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BC State of Emergency

**Extraordinary Efforts of the Workers
and People of BC**



The workers and people of BC have carried out countless acts of social solidarity and their social responsibilities in response to the devastation in many communities over the past week as a result of massive flooding and mudslides caused by torrential rains.

Renewal Update expresses condolences to the families of the four people who lost their lives in the mudslide near Lillooet and the two people who are missing and profound sympathies for all the people in trouble who have lost homes and livelihoods and are put in untenable situations. We salute

their courage and the altruistic efforts of all those involved in rescue operations.

While recovery continues, Environment Canada (EC) issued a warning on November 25 for heavy rain accompanied by strong winds as the next storm system arrived on the BC Coast. Howe Sound, Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley were receiving from 50-80 mm of rain by the morning of November 26. Environment Canada stated that the storm will be less intense than the event of November 13-15, however along with moderate to heavy rain and saturated ground, freezing levels will rise above mountain tops today, which may worsen recent flooding and impact vulnerable landscapes and infrastructure.

Environment Canada warned that localized flooding is possible in low lying areas, and issued a warning for people not to approach washouts near rivers, creeks and culverts. More rain is expected in the next week.

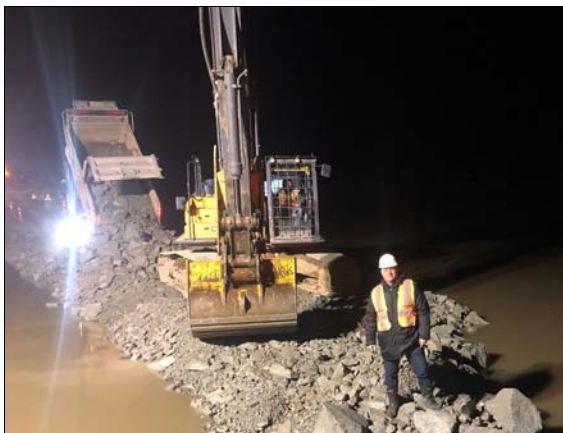
The heavy rainfall is caused by “atmospheric rivers,” which are defined as long, narrow streams of high water vapour concentrations that can deliver intense amounts of rainfall over a short period. They carry water vapour from tropical to more temperate regions in amounts more than double the flow of the Amazon River, according to the American Meteorological Society.

These “rivers in the sky” are relatively common, with about 11 present on earth at any time, according to NASA. But warming air and seas results in more moisture held in these atmospheric rivers, causing extreme levels of rainfall when they make landfall.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of workers including first responders, railway workers, truck drivers, helicopter crews, volunteers, and Gurdwaras, hundreds of people have been rescued, including hundreds airlifted from communities where road access had been cut off. In Abbotsford, community members with boats organized themselves to rescue people stranded in their homes engulfed with flood waters.

There were numerous incidents of people being stranded on roads impassable due to mudslides or washouts. In one case, helicopter crews rescued 311 people stranded when more than 100 cars were trapped between two mudslides on Highway 7 near Agassiz.

Working 24/7 in many cases, workers have made intense efforts to repair the damage and prepare for the expected next heavy rains. An example is the actions of city workers who worked overnight to build a 25-metre dam around the Barrowtown Pump Station to hold back the rising water endangering the residents of Abbotsford and Chilliwack. This prevented what officials had called the “imminent failing” of the station which was in danger of being inundated with floodwaters flowing north from the Nooksack River in Washington State, and was the only thing keeping back excess water flow from the Fraser River.



There are many stories of courageous actions of first responders, of medical personnel improvising

and organizing their peers to get around road closures to get to patients. In every community people have opened their homes and provided food and care for stranded people. Communities and Gurdwaras have come together to provide hot meals to stranded truckers, and engaged helicopters to airlift food, as in the cases of the Gurdwaras, and essential supplies to cut-off communities in the Interior. Farmers have taken in animals from farms submerged by flooding, and community members are volunteering for everything from filling sandbags to cleanup. The strong sense of social responsibility and social solidarity has been crucial in responding to this disaster.

The actions of the provincial government have not been proactive to make sure that every community has what it needs. In many cases they have tried to deny any responsibility at all, claiming that this or that is the responsibility of municipalities or cities and leaving people to fend for themselves. For some communities and First Nations the failure of the governments to provide the necessary supports comes on top of the disastrous fires of the summer from which many communities have not recovered.

The response to this disaster shows just how precious the working class and First Nations are. There is no hesitation when it comes to the working people taking up their social responsibility. But the same cannot be said for governments, whose duty it is to make sure that no one is left to fend for themselves. The people demand that the experience of people in so many other disasters, from wildfires to floods, where they are still fighting to recover and rebuild years after the disaster, must not be repeated. The status quo where the rich look after themselves, and where private interests enrich themselves further in the repair and building of new infrastructure at the expense of the workers and all of society is neither tenable nor acceptable.

Many are pointing out that this disaster will have serious long-term effects, including the toxic mix of raw sewage, debris, contamination from agricultural, chemical and poisonous materials, manure, etc. in flood waters, as well as the repair and rebuilding of infrastructure. Many also point out that many of the wrong environmental decisions made by successive governments are exacerbating the problems. It requires the full involvement of the people of BC and the Indigenous Nations in taking decisions, to make sure that all measures are taken for the safety of the population so that no one is left to fend for themselves, and to prepare for future events.





(Photos: G. Bharbhoo; farms.com-prairies, B. Mueller, Sikh Community of BC, B. Mueller, KWL, E. Dv, United Way)

State of Emergency Declared

On November 17, the province of British Columbia declared a state of emergency “to mitigate impacts on transportation networks and movement of essential goods and supplies, and to support the province-wide response and recovery from the widespread damage caused by severe flooding and landslides.” The state of emergency will be in effect for 14 days and can be extended. At the time that the state of emergency was declared there were approximately 17,775 people evacuated due to impacts from the flooding, with 5,918 properties on Evacuation Order, and 3,632 properties on Evacuation Alert.

Under the orders, gasoline and diesel fuel purchases have now been limited for non-essential vehicles to 30 litres per trip (applicable to the Lower Mainland, Sea-to-Sky, Sunshine Coast, Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island). There is no fuel limit on essential vehicles. Non-essential travel is also restricted along severely damaged highways.[1]



Financial Assistance

Emergency funds are being made available to evacuees by the government. Applications for Disaster Financial Assistance from the provincial government can be accessed [here](#). Information about evacuation orders, road closures, evacuee registration and Emergency Support Services Reception Centre locations can be accessed [here](#).

On November 23, the BC government announced that it is working with the Red Cross “to provide additional financial assistance to help people meet the immediate needs associated with being evacuated due to flooding.”

“Financial assistance will be provided by the Red Cross to people whose primary residences have been placed on evacuation orders due to the flooding and extreme weather event that occurred Nov. 14-16, 2021. Eligible households will receive \$2,000,” the release states.

Response of First Nations

More than 100 First Nations have been directly impacted, with nine First Nations under evacuation order, while others are isolated by washed out or impassable roads caused by overflowing rivers or mudslides. The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) stated its deep alarm about both short-term and long-term cumulative effects of the crisis on the safety and welfare of First Nation communities still recovering from the compounded and ongoing emergencies of the 2021 wildfires, the COVID-19 pandemic, the opioid crisis, homelessness and the crisis caused by the discovery of the thousands of unmarked graves on the sites of former residential schools. The FNLC called for significant resources from both levels of government.

First Nations report that they received no advance warnings or notice of the flooding. The First Nations Emergency Services Society (FNESS) reported that it did not hear anything from BC Emergency Management until a day after the floods. Assembly of First Nations National Chief RoseAnne Archibald has called for the federal government to immediately fund FNESS to deal with the specific needs of Indigenous communities during the crisis. Funding to the FNESS for emergency management had been cut off by the federal government.

Impact on Farms and Farm Workers

Two hundred square kilometers of farmland have been flooded so far across southern B.C. and 959 farms were on evacuation order as of November 19, with 14,000 residents of B.C. remaining on evacuation orders on November 20.

Many farms have been affected, including vegetable, dairy and chicken farms. Thousands of farm animals have drowned due to massive flooding of the rich agricultural plain in the Abbotsford area of the Lower Mainland. As well, animals injured during the flooding require veterinary assistance. The water overwhelming the farms poses its own dangers, contaminated with human and animal waste, asbestos fibers and oil and gas. Thousands of acres of crops have been affected.



More than 600 migrant workers from Guatemala, Mexico, Jamaica and the Philippines have been displaced by floods, some staying in shelters and others evacuated to other farms. Many have lost all their belongings and documents. The workers are working in BC on work permits and contracts that tie them to a specific employer so they cannot work elsewhere and do not have access to Employment Insurance. Migrant Rights Network is raising funds to assist them. To donate [click here](#).

Transportation Corridors



The damage to major highways and rail links was so extensive that Vancouver was cut off for days from the rest of the country, blocking the supply chain of containers shipped by rail and truck from the port of Vancouver across the country. A CN train derailed on a washed-out section of track in the Fraser Canyon and a CP train partly derailed after running into a landslide. It is expected to take months before some of the roads and bridges that have collapsed or been damaged will be repaired.

Crews have been working 24/7 to repair railway tracks, and CP began limited service on November 24, with trains carrying grain and fuel arriving in Vancouver. CN was also expecting limited service on washed-out tracks in southern British Columbia to be restored, including some traffic on the Vancouver to Kamloops corridor on November 24.

Two routes connecting the Lower Mainland to the Interior have recently re-opened. Highway 7 connecting to Highway 3 has reopened primarily for heavy commercial vehicles, and Highway 99 connecting to Highway 97, as well as a stretch of Highway 1 east of Chilliwack between Bridal Falls and Hope are now open. The Coquihalla Highway has been badly damaged, including collapsed bridges and at least five sites that are significantly damaged or degraded. Updates are being provided

on a daily basis. The Coquihalla Highway is an essential lane for shipping goods, and also the quickest route from Vancouver to several parts of the BC Interior.

The Trans Mountain Pipeline has been shut down since November 14, in what the company describes as a “voluntary, precautionary shutdown.” Trans Mountain is anticipating reopening the line by around November 27. This is the longest shutdown of the TMP since it was built in 1953. Construction of the Trans Mountain Expansion has also been suspended.

Note

1. For information on BC government's state of emergency [click here](#).

(With files from Renewal Update correspondents, Environment Canada, the Red Cross and news agency reports. Photos: Migrant Rights Network, farms.com-prairies, S. Susan)

First Nations in BC Experiencing Compounded Emergencies; BC and Canada Must Provide Full Supports

- First Nations Leadership Council -



Volunteers packing supplies to go to First Nations communities facing flooding.

As BC continues to reel from the ongoing devastation caused by the recent “atmospheric river event”, which saw extreme rain, winds, landslides, and floods wreak catastrophe upon communities and infrastructure, the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) remains deeply alarmed and concerned about both short-term and long-term cumulative effects of the crisis upon the safety and welfare of First Nation communities.

The FNLC calls upon the provincial and federal governments to commit significant financial supports, and resources to First Nations still recovering from the compounded and ongoing emergencies of the 2021 wildfires, the COVID-19 pandemic, the opioid crisis, the homelessness crisis and the crisis caused by the discovery of the thousands of unmarked graves on the sites of former residential schools.

“From a pandemic, to fires then to floods, First Nations have been forced to shoulder the impacts of

colonial-induced climate extremes while navigating the challenges caused by COVID 19 without adequate supports and resources. Over the past week, many First Nations have lost their homes, with little to no support from BC and Canada, while being forced to pay out of pocket to access temporary shelter and food supplies. This is totally unacceptable: time and time again First Nations have borne the brunt of climate change impacts and time and time again the federal and provincial governments have failed to assess and take seriously the risks posed by climate change. BC and Canada must commit to the full reimbursement of all costs that have accumulated for all impacted First Nations, including accommodations and transportation costs, rather than continuing to generously fund a military-style invasion of peaceful land defenders in unceded Wet'suwet'en territory, as a means to advance LNG fossil fuel development. Our hearts go out to all the flooding and mudslide survivors, and to the 17,000 people that have been displaced from their homes," stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

Despite a 2018 BC Auditor General report concluding that BC was not adequately managing the risks posed by climate change, as well as a 2019 preliminary climate risk assessment citing atmospheric rivers as a risk, BC continues to take a reactionary and inadequate approach to these unprecedented climate disasters. Moving forward, it is imperative to address the immediate needs of those impacted by the floods while simultaneously addressing the long-term cumulative effects that will be felt in BC and beyond. "The time for proactive responses is now," stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of First Nations, noting the varying impacts that require immediate attention. "The Fraser River is an essential waterway in the global food chain. The rippling effects of this disruption could be catastrophic for our communities if not adequately addressed and First Nations need to be included in these conversations at the forefront, yet they haven't been thus far."

"The devastation is vast and can already be felt in the lower mainland and beyond," stated Robert Phillips of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. "The incalculable impacts that will be felt in our communities from debris, raw sewage, mass exodus of livestock, agricultural, chemical and poisonous materials contamination that is all currently moving downstream is a brewing environmental catastrophe with global implications. We reiterate our call for the Province to declare an indefinite state of emergency, as this flooding has caused what will most certainly be billions of dollars in damage, indefinite displacement of thousands of people, long term environmental effects yet to be contemplated, and serious long term disruption in an already fragile supply chain."

The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

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