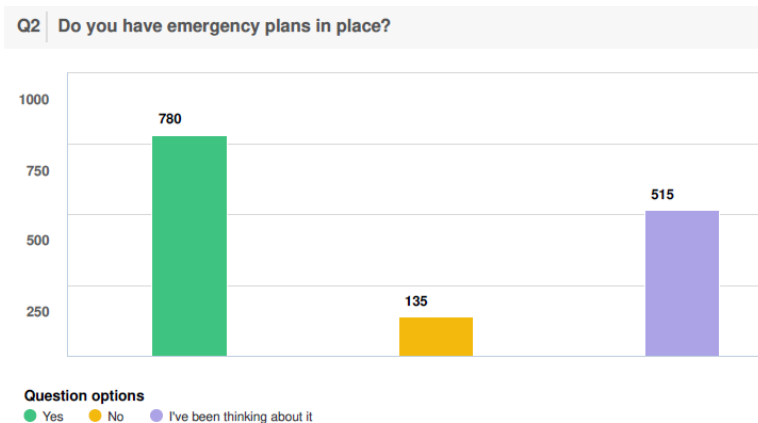
Number of Questionnaires completed by postal code

Kelowna	751
West Kelowna	351
Lake Country	136
Peachland	67
Westbank	63
Vernon	53
Other	43
Total	1,464

*Note: postal codes do not directly align with local government and Westbank First Nation boundaries.

- There were 1,464 questionnaires completed (four printed copies received and entered)
- Participation exceeded expectations, surpassing the goal of 800 completed questionnaires

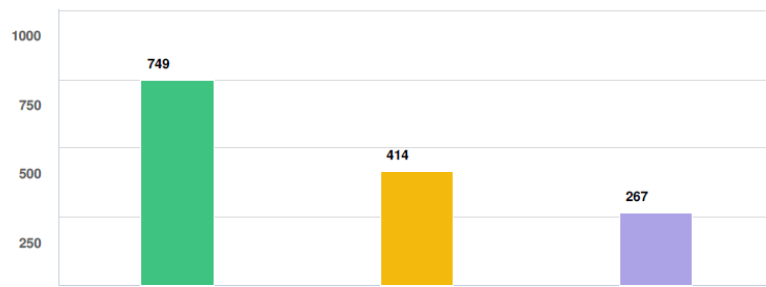
Emergency plans



- 53% of respondents indicate they have emergency plans in place
- 35% of respondents say there are thinking about it
- 9% of respondents say they do not have emergency plans in place

2. Community Readiness What We Heard Report Summary

Q4 Do you have the necessary supplies to carry out your emergency plans?



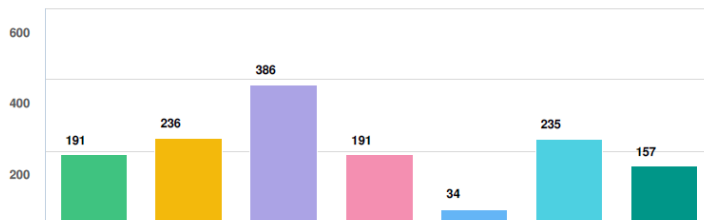
Question options

● Yes ● No ● I don't know what I need

Mandatory Question (1464 response(s))
Question type: Checkbox Question

- 51% say they have the necessary supplies to carry out their emergency plans
- 28% of respondents said they don't have the necessary supplies
- 18% of respondents say they don't know what they need

Q5 What would encourage to prepare for emergencies at your home or your business?

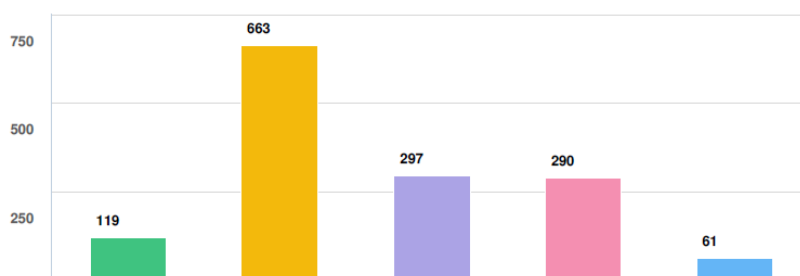


Question options

● Nothing, I am already prepared ● Personal experience with disasters or emergencies
● Recognize it will make a difference if I'm prepared ● Increased likelihood of local disaster or emergencies
● Information about consequences (losses) ● Discounts to buy basic supplies ● Additional grants to FireSmart your property

Mandatory Question (1464 response(s))
Question type: Checkbox Question

Q6 What is a barrier for you to prepare for emergencies?

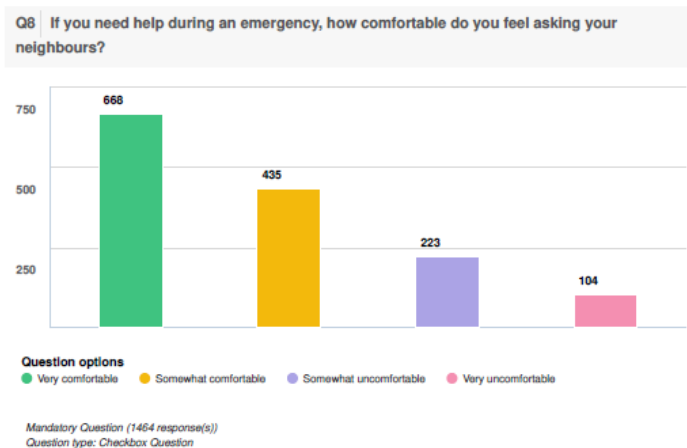
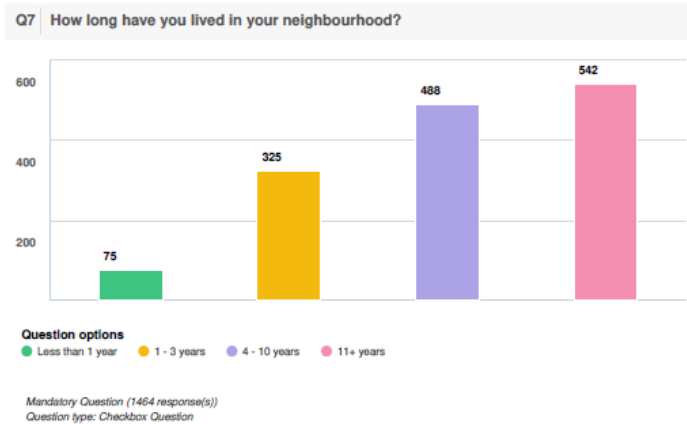


Question options

● Talking to my family about it is hard ● Planning for the unknown is confusing ● I don't know where to begin or what to do
● I can't afford to buy supplies ● I don't think it is important where I live

- 66% of business respondents don't know where to begin or what to do and selected planning for unknown is confusing.
- 20% of business respondents noted costs of supplies was a barrier

Level of connection among neighbours correlated by the number of years living in their neighbourhoods and comfort level of asking for help during an emergency.



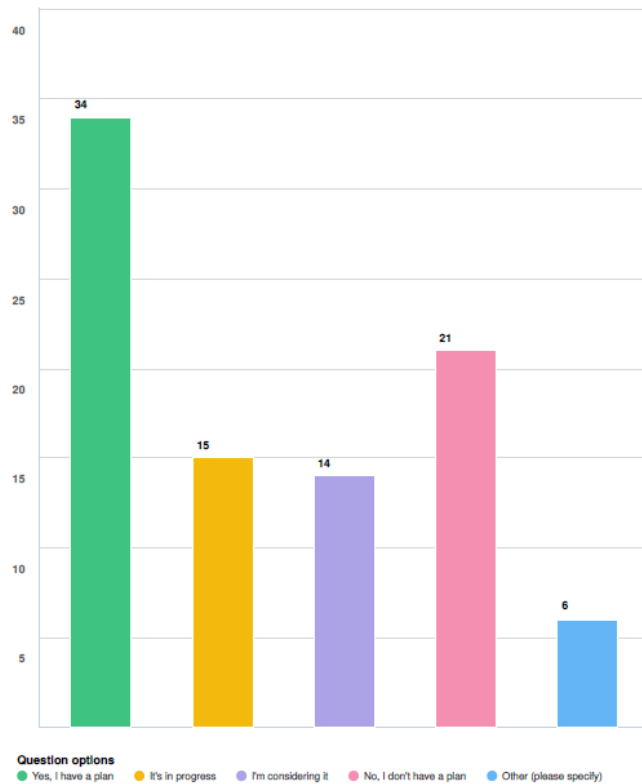
- **New Residents (Less than 1 year):** Few respondents are new residents, and they tend to feel less comfortable asking for help. This could be due to a lack of established relationships in the community.
- **Short-Term Residents (1-3 years):** This group shows a moderate number of residents, with a slight increase in comfort asking for help. They might be starting to build connections but still lack strong community ties.
- **Mid-Term Residents (4-10 years):** Most respondents fall into this category. They seem to feel more self-reliant or have better access to resources, as fewer of them feel the need to ask for help during emergencies.
- **Long-Term Residents (More than 10 years):** This group is smaller but shows a higher comfort in asking for help. Long-term residents likely have strong community bonds and trust their neighbours more.

Key Insight: Overall, the longer people live in a neighbourhood, the more comfortable they feel asking for help, likely due to stronger community ties and established relationships.

Business continuity and preparedness

Out of the 1,464 respondents, 185 (12%) were business owners or senior managers, and nearly half of these businesses have employees.

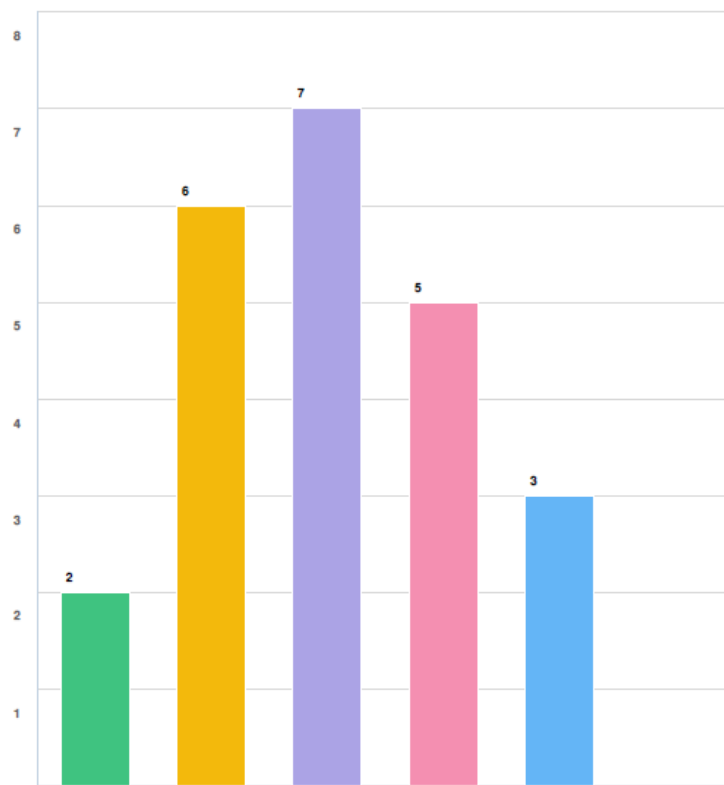
Q12 | Do you have or are considering a business continuity plan to support you during an emergency (i.e. cyberattack, natural disaster, epidemic)?



Mandatory Question (90 response(s))
Question type: Checkbox Question

When asked what stops them from completing an emergency plan most indicated they don't have the resources to create a plan, or they don't know where to begin.

Q13 If you answered no, what stops you from completing one?



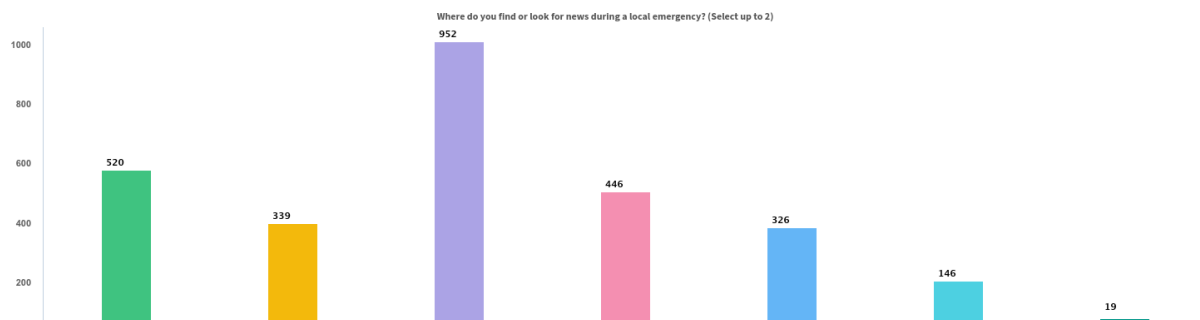
Question options

- Planning for the unknown is confusing
- I don't know where to begin or what to do
- I don't have the resources (financial, human, time, etc.)
- I don't think it is needed for my business
- Other (please specify)
- I don't think it is important where I live

Optional question (20 response(s), 1444 skipped)

Question type: Checkbox Question

Where people receive local emergency information



Question options

(Click items to hide)

- Media outlets (TV, online, radio)
- Local municipality sources (website, e-news, social media)
- Central Okanagan Emergency Operations Centre sources (e-news/alerts, website, social media)
- Other government agencies (i.e. BC Wildfire, Environment Canada)
- Social media (neighbourhood groups, friends/family feeds)
- Word of mouth (family and friends)
- Other (please specify)

Key Insights:

- During a local emergency, 65% of community members indicated receiving information directly from Central Okanagan EOC sources.
- Media outlets account for 35.5%, while other government agencies (i.e. BC Wildfire, Environment Canada) account for 30.5%.

How we communicated

Community relations activities

In-person Methods

Staff attended nine events throughout the engagement period to promote awareness of the public input opportunity and to provide information on emergency preparedness. Additional pop-up locations occurred when opportunities were presented. These events and number of face-to-face interactions included:

- Peachland Fire Department Panel - April 6 (75)
- WFN Community AGM - April 16 (200)
- Okanagan Wildfire Responders Gratitude event - April 27 (50)
- Kelowna Chamber of Commerce Future Proofing the Okanagan - May 1 (50)
- Ellison Heritage Community Centre - May 6 (75)
- Killiney Beach Community Hall - May 7 (75)
- Joe Rich Community Hall - May 8 (45)
- West Kelowna FireSmart Family Day – 25 (200)
- City of Kelowna Climate Resiliency Open House – May 23 (10)

*Reached 200+ outside of the engagement window at the Lake Country and Peachland community events.

Print and Digital Methods

- Newspaper advertisement in Capital News and Vernon Morning Star – May 2nd
- Castanet advertisement – May 1 - 11

Printed Materials

- Posters (distributed across the region)
- Postcards
- Display boards
- Central Okanagan Emergency Operations business cards

Public Notices

Published news releases through the Central Okanagan Emergency Operations website (cordemergency.ca) to approximately 53,000 subscribers:

- April 15: e-News launch of engagement (64% open rate)
- May 6: e-News launch of Emergency Preparedness Week (64% open rate)
- May 10: e-News announcing the extension of input to May 31 (63% open rate)

Regional Partner's Digital Toolkit

- Produced Community Readiness public engagement materials and content to share with the regional partners.
- Okanagan Regional Library

Central Okanagan Emergency Operations Website Analytics

- Number of visits to website and webpages: 7,972 views (a webpage viewed)
- Total of 4,002 users (individuals that visited cordemergency.ca)
- Total of 5,379 sessions (how many times (sessions) the website was opened)
- Increase of subscribers to cordemergency.ca from 53,353 to 53,523 (↑200)

Social Media Analytics

Facebook

Increased Facebook followers from 10,190 to 12,898

- 2,708 additional followers
- Total Posts: 4
Total Impressions: 31,600
- Total Reach: 21,113
- Total Engagement: 918

Date	Post Impressions	Post Reach	Engagement
April 15	21,859	11,930	791
April 22	5,515	5,133	56
May 13	2,568	2,464	54
May 28	1,658	1,586	17

X (Formerly Twitter)

Decreased Twitter followers from 13,494 to 13,478 (loss of 16 follower)

- Total Posts: 4
- Total Impressions: 6,085
- Total Reach: 133
- Total Engagement: 208

Date	Post Impressions	Post Reach	Engagement
April 15	1,828	45	77
April 22	2,091	26	47
May 28	870	44	54
May 28	1,296	18	30

Key Insights:

- **Facebook** posts consistently reached a larger audience compared to X/Twitter.
- **X/Twitter** engagement rate per post was higher in all except April 15, despite lower overall reach.
- **April 15** received the highest engagement across both platforms.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Community Readiness Public Engagement initiative provided valuable insights into the emergency preparedness of Central Okanagan residents and businesses. It was encouraging to learn that participants know where to go to receive local emergency information and generally feel prepared in an emergency.

The public input received will shape the strategic communications plan to support the Regional District of Central Okanagan's (RDCO) Emergency Management Program, focusing on community readiness in response to the modernized Emergency and Disaster Management Act and the Board's strategic priorities. Additional operational information received has been shared with emergency operations officials.

Key themes from the initiative highlight the community's priorities and concerns, providing valuable information for aligning the communications plan with public expectations. These themes underscore the need for clear and consistent communications systems, additional public announcements and education on emergency preparedness, accessible and clear emergency preparedness documentation, and community-based initiatives like fire prevention assessments and neighbourhood-based programs.

People clearly value practical, actionable advice that they can implement gradually and at a reasonable cost.

The initiative has demonstrated the importance of community involvement in emergency preparedness, such as forming neighbourhood emergency groups and involving residents in emergency operations (i.e. evacuation planning). Feedback on the survey or questionnaire suggests more open-ended questions for more data collection.

The staff from the Regional Emergency Program extend their appreciation to everyone who participated and a special thank you to the regional partners that supported this work.

The input received will enhance the collective preparedness for emergencies, contributing to a safer, stronger, and more resilient future for all who live, work, and visit the Central Okanagan.

Submitted Story on yoursay.rdcog.bc.ca

REST ASSURED

16 Apr 2024

"In the summer of 2023 I fell and broke my hip. This put me in an extremely vulnerable position. The fires jumped Okanagan Lake and orders to evacuate seemed to be forthcoming. Practically bedridden, a senior citizen living independently was cause for concern. My loving next-door neighbour sent a message telling me "if we are asked to leave our homes he'd throw me over his shoulder if he had to just to make sure I got out." The visual was enough to ease my sense of vulnerability. Luckily we didn't get evacuated. It was such a relief to know someone close at hand was standing vigilant over me. Blessed."