



News Release

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The Province Is Not Doing Enough to Protect Ontarians and Critical Infrastructure from Natural Hazards: Auditor General

(Toronto) Ontario can do more to prepare for and manage emergencies resulting from natural events such as floods and fires, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2022 Annual Report*. As the impacts of climate change intensify and population density rises in the province, programs to manage natural hazards and respond to emergencies will only become more critical.

“Establishing effective emergency management programs can save lives and better protect property and the environment,” Lysyk says. “More needs to be done to assess the risks of natural hazards so that the Province is ready to respond quickly to future environmental events and to make sure we don’t repeat past mistakes.”

The report notes that Ontario’s ability to mitigate the impact of floods is restricted because of insufficient efforts to identify at-risk areas. In terms of firefighting efforts, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has not effectively tracked the reasons for delays in dispatching a fire crew. It took longer than four hours to dispatch fire crews to 15% of fires from 2017 to 2021. The Ministry also does not routinely conduct reviews of its previous responses to emergencies.

The report also found that a key fire prevention and mitigation strategy has not been used to its fullest potential. One component of the strategy is to create Wildfire Protection Plans to help communities assess their wildfire risk and make recommendations to lessen the threat and impact from forest fires. As of August 2022, only 15 out of 144 municipalities in Northern Ontario had prepared a Wildfire Protection Plan.

The Province also fails to identify and inspect high-risk oil and gas wells, even though improperly maintained or abandoned wells are safety risks for people and for groundwater resources. As well, little progress has been made on the rehabilitation of hazardous abandoned mines. Only 111 of the over 3,900 abandoned mine sites with hazards had been partially rehabilitated, while 2,335 sites had not been rehabilitated at all. The Ministry of Mines didn’t know the rehabilitation status of the remaining sites.

“The lack of so much basic information about natural hazards across the province is surprising and troubling,” Lysyk says. “Improvements to emergency management programs should be based on robust risk assessments and lessons learned from past events.”

The audit report includes 30 recommendations for improvement.



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Read the report at www.auditor.on.ca

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