

Improving Assessment of the Quality and Sufficiency of Emergency Management Programs in Ontario (IQEMPO)

Final Report - April 28, 2023



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Emergency Management Ontario (EMO) oversees conducting annual reviews of emergency management programs implemented by ministries and municipalities in Ontario. The reviews are conducted to ensure that the ministry and municipal emergency management programs comply with requirements of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* (EMCPA) and its associated regulation, *Ontario Regulation 380/04* and *Order-in-Council (OIC) 1739/2022*. Several reports (in 2017, 2020 and 2022) by the Auditor General of Ontario (OAGO) in the past have recommended EMO to improve its review processes to ensure it can conduct adequate assessment of the quality of the emergency management programs implemented by ministries and municipalities.

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The goal of this project was to identify a program evaluation methodology that can be applied to EMO's current compliance review process to assess the quality of ministry and municipal emergency management programs. Research methodologies employed as part of the project included:

- Extensive review of documents and files related to EMO, compliance processes, the governing legislation and regulations, reports prepared by the OAGO, and reports and documents on emergency management programs in other jurisdictions.
- Survey of 143 municipal and 29 ministry representatives involved in developing and implementing emergency management programs.
- Survey of 31 key EMO representatives involved in the compliance review process.
- In-depth, one-to-one interviews with 9 representatives of municipalities and 5 representatives of ministries involved in emergency management and compliance reviews.
- Three focus group sessions involving a total 59 representatives of municipalities, ministries and EMO staff members.
- Survey and interviews with representatives in other jurisdictions in Canada and the US that fill similar roles to that of EMO.

Findings from all lines of evidence were analyzed and triangulated to develop recommendations for strategic directions.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Four strategic directions are proposed to provide reliable indications of the quality and currency of emergency management programs and foster a greater culture of continuous improvement. None of the proposed strategic directions has a priority over others and they are not necessary mutually exclusive in that EMO should incorporate a mix of the options.

#1: CHANGES TO THE EXISTING COMPLIANCE SYSTEM

Revise the existing compliance system by adopting industry standards approach and using combination of methods for assessing quality of emergency management programs including self-assessed tools, on-demand auditing and peer reviews and encourage compliance through financial rewards, more detailed feedback and better use of technology.

The existing compliance system can be improved by:

- *Adopting standards of effective emergency management program.* Several standards already exist (e.g., CSA Z1600, CSA N1600, NFPA 1600, etc.) and are increasingly being used by jurisdictions across Canada and the US. These standards can be further analyzed to determine their suitability with respect to the needs of municipalities and ministries in Ontario.
- *Developing and implementing self-assessment tools.* Administered online, such tools allow municipalities and ministries to compare and grade components of their programs against industry benchmarks and standards. The results can then be aggregated and reported to communicate the percentage of standards that are being met. Year-over-year comparison of scores can help to report on program specific targets or objectives and monitor and track progress over time. A scoring system, rather than a pass/fail system, could further encourage representatives of the municipalities and ministries to proactively undertake additional activities to increase their score. Establishing a threshold score after which a program is considered compliant will ensure minimum standards are met by most programs. The threshold can be adjusted based on the size, location, and risk profile of municipalities to ensure smaller municipalities with lower resources and risk profiles are given more flexibility to become compliant. If designed and used effectively (in conjunction with other methods described in this section), the self-assessment tool may ease requirements to collect documents and files from programs as evidence to prove their compliance.
- *Providing on-demand evaluation or auditing services through which municipalities and ministries can request a detailed review of their program against industry benchmarks and best practices.* Voluntary participation in the reviews will help to build trust and facilitate collaborative relationships between EMO and municipalities.
- *Providing rewards, grants and acknowledgements for programs that exceeds minimum thresholds.* Providing financial incentives, particularly for smaller municipalities with little

resources, will encourage higher rates of compliance. Withdrawing rewards will become a critical incentive for municipalities to ensure they keep compliant.

- *Providing more detailed feedback on submissions.* EMO can facilitate the process by including a specific question in the submission process to identify if a municipality or ministry needs detailed feedback, and creating specific templates and tools and procedures that EMO staff can use to provide such feedback.
- *Implementing a program to encourage voluntary peer-review of the programs.* Peer-reviews can help to improve quality of the programs implemented by municipalities and ministries and facilitate peer-learning and exchange of ideas and best practices. EMO can facilitate the process by activity promoting the initiative, creating a list of those interested in peer-reviews and matching reviewers, providing rewards and compensations, and developing processes and procedures.
- *Ensuring a greater use of technology.* More digitalization of the submission process will contribute to increased participation and more efficient data analysis. Ensuring the system is intuitive, user-friendly and does not require extensive time commitment from programs will encourage participation.
- *Ensuring ministry and municipal emergency management programs are coordinated from one department within EMO* to achieve more efficiencies and consistency in their activities.

#2: STRATEGIC USE OF AFTER-ACTION REVIEWS

Facilitate greater use of After-Action Reviews (AAR) in determining preparedness, identifying lessons learned and developing actions for improvement.

After Action Reviews (AAR) provide an effective approach for capturing lessons learned from activities implemented in response to real-life emergencies. The AAR is a structured approach for reflecting on the response and identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. When asked to identify good indicator(s) of preparedness, 27% of municipal representatives and 33% of ministry representatives who were surveyed identified post event or post exercise reviews and after-action reports as effective tools for evaluating their preparedness.

There is a need for a greater utilization of the after-action reviews by EMO, municipalities and ministries to assess and improve effectiveness of their emergency management programs. EMO can encourage municipalities and ministries to use after action review through developing and distributing templates and tools, providing training and capacity building support and by better incorporating AAR reviews into its own activities.

#3: ON-GOING EVALUATIONS OF PREPAREDNESS

Implement an in-depth evaluation of EM program every five years, combined with a series of annual evaluations focused on ministry and municipal emergency management programs.

We suggest a multi-layered or multi-pronged approach to evaluation that would include:

- **Development of an evaluation framework** that would detail the evaluation components that will be undertaken over the next five years. The evaluation framework would be updated every five years.
- **An annual series of rotating evaluations**, focused on a sample of individual ministries and municipalities.
- **A full program evaluation every five years** that would include primary research but also draw from the rotating evaluations, the annual compliance reviews, and after-action reviews.

Evaluation Framework

The evaluation framework would detail the approach to both the rotating evaluations and the five-year evaluation. The evaluation framework should include:

- A profile of the programming.
- A program logic model that details the objectives, input, activities, outputs and intended impacts in the immediate, intermediate and longer-term.
- An evaluation matrix that defines the evaluation questions, the indicators that will be used to address these questions and the sources of data that will be used.
- The sampling methodology that will be used including how the annual sample of ministries and municipalities will be selected.
- The methodologies that will be used to collect the data for both the annual and five-year evaluation.
- The data collection instruments that will be used.

Annual Evaluations

The annual evaluations would evaluate a sample of ministries and municipalities and focus primarily on the contribution of the program to the development of emergency management programs and the extent to which the programming meet the needs of the ministry or

- A review of documentation and data including information provided by the ministry or municipality for guidance and support. The methodology would include: municipality as part of the compliance review.
- A site visit to the ministry or municipality to meet with emergency management staff and partners, review documents and data, review training programs and equipment, and conduct exercise simulations of emergency scenarios.

- A review of other documentation (e.g., governing documents, meeting minutes, training materials, emergency management plans, standard operating procedures, and other relevant documents)
- Interviews with key representatives from the municipality or ministry and partner organizations related to the emergency management program.
- Preparation of a report for the ministry or municipality which presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations regarding actions that can be taken address gaps, issues and challenges.
- A follow-up one year later to assess the progress made in implementing the recommended changes to the emergency management program.

Five Year Evaluation

We suggest that the evaluation strategy should include a major overall evaluation of the Emergency Management Programs in Ontario every five years. The overall evaluation would assess the effectiveness of the overall programming delivered by EMO, ministries and municipalities. The evaluation would likely include:

- Document and data reviews
- A literature review on best practices, key trends, and common risks and hazards
- Interviews and surveys with EMO staff, municipalities, ministries and other key stakeholders
- A series of case studies which focus on particular elements of the programming
- The results of the rotating evaluations, the annual compliance reviews, and after action reviews.

#4: FOCUS ON BUILDING ACCREDITATION CAPACITY

Facilitate creation and utilization of capacity for accreditation of emergency management programs.

Several accreditation organizations exist in USA which are working with municipal, state and national organizations and help them build capacity for emergency response. Programs like Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) or Local Emergency Management Accreditation Programs (LEMAs) have developed extensive processes to assess effectiveness of emergency management programs against industry standards and provide certifications to confirm their capacity.

The need for Canadian based accreditation initiatives will continue to grow due to increasing public demand for effective emergency response activities. Three options that could be considered to promote accreditation or certification include:

- Providing cost-shared funding to municipalities and ministries as a means to encourage them to become certified through one of the established bodies;
- Developing an Ontario based LEMAP program and then incentivizing local participation by offering certification services on a cost-shared basis or simply requiring that programs become certified over a certain period of time.
- Encourage the development of a Canadian based accreditation initiatives. In doing so, there may be opportunities to work with the Canadian Standards Association or with the City of Halifax which received nearly \$800,000 from the Canadian Safety and Security Program to develop a web-based tool for assessing municipal disaster preparedness and response capacity.

EMO can also facilitate accreditation through working with representatives of other Canadian jurisdictions as part of the Canadian Council of Emergency Management Organizations (CCEMO) to promote accreditation or establish an accreditation body as a joint initiative. Once the body is established, the municipalities and ministries (e.g., those who have comprehensive programs and resources) can be encouraged to participate in accreditation through providing technical expertise, capacity building support, financial incentives and relaxed compliance requirements (e.g., those who receive accreditation are no longer required to participate in compliance process).

As most activities implemented through this recommendation initially will focus on coordination and collaboration with partners, and thus can be undertaken by existing staffing and resources.