



Emergency Management in Ontario

2017 Value-for-Money Audit

Why We Did This Audit

- Emergency management in Ontario and the operations of the Provincial Emergency Management Office (EMO) are important for the safety of Ontarians should an emergency occur.
- Having effective emergency management programs in place is important to ensure that the Province is ready to respond to an emergency to minimize the harm or damage that may result.
- Emergency management in Ontario has never been audited by our Office.

Why It Matters

- The focus of emergency management in Ontario should be on protecting lives, infrastructure, property and the environment, and helping ensure the continuity of government operations and critical infrastructure.
- Growing research about the impact of climate change has focused attention on the increasing likelihood of more frequent and extreme natural hazards. In addition, there are growing threats from terrorism and an increased dependency on technology, which is vulnerable to cyberattacks.

What We Found

- Emergency management is given a lower-than-expected priority in Ontario. Emergency Management Office (EMO) is located within the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, where it competes with other ministry internal priorities. EMO has not fared well in this environment in the past, and has experienced significant cuts to its program, staff and budget. For example, EMO is not able to provide sufficient support to municipalities to ensure readiness to respond to an emergency.
- The current governance structure for emergency management in Ontario is not effective for overseeing a province-wide program. The Cabinet Committee on Emergency Management is responsible for oversight of emergency management in Ontario, but has not met for several years.
- The latest overall provincial risk assessment was done in 2012 based on emergencies experienced in Ontario up to 2009. Therefore, the current provincial emergency management program has not considered or assessed emergencies that have occurred over the past eight years, or the latest information on the effects of climate change and other developing risks such as cyberattacks and terrorism.
- The provincial emergency management program does not focus on all five components of emergency management: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery; it focuses mainly on just two of these—preparedness and response. It has also undertaken activities related to recovery through disaster financial assistance programs. Although there was a plan in 2003 to expand the provincial emergency management program to include all five components by 2006, this has not yet been done.
- The two provincial emergency response plans that are prepared by EMO—the Provincial Emergency Response Plan and the Provincial Nuclear Response Plan (off-site response—outside the boundary of the nuclear power facility)—have not been updated since 2008 and 2009. The Ministry is currently updating the Provincial Nuclear Emergency Response Plan.
- The approach to practising for emergencies (at the ministries we visited) does not ensure that the Province is ready to respond to emergencies. Approximately 80% of the practice tests done over the past five years were basic tests that included discussions, seminars, and workshops to familiarize participants with current plans, agreements and procedures. They generally did not include a simulation of an emergency requiring the movement of personnel and equipment.
- The Province's overall state of readiness to respond to emergencies needs significant improvement. For example, numbers of trained staff are insufficient for a lengthy emergency, and agreements are not in place for resources that may be needed in an emergency response.

Conclusions

- The Provincial Emergency Management Office (EMO) and the selected ministries did not have effective policies and procedures to ensure that emergency management programs would be able to respond quickly as needed to protect the public and sustain provincial and municipal operations.
- EMO and the selected ministries we visited did not have effective processes to measure, evaluate and publicly report on their emergency management program's objectives.
- Emergency management operations at EMO and the ministries, including disaster financial assistance programs, are not always carried out with due regard for economy and efficiency.