

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Thursday, October 27, 2005

Committee Room 1

Emergency Measures Organization

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Ms. Marilyn More (Chairman)

Ms. Judy Streach

Mr. Mark Parent

Mr. Gary Hines

Mr. Jerry Pye

Mr. Gordon Gosse

Mr. Stephen McNeil

Mr. Leo Glavine

Ms. Diana Whalen

[Mr. Gordon Gosse was replaced by Mr. Howard Epstein.]

[Mr. Leo Glavine was replaced by Mr. Harold Theriault.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Mora Stevens
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Emergency Measures Organization

Mr. Craig MacLaughlan
Executive Director, EMO/911

Mr. Andrew Lathem
EMO/911 Director of Emergency Programs

Mr. Mike Myette
EMO/911 Director of Emergency Services

Mr. Dennis Kelly
EMO Director of Training and Planning

Department of Community Services

Mr. John Webb
Director of Emergency Social Services

Mr. Chisholm MacKinnon
Central Region Coordinator - Emergency Social Services
(John Webb's Alternate)



HALIFAX, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2005

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'll call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Community Services to order. Today's topic is the Emergency Measures Organization, soon to be the Emergency Management Organization, I believe. We'll start with the introduction of the committee members. Howard, would you like to begin.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Judy, I want to welcome you. I think this is your first meeting with our particular standing committee. We're very pleased to have you join us.

MS. JUDY STREATCH: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just before I ask Mr. MacLaughlan to introduce himself and his colleagues, I just want to set the context for today's topic. With our history of the Halifax Explosion and with the recent floods, Hurricane Juan and White Juan, Nova Scotians are very aware, and always have been, of the impact of natural and man-made disasters, but there seems to be an increasing anxiety among the more vulnerable citizens in our province, especially older residents, people with disabilities and those on low incomes, in terms of how they would deal with such a disaster. They fear that because of their limited resources, they have limited options and are not sure that they can prepare themselves for disaster or deal with the impact of a disaster as well as other Nova Scotians.

So I think the intent of the Standing Committee on Community Services today is to see how we might work with others to lower the risk for these more vulnerable Nova Scotians, and also work along with the organizations that have primary responsibility for dealing with the aftermath in making sure that all the deterrents are in place, as well as the resources to supplement what citizens can do on their own.

I just wanted to explain - some people may think this is an unusual topic for our

committee to look at - that we're looking at it more from the perspective of vulnerable citizens and what we can do to supplement the programs and services available to them at the time of a disaster.

Welcome, Craig, and thank you again for the wonderful tour last week. I know those of us who were able to make it had a marvellous time, and it certainly answered a lot of questions in our minds and gave us a renewed appreciation for the work that you and your colleagues are doing. We do want to thank you for that. We've had a tremendous response from EMO in the past, and we expect great things of you in the future. Thank you very much.

MR. CRAIG MACLAUGHLAN: Good morning, Madam Chairman, and members of the legislative committee. I would like to thank you for asking me to speak to your committee this morning as the Executive Director of Emergency Management Nova Scotia. Before I proceed with my opening remarks, I would like to introduce to you members of my management team who have joined me here this morning. This is the new and improved management team for EMO Nova Scotia.

Mike Myette - on my left - Director of Emergency Services. Mike has been with EMO Nova Scotia for 10 years. He has been with the province for 24 years, having served with the Department of Environment and Labour in a number of positions prior to accepting a position with EMO. Mike was pivotal in bringing the E911 system to this province, and it's province-wide, something other jurisdictions, today, still struggle with.

Andrew Lathem, Director of Emergency Programs. He has been with EMO Nova Scotia since May of this year. He brings with him 29 years of incident command experience with the RCMP. He was the officer-in-charge of Swissair, MK Airlines, and site officer-in-charge of Hurricane Juan and the Bush visit. Andy will be operationalizing EMO into the 2000s.

Dennis Kelly, Director of Planning and Training. Dennis is a secondment from the Department of Justice. He is a retired HRM police officer, and brings with him several years of operational, planning and training experience. He will be assisting EMO Nova Scotia with its strategic planning and training needs at all levels of government.

They are available to you for any questions that you may have.

For my part, I accepted the executive director's position as of February of this year after a 30-year career with the RCMP. Retiring as the officer-in-charge of Support Services, Criminal Operations Branch, I was the Division Incident Commander in Nunavut, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia during my career. I am hoping that my experience and that of my management team will place EMO Nova Scotia as a best practice in emergency management in Canada.

The Nova Scotia Emergency Management Office has its roots in civil defence. The organization was officially created as Nova Scotia Civil Defence by the Civil Defence Act of 1953. The purpose of the Act was to provide for the protection of civilians in the event that a

nuclear war erupted between Russia and the U.S.A. As the threat of war declined, there was increasing recognition of the need to protect citizens of the province from peacetime emergencies, and in 1967, the Civil Defence Act was renamed the Emergency Measures Act. The Act, however, was still based on a war-time scenario until 1990, when it was updated significantly to broaden the authorities and the scope of emergencies to include those likely to occur in peacetime.

Minister Fage has recently forwarded several amendments to the House during this sitting, with one change being the organization is now going to be called the Emergency Management Office Nova Scotia to better reflect what we do, and to correspond with other emergency management programs in North America. I would like to thank the members around this table who supported those amendments, and are helping me to move my organization forward.

The mandate of the Emergency Management Office is to coordinate the province's response to an emergency situation. The mission of the Emergency Management Office is to ensure the safety and security of Nova Scotians by enabling a prompt and coordinated response to an emergency. The goal of EMO is to effectively manage the consequences of emergencies through its efforts in planning, preparedness, training and co-operation.

Accepted emergency management doctrine states that "the best managed emergency (and consequently, the least costly to manage) is the one that never happens". In 2005-06, keeping with that doctrine, EMO will implement a program of risk mitigation, designed to identify the hazards that contribute to causing emergencies and, where possible, encourage the development of plans to reduce or mitigate the risks associated with those hazards. EMO will also implement a proactive program to educate emergency managers in identifying critical infrastructure, conducting an analysis of the risks to that infrastructure and establishing plans for protection from those identified risks. Departmental emergency preparedness officers throughout government will be developing business continuity plans for the provincial government departments.

A properly managed emergency will be a less costly one, not only in terms of dollars spent but also in terms of lives and property saved. Through its programs of proactive emergency preparedness training and response planning, EMO will continue to empower individuals, industry and government to take steps to effectively manage all types of emergency situations. An effective response will tend to reduce the social, financial and health costs of an emergency, reducing or even eliminating the requirement for government funding to recover from the consequences of the emergency. EMO plans to enhance its emergency management capabilities with information technology. EMO has purchased software to transition from paper-based information management within JEOC.

Through the application of technology and improvements to 911 emergency reporting service, EMO will improve the province's ability to promptly respond to the impacts of emergencies.

Prompt recovery from an emergency is essential. Essential services have to be up and running as soon as the initial response is complete. In 2005-06 to assist individuals, businesses

and government to recover from the financial impacts of an emergency, EMO will develop an integrated program of planning for prompt disaster recovery. The program will include efforts to enhance the present cost-shared Federal Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements, and thus reduce the financial burden on the province. It would also include a series of administrative and contractual elements designed to improve EMO's ability to launch and deliver an effective program promptly on the heels of a disaster.

[9:15 a.m.]

EMO will also implement a program to encourage and assist the province, municipalities and the business sector in the development of business continuity plans so that an appropriate minimum level of public and private sector services can be sustained and delivered, assured both during and after a disaster.

The Emergency Management Office's core business function is to reduce the consequences of emergencies in terms of both financial and social costs. There are three fundamental ways that the effects of an emergency can be reduced. The first is through effective planning before an emergency occurs, the second is by promptly reporting the emergency, and the third is by promptly coordinating the response and the supply of provincial resources after an emergency occurs.

We are concentrating our efforts on disaster mitigation, integrated emergency preparedness, emergency management training, 911 emergency reporting service, integrated emergency response, disaster recovery, ground search and rescue, departmental emergency preparedness officers, and emergency measures coordinators within municipalities.

This has been a brief overview of Emergency Management Nova Scotia and I, along with my colleagues, would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Before we start with questions, I also want to introduce two members of the Department of Community Services. We have with us John Webb, who is the Director of Emergency Social Services. We want to thank and congratulate John - he just returned, I think last night, from three weeks down in the southern United States helping the authorities there deal with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. So thank you very much for all the work you put in. (Applause)

We also have with us Chisholm MacKinnon. He's the Central Region Coordinator for Emergency Social Services, so we're pleased to have both of them with us and they can answer questions. In fact, John, I'll just give you a few minutes in case you want to make any comments before we actually start the questions about either your experience or just what the department is doing in terms of preparedness and response.

MR. JOHN WEBB: Thank you. I'm pleased to be here this morning to talk to you - and have Chisholm here, as well - about our Emergency Social Services program. It basically started after the two-tier system became a one-tier system and we realized that we needed to do more work to have a better emergency social services type system. After that I was a district

manager in the Halifax side, for a number of years, for social assistance and employment support. I know a number of people here in this room and I was pleased to be able to be freed up after Swissair as well as the full-time Director of Emergency Social Services.

We're one of only three provinces that really has a full-time Emergency Social Services Director. I also have 10 Emergency Social Services coordinators out in the field - Chisholm is my alternate - around the province. What we do is we have an agreement with the Red Cross where they will be our response agent in times of emergency and also in advance of emergencies in training. They have sub-agreements with such agencies as Salvation Army, Feed Nova Scotia and other agencies that are around.

What is Emergency Social Services? We do work under the Emergency Measures Act and the Emergency Measures Organization as one of the responders. The five services that we do become an extension of, what it is that we do in non-emergency times, which is emergency food, clothing, sheltering of people in times of a large-scale emergency, registration and inquiry - the Red Cross is known as a national leader in matching people up - and also personal services. Personal services, other related duties, as they say, dealing with the elderly, the disabled, special groups, also dealing with the psychosocial reaction people will have in an emergency. We have an agreement with the Psychologists Association, the CISM network and the churches, that we network in advance of emergencies. We also work, of course, with the Department of Health very closely on the psychosocial care of people.

What we are there for is to deal with the most vulnerable in the times of large-scale emergencies and crises. What we also have is very much a proactive stance with Emergency Measures and Red Cross to see that people are individually prepared as much as possible. Individual preparedness is so key, because most people will take care of themselves or their family and relatives during an emergency, but they need the help and emphasis to know where to go and where to access help. Most people, through networks of their own, will be able to help themselves during an emergency.

As I said, we do have the arrangement with the Red Cross to do the training in response - and who else do we think of in an emergency other than the Red Cross, in times of emergency as well, the Salvation Army. When I went to the States, I went under the American Red Cross because they're an umbrella group, they take people from all different governments and non-government, psychologists, et cetera, and work under their huge umbrella in America, and also here of course.

There are two phases to emergencies - advance of emergencies and times of emergencies. In advance of emergencies there is a tremendous amount of work to do and we are totally spending our time building the capacity. We do training exercises, interacting and collaborative interacting with other agencies and groups and, again, much of it through the Emergency Measures Organization. We want to get to know other agencies and other people in advance of emergencies, so when emergencies happen we know who can access which services.

Individual preparedness, again, is so important. In times of emergencies we respond in any area in Nova Scotia through the Red Cross, the 1-800 number that the first responders

have. People in the community get access through the 911 system, through Craig's office. So the fire departments or the emergency measures coordinators all know how to access Red Cross and our services that pay for any services in times of emergency. The Red Cross, of course, is mostly volunteers; there are never salary indications at all. Everything is voluntary, but any extra costs that are not received through donations, or whatever, through Red Cross, are covered through us and through recovery through DFAA or other services that might be available.

We were there to respond to - I have a list that I can table of 53, approximate, large-scale or mid-scale emergencies that we've been involved with and called out on with Red Cross since 1998. It's an extensive list, and that's not counting the small fires. This is mostly over 10 units, or 25 people who are affected - the Cowie Hill fire, that was quite extensive, Sunrise Manor, how we spent our New Year's Eve helping those people there, and the floods, hurricane, the power outage - that was huge - a Hammonds Plains fire, et cetera. So I gladly table that for your information. We also worked an agreement with all the municipalities and a letter was sent out to the municipalities as well on May 10th to clarify exactly what Red Cross can do, and I would like to table that as well. That was sent out. That will give you some understanding of what we've been doing to be prepared and to have an agreement with the municipalities and the province.

Of course, the Department of Community Services is in that work, and that's what I've spent my working lifetime doing, helping the most vulnerable people, and it was very humbling to go to the States. I ran an emergency shelter down there with the most vulnerable people from New Orleans who were plucked off the roofs, who were in boats for a number of days, who lost friends, who saw bodies and much that they didn't want to see. They were stuck in a shelter and they were able to get me, as a specialist in poverty issues and shelter management. So our province was able to help. I was very proud to say our province was able to help in that way, especially our special connection that we have with Louisiana in terms of our Acadian community.

I was very proud to be there, but I was also proud to bring back lessons and enhance our program that we have here that I'm looking forward to working to try to minimize any effects on large-scale disasters we may have. What we are doing is enhancing our ability and capacity to respond in large-scale emergencies, and working with Craig and the teams, and all the municipalities. I look forward to continuing to do this as time goes on.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Could I just clarify one thing for my own sake, if not the other members, the Emergency Social Services is not just focused on the current clients of the department, but is available to the full public?

MR. WEBB: Correct.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: In an emergency situation.

MR. WEBB: Yes, indeed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So do you have additional emergency social services for your own clients as well, or are they treated as any other citizen?

MR. WEBB: They are treated as any other. For example, in the hurricane, we set up services to help the most vulnerable. We set up a special rate where people who lost their food and the hurricane happened a few days after the social assistance cheques were out, and most people lost their food that was in freezers and fridges, what we did is helped with a social assistance rate, which was covered under DFAA, not to compensate people, but to give assistance until their next cheque came in. We were able to develop that and humanely give that, but those who were working poor, or who were on pensions, that sort of thing, we made an agreement with Feed Nova Scotia where Diane Swinemar and her member groups were able to help those people. So we were able to help network and we also did food drops in the areas hardest hit on the Eastern Shore. They were people who just were vulnerable as opposed to being in need.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Jerry, I think I have your name first and then Howard.

MR. JERRY PYE: Thank you so very much for being here. I want to apologize for not attending the Emergency Measures tour and I would have probably been delighted to have that tour simply because it would have better informed me of exactly the activities that are going on at that central headquarters. The issue that I first want to bring is the issue where it states in this handbook, facts for seniors, it states facts for adults, it states facts for children, but there are no facts implied or given in this from the government with respect to disabled persons and what disabled persons should consider and what those kinds of facts would be. I guess that in itself is a bit of a difficulty.

Also I'm glad to hear that Mr. Webb was down in Louisiana with respect to Hurricane Katrina because, as he will note, there were a number of abandoned seniors' home care facilities that people just up and left, leaving those seniors to die, and I would hope that that would never happen in Nova Scotia and he can certainly enlighten us to the protocol and the process that would take place through Emergency Measures in that particular area.

I want to say that your connection to the Red Cross, I had an opportunity to experience that, and I want to tell you of a concern that I did have. You will note that there was a power outage in the Dartmouth North area, and in parts of Halifax, as a result of some of the high towers that carry the grid of electricity through Burnside and a number of those towers collapsed because of a heavy wind and rainstorm - approximately four of them. The power was out for a considerable period of time and during that period of time there was a small emergency measures organization set up in the new fire station on Highfield Park Drive. In that new fire station the Red Cross had its facilities there to assist individuals, particularly vulnerable individuals.

Most of the vulnerable individuals in Dartmouth North, or seniors, do not live in seniors' housing because there are very few units dedicated to seniors' housing in Dartmouth North, so many of them live in apartment complexes. As a result of that when the power went out there was absolutely no use of the elevators. I do know that this one particular individual, disabled, in a wheelchair, living in Highfield, made several attempts to get some assistance

because the power was out for quite some time and needed to be brought over to the emergency centre for some hot soup and tea and some sort of comforting. That didn't happen. As a matter of fact, they said it wasn't their responsibility to go see the individual.

[9:30 a.m.]

I got in my automobile after they called my office, John, and of course I went over to the centre. When I went to the centre they told me again that it wasn't their responsibility but they would look at it because I identified the building, the civic location, as well as the unit in which the individual lived in. This was just one example of the kinds of things that can happen.

I think if we're going to recognize in a disaster or in a time when there is a need for an emergency measures operation to take hold in a community, then we have to identify where those individuals live and how we're best going to serve them because it's a very traumatic experience for those individuals, whether it's for eight hours or 24 hours. Anything beyond eight hours it then becomes a traumatic experience for everyone because people are wondering how long it's going to take and who is going to come to assist them.

This is an area that has been of great concern to me. How do you identify the most vulnerable in our community? Who and what list do you have for disabled people who may not be in an institution or a supportive home, or a small options home, but is living in private, public facilities, or their own residences. How do you identify those individuals when the crunch comes, as well the number of seniors who are living in a confined area where in fact that measure needs to be taken?

I think I'll stop right there, Madam Chairman, for now, and listen to the response.

MR. WEBB: Thank you, Mr. Pye. On the two questions, one of the networking things that we're doing in advance to emergencies is - indeed the networking that we have with two specific groups and probably a third is we have a network with the persons with disabilities network, with all the major disabilities, we've met with them for the last two years. We have a committee with myself, Emergency Measures reps and Red Cross. They're coming to us and the first question is, what can we do, how can you help us become more prepared?

We know that when an emergency happens, persons with disabilities, especially mobility disabilities, if they want to congregate in shelters, they may be going to places that may not be totally accessible, that may not be sensitive to persons who have hearing or speech problems. For example, if someone has a guide dog with them, they may be confused as well in a difficult situation. So we're developing brochures with the persons with disabilities network. We're developing sound bites that they can send out to their people. We're having network meetings. We've been having that for the last few years, so if you talk to the principals of the organizations who are involved, that's one thing that we are doing and we continue to work with them and have those brochures.

MR. PYE: Is that why there is not a fact sheet for persons with disabilities, because you don't have it compiled or completed?

MR. WEBB: There are a number of fact sheets that Red Cross and EMO have for individuals in general, and the persons with disabilities network are helping us to ensure that we get the right message. So there are a number of brochures that are out there already, but there are a number of others that are being sent out. So that you can look forward to, and I can put you in touch with Jen Powley, the head of that network.

Secondly, we also have a unique organization here that was started by Emergency Measures, Bill Weagle, actually, a number of years ago, SCEPA, Special Care Emergency Preparedness Association, that is unique in Canada. It's a network of all the homes for special care and small options. I'm on that committee as well, provincially, and we have it in the regions.

We're networking to avoid exactly what happened in Louisiana and those other places where the seniors' centres were forgotten. There's a network of all the homes for special care where they are networking to try to enhance their collective ability to respond to emergencies. They make sure they have emergency plans. The Emergency Measures Organization checks those plans on a yearly basis to ensure that they are encouraged - not encouraged, they are made to comply with the Homes for Special Care Act - to be up to speed on that. That network is working diligently to ensure that they are prepared and they're helping with such things as generators and those effects. So that is a very active network.

To answer your second question, is indeed the power outage and what happened there. I will say first that our department has also diligently looked at the generator problems. Emergency Measures can talk about the general emergency. The best thing that we can tell people in the community is to not necessarily have a generator, but to ensure that they are wired for a generator that can be plugged in, that's one thing, but in the large-scale housing for senior citizens' centres around the province, all the public housing seniors' centres are in the process of having generators for their elevators, for emergency lighting and for a common room. That is now in place for four out of the six ones here. Samuel Prince is going to be having that soon and the last one will have it very soon. Our minister, I understand, is also arranging for it in other public housing units all around the province. So that is a priority, that is being looked at, ensuring seniors can get out during emergencies.

In terms of the power outage for a considerable period of time - indeed, in the first day, and I remember talking to you during the power outage - during the first part of the emergency we were dealing with thousands and thousands of people who needed to be checked. That's why it's so important to ensure that friends and relatives have a network for checking with each other. It is their responsibility to ensure they have a plan and even if a senior is isolated, that they have friends, relatives and neighbours who can check. Of course, that network may fail during an emergency, going door to door. We did do that as the emergency went on, but in the initial phases we were dealing with the Eastern Shore area and dealing with people who were without power as opposed to being proactive, going door to door. We did not have the resources to go at that stage.

We did, after a number of days passed, then start to isolate, especially down in the southern shore, the Kentville area, where we started going door to door. I think search and rescue people helped and we have the ability to mobilize as time goes on. Once we prioritize

because, as I said, I remember talking to you on the phone and said, at this stage, to go door to door, we would also have to mobilize, once they found someone door to door, to make sure that they had the appropriate resources, is it something that would be 911. So we were advertising and it's a natural phenomenon that people will check on neighbours. Red Cross had a proactive approach - for everyone who had the ability to listen - saying check your neighbour program, to proactively go out and do that.

So we are sort of working towards wanting to have a door-to-door program, but we know in a first-scale emergency that may be impossible to do, to have the resources. We're dealing with the response, all the responders are, but we will do that. Also, how can we identify the most vulnerable? Nova Scotia Power has a critical list of people and we are working with Nova Scotia Power. We're working with the gas companies and the air companies; all those who are on oxygen, or need gas, they are identified through Nova Scotia Power and people can register with them and they will make sure that they're aware of who are the critical people. A lot of those people do have generators and are in the process of getting generators, but we're working with Nova Scotia Power to help them identify.

In terms of keeping a list, I think that would be the ideal, to have a list of all the vulnerable people, but each emergency has its own set of vulnerable people. Each emergency can't be predicted in advance, it depends on where it is and how devastating it is. We do have a list under the Department of Community Services and the Department of Health. We already know our caseloads under our continuing care. In the emergencies, I'm so proud to say, our staff and the staff at the Department of Health came in and called our clients and called people because our phone system, thank heavens, was mostly in operation. If our phone system wasn't in operation, going door to door may be a necessity - or at least not going door to door, but going to visit those people who are on our list, because most of the people in the Department of Health and Department of Community Services are on our rolls either in homes for special care or in a supportive environment. So we are aware of those.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Craig, did you want to add anything quickly?

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Yes, I would, just a couple of things. One, although I won't speak for Nova Scotia Power, they certainly have a program called the Critical Customer Care Plan. The phone number for that is 1-800-428-6330. Nova Scotia Power does sit with us as part of our DEPO, or Departmental Emergency Planning Officer, and so does Aliant. We are working with those organizations, along with government, to try to identify areas that we need to identify - things such as special care.

I think it would also be almost impossible for us as an organization to try to keep a list of everybody out there who was vulnerable. It would be absolutely impossible because every day it would change, every minute it would change - people coming out of the hospital, people going in, people going home, who needs oxygen, who doesn't, but I think that both John's organization, and Health, and Nova Scotia Power are all making great steps towards identifying where possible, during emergencies, those who need help.

But I think the message that we have to send clear is that we all have to be responsible for ourselves for 72 hours. That's the message that we want to send home, that we should if we

have our parents, our children, our relatives, whatever we can do for those people. Like if my parents were on oxygen and I knew that a big storm was coming, I should ask myself if dad's got that extra oxygen tank, or whatever he might need. I think it's important, it's the most important thing we can do.

I also think that apartment owners and owners of these large towers need to take some responsibility also. I mean, this is a revenue base for them and I'm sure they don't mind taking the money from them, but they should also put things in place to ensure the safety of the people in those buildings. There are fire codes, there are building inspection codes, but there should also be codes to look after people, know who's in the building and know who's vulnerable in that building, so that if emergency services have to attend the building, there's some way of them knowing who's in the building.

As I said during our meeting, Nova Scotia Emergency Measures Organization is not a first responder. We train and we coordinate, we prepare people. We've got a unique situation in this province that we need to perhaps pitch a little harder, because there have been some comments that the municipalities are not at our table during emergency planning, that certain people aren't there. We certainly are the envy of a lot of provinces across Canada. We have representatives from all departments and we have representatives from all municipalities, called emergency municipal coordinators, and we have the private sector that sit with us and organize with us. We meet every six weeks and we discuss and look at what needs to be fixed, or what needs to be addressed, and we try to put that stuff together. We just had our first large meeting - I'll call it - where all of us spent a couple days together and we started identifying things that we need to address.

You're right, in my review of the past eight months of my organization, I think that there's more that we can do for the elderly and disabled. I think that there are programs that Dennis Kelly, Director of Training and Planning - as early as yesterday we spoke about what it is that we need to do and what kind of programs we can find out there that we can bring to this province and enhance the ability of our seniors and our vulnerable people to take care of themselves. I think that's an important step for us.

We also are the only province that has three levels of government working together on the same floor, in the same building, sharing and meeting daily in most cases to do with emergency management and that is of course my organization, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada and the HRM, but of course we are tied in with all the other municipalities and nobody else in Canada has that three-level response right at their fingertips, that we can bring in resources and I think we proved it during Hurricane Juan, White Juan, during the MK Airlines crash, many smaller flooding, Bridgewater, that type of thing where we brought our agencies together and were effective in a quick response. I think I'll leave it at that.

MR. PYE: Just briefly, Madam Chairman, no response, just one comment if you don't mind.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Very quickly.

[9:45 a.m.]

MR. PYE: I just wanted to say, this comment is just that we don't expect you to go door to door, but when a call comes in, and this vulnerable lady was in a wheelchair, they identified the civic number, the unit, she could have been brought over for the comfort, that's all I'm saying. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We're developing quite a backlog of questioners here and we're running into a bit of a time squeeze and Diana is fourth down on the list. I know she informed me before the meeting that she had to leave at 10:00 a.m., so I'm just wondering, would people mind if she went now? Is that a problem with anyone? Okay, Diana, would you like to go next?

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman, I appreciate that. I share the concern about people in apartment buildings, particularly because Clayton Park has a high percentage of people living in apartments four storeys and above and it was a concern during Hurricane Juan, particularly when power was out, and I'm happy to see more plans going in place. I would suggest perhaps that there be some coordination with building owners. I know in Clayton Park there are many owners, but there are some owners who have multiple buildings and I think some working through the building owners to see that their superintendents and so on, perhaps can be part of that link to buildings, because I understood they did serve quite a good purpose. They visited, they checked on people in their own buildings, but not because they were part of any bigger organization or that they had any training, but just that they did it as good neighbours would. But I think they could form an important link.

I have a question specifically though, I wanted to go to a different area, to where we are building our houses and homes and subdivisions. It kind of came out of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the talk about where we're going on our seacoast, and whether or not we're building in very vulnerable areas. I wondered if you could speak a bit to that, because there's a question of draining wetlands, which are the natural flood plains or flood areas when there are storms, and this sort of thing, with us being a coastal province and we're building all around the edges of our water. I read your mission statements, and I realize it goes beyond that, but I think you are in a very good advisory position as well.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Well, I guess a lot of that is a municipal issue, and would be addressed by the municipalities. There is no doubt that we have to start looking at the flood plain areas and not building on the flood plain areas and I know that the government has taken steps not to issue permits for some areas. However, I don't think I can really speak at length on how we could stop that or at what point I would involve myself with getting involved in municipal planning and that type of thing. I think that would maybe be something that we would discuss with our municipal coordinators and we have touched on it somewhat, but how we further get into that is probably something that we should look at.

MS. WHALEN: I think particularly with the changing weather patterns that we seem to be seeing, it may be a long-term or perhaps a short-term phenomenon, but we are seeing repeated flooding and repeated events and I think that people in your position would be the

best to identify where areas are vulnerable and make recommendations, because municipalities often just continue to issue building permits and unless there are some environmental regulations or some safety regulations that might be coming from a provincial level that perhaps would preclude certain building areas or give them stronger guidelines. So I suggest it as something that maybe is an area to be proactive.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: I think so in the sense that maybe we could bring it to Environment or other parts of government, but really for my organization, we don't really involve ourselves in that. We are a coordinating body that prepares for emergencies and response. I guess, personally, I would think that it's going to be pretty hard for us to stop people from getting that ocean view, or that lake view, that type of thing. It has been a topic at our municipal meetings, but I really don't have an answer for you.

MS. WHALEN: All right, I'll leave it at that.

MR. WEBB: I'll add to what you are saying in terms of individual preparedness. One of the things that we do set up, and we're getting better at, is our call centres where individuals may call. I think we are attempting to do a better job when people call in on the individual situations there that, number one, we identify the DCS and Health people who are vulnerable so we can be proactive on those, and we have the persons with disabilities network and that critical group at Nova Scotia Power, but also the Senior Citizens' Commission and those are helping us and will be added to that group to help identify. We can match those people up and deal with the most vulnerable. But I think if there are individual situations, we will try to have legions of people that can go out and have individual situations, or hopefully 911 still works on the very critical ones.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm not sure, did anyone behind want to comment on that particular issue? If you ever do, just come up to either the sit-down mic or the stand-up mic and add your comments as well. You're free to take part in the discussion.

Just to let people know, I have Howard, Junior, Stephen and then Gary.

MR. HOWARD EPSTEIN: Mr. MacLaughlan, Mr. Webb, thank you very much for your information. It's been quite fascinating. Can I start with this whole question of training, coordination, which I guess is really part of the basic mandate of preparedness.

The way you're structured relies a great deal, of course, on delivery of services at the municipal level. As you said, you're not so much an emergency responder yourself as a coordinator, planner and preparer. I'm curious about municipal emergency preparedness and the extent to which that's really lined up. I remember seeing figures a couple of years ago in which you had done evaluations of the state of preparedness of the different municipal units around the province. The scores were variable - you had, I think, a four category rating from excellent down to poor.

I see in your business plan for 2004-05 there's a small table that gives some data, it gives the base of your measure, which is for 2002-03. The figures then were that 71 per cent

of the municipalities were rated good or better, but 18 per cent were rated as poor. The business plan for that year had a target of moving to 80 per cent rated good or better with no more than 10 per cent rated poor. So I'm wondering if you have updated figures now and whether you can tell us whether that target was met or what the current state of play is and how it's going.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: I guess I'll answer your first question on the municipal preparedness and training. I'm very glad to say that I was fortunate enough through the Department of Justice to get the services of Dennis Kelly who has really worked hard in the last six months to revamp our training and especially that of the municipal coordinators.

This year for the first time, we have actually taken municipal coordinators - emergency planning coordinators - into our training centre and they have been trained in effective presentation and they've also been trained now as instructors to give the basic emergency management awareness course. They are spread out throughout Nova Scotia and we intend to increase that into the municipalities. We're just too small of an organization yearly to give training to local fire departments, municipal employees, elected officials, those types of groups. So we've moved forward with that. We've been averaging about 240 people trained in different Emergency Measures' courses. Our goal this year is 1,000 and I feel quite confident that we will meet that goal.

We're very much tied into the municipalities. I have formed an executive advisory group for myself within the municipalities of Nova Scotia and I meet with them every six weeks, and part of that meeting is to talk about training and what training needs are required within the municipalities.

I also formed an executive group with the Ground Search and Rescue of Nova Scotia where there are 24 teams and 1,600 volunteers - one of the largest in Canada - a great bunch of people. I actually met with them at their annual meeting this past Sunday in the Valley.

I'm looking at restructuring them into four regions across this province, larger teams where we can enhance our training and the use of these people. I'll give you an example, there were no sandbag machines in this province, none, yet we've had flooding year after year. EMO Nova Scotia has gone out and prepared proposals, and we're just in the final stages now of purchasing four sandbag machines that will be strategically located across this province: one in the Valley, one in the South Shore, one in Truro, and one in Sydney.

Ground Search and Rescue have agreed to become the trainers and workers for these machines. If you think about it, if we can save one house - I think it's 500 bags for one house - just think what that does for all of us as taxpayers and what it does for those people who live in those homes. So we're working hard toward that and I'm hoping by next year we buy four more. So we're tied in very tight with training and mitigation projects with the municipalities, and I think that's only going to grow in the next couple of years.

Evaluations under legislation are done every two years within the municipalities and by law, EMO must evaluate them and participate with them. The municipalities must have their emergency plans prepared. After we do our review you'll see what happens, it usually hits the

papers who's good, who's bad and who's poor. I do not have the exact numbers for you but I will table that with the committee, and as soon as I get back I'll have somebody send those off to you. I know that we're in the high 90s from the 70s as reported back there and it's due again next year.

When meeting with the municipal coordinators, they told me that they felt it was now time for it to be updated, so we're working toward - well, our next evaluation is in 2006 or 2007, and I hope to have a new and improved evaluation because what they said is maybe we're not really looking at today what we need to be looking at in emergency preparedness within these communities, because times have changed so much. Something as simple as, perhaps that municipality should have a sandbag machine in their community, who knows? So we'll be working toward a new evaluation program and I'm pleased to say that nobody scored poor this year. I remember the year before I came in there were a few poors there and now they have come up to date.

I think some of the reasons for the poors were there was transferring of people, people had quit the EMC positions, and a lot of these EMC positions are volunteer within the municipality. One of the things I want to sing a tune, I guess, to the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities is I think that it no longer can be on the corner of someone's desk or the corner of a volunteer's desk and I think it's important that this job of emergency preparedness be part of somebody's duties and that they start taking their duties a little more seriously. I notice that the group is starting to age, like all of us, and with volunteers and getting older, I'm very concerned that in the next couple of years we may not have those people there in those positions that are as committed as the people who are there today; they are extremely committed.

We will continue to improve our assessment process and report back on that process.

MR. EPSTEIN: There was something that was very striking about the extreme weather events in the southern United States recently - this was New Orleans and Galveston - that the government tried to organize mass evacuations of big, urban areas. It seems to me that an evacuation is a very difficult thing and I'm wondering if you have any comments for us about how prepared we are in Nova Scotia, particularly I would think in our larger, urban areas, if we have to organize an evacuation.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Again, you must remember what they did down in New Orleans - I'm hoping - would not happen here, only because we have the three levels of government, we have our planning. I think when the reviews come out on the aftermath of this you will see that down in the States they didn't talk to each other, they didn't organize and they didn't know who was in charge. The minute that we have our intelligence come in about any event that happens in this province, a call goes out, our Joint Emergency Operations Centre is opened, levels of government, private sector, the EMCs - not all of them but whatever area we're talking about - come out. We open up and start planning for what's going to take place.

Part of the annual reviews done include evacuation plans within communities. One point I want to make is that it's very hard, if not impossible, to have evacuation training. How could we train, or how could we do testing of evacuating half of say, Halifax? What we can do is do tabletop exercises with all those who would be involved, from the Department of

Transportation and Public Works, to EHS, to police, to politicians, whatever we needed within that circle to train as best as possible, or simulate an evacuation. We've done that and as early as two weeks ago I met with the HRM and their plan has been updated as of this year, it would work as best as possible. It is all subdivided into maybe just evacuating this area, or evacuating that area. Did you want to speak to that, Mike?

[10:00 a.m.]

MR. MIKE MYETTE: Yes, our structure is strategically very different than what exists in the U.S. in many areas, because we have that bottom level of coordination at the front line at a municipal level. Each municipality, as part of their planning process, plans evacuations. So rather than a mass evacuation, like when we talk about having to evacuate a state or portion of a state, it's all broken down in smaller pieces, so each municipality has a smaller piece of the pie to deal with. The fact, as Mr. MacLaughlan alluded to, that we coordinate and communicate on a regular basis, brings those pieces together much more effectively than they have done, I think, in the U.S.

We have that going for us, this complex network that exists in this province, that is very unique, because the Legislature has seen fit to impose emergency planning as a component of its Statute.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Theriault.

MR. HAROLD THERIAULT: Thank you for your presentations, they were very interesting. I want to talk a little bit about communication. Communication is a very important thing in anything you do in life, no matter whether it's in good times or bad times, it's probably a better thing during bad times.

Last year in Digby we had a power outage, I don't know if it was everywhere but it was in Digby for three, four, five days, it was quite a period of time. My telephone didn't stop ringing and when I would hang up from one person there would be three or four people waiting to get through to me. I gave them every number that I had, Emergency Measures, local Red Cross, fire departments, they had all the numbers. Every person would say to me, I've called there, I can't get through, I can't get through; that went on for days.

Last year we thought of a good idea - and I think this takes place in other areas, you probably know more about it than I do - of the Reverse 911 system. I would like to get your thoughts on that. With this system, Emergency Measures would know of the emergency going on, let's say in a place like Digby County, there's an emergency down there. You people know exactly what's going on down there, you would probably be the first ones to be contacted about it. You would have a system where you press one button and everybody who wants to be hooked up to this, would get a phone message from EMO telling them about the situation and it could even be updated every half-hour. A very simple system.

Right now we have a system where 900,000-some people in this province are trying to call EMO, or Nova Scotia Power, it won't work. It's just common sense that you can't get 1

million phone calls into one phone, but you can get one phone out to 1 million phones. A very simple system. What do you think of this Reverse 911 system?

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Actually it's much bigger than just a Reverse 911 system. As I said earlier, Mike Myette is the manager responsible for 911 in the province and he has been looking into this. Really, there are some privacy issues and it's tied up with - go ahead.

MR. MYETTE: We certainly aren't alone, in any sense of the word, in supporting the system the member has mentioned. We have been collaborating with emergency management agencies and indeed, 911 services across the country, petitioning the CRTC for a system that would allow us, during emergency services, to output calls to phones in precisely the manner the member has mentioned. The 911 systems were developed for 911. This is an outreach of a different nature than what the systems were designed for.

Given the increased concern about privacy, at all levels of government, the CRTC is listening to us; however, they are somewhat reticent to step forward and say anyone can use the system. So we have responded to the CRTC with a letter of support as has, I would suggest, every province in Canada. Suggesting that the system should be in place, we should be able to use the 911 system database for this reason because it has every number in there. You cannot hide from the 911 service. You can't block your number, it's always there. The controls that have to be put in place are very important, so we spoke to the CRTC and we said, you have to put controls in place, you have to put gateways and you have to put keys, because people don't want to be phoned for something that is not an emergency, but they should be phoned when it is an emergency.

So that's what we have done. We are waiting for the CRTC to rule on the issue of Reverse 911. We fully support the initiative at every level and we are working together with our colleagues across Canada to get the CRTC - I guess if I was going to be a betting person, I would suggest that it's going to be approved. The issue is time, where we hope sooner than later.

MR. THERIAULT: Thank you. Another topic I would like to talk about is coordination.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: If I may, I would still like to finish your question because I think there is a little bit more here than just the Reverse 911 and I want this committee to know that we've been working hard. First of all, we've recognized that that is an issue and when you go away from this table, I want you to know that we are working towards that. If I could, I would ask that Andy Lathem speak to some of the projects that we are just doing in reference to communication.

MR. ANDREW LATHEM: Good morning. Specifically on the communications part of the software program that we're pulling in, it's called eTeam and eTeam has a component that allows us to integrate lists and have mass call-outs. We've also worked with Aliant and had a presentation recently from them that allows us, as you indicated earlier, to push one button and send out various levels of broadcasted information.

We're looking at the various mediums that can go across, not just hard-line telephones, but cellphones, e-mails and the technology is in existence and we're looking at and considering the different levels so when we activate the JEOC and we need people from various departments there, we can send out a notification. Then once the people are in the JEOC and there is a notification that is in a specific geographic area, we can utilize the material that Mike was talking about from Reverse 911, we would have that integrated into our software and we would interface with Aliant and be able to broadcast out a public message that is related to that specific emergency in that geographic area. Then if there is province-wide notification that is required, that is another step in the technology.

Aliant currently has taken our request and our information and is looking at the capacity of systems because if we were doing something that was greater than 40,000 people, then there are switches and a number of technologies that would bottleneck and we have to look at the capacity. So we don't want to create an expectation until we're sure that the technology can meet that. Are you going to speak about Communications Nova Scotia? Okay. Does that answer your question, sir?

MR. THERIAULT: Yes.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Further to that, I've also met with Communications Nova Scotia. Radio stations are difficult to deal with. They don't like anybody taking over their radio stations and communications, but we're working through Communications Nova Scotia who sit on a committee with me now, that we will have a provincial communication plan, which will include such as you're talking about, and hopefully 911 will be in there. But for today, we have satellite phones, in the last month that have been sent out to all EMCs; satellite phones are now within all the municipalities and Ground Search and Rescue has them. We have ham radio in our building, so if we lose all communications, ham radio will work, and as Andy said, we're working with Aliant to have a mass broadcast. HRM has a city watch program that they use now, so they can go city-wide with different broadcasts, that we hope to also get it on.

Yes, we recognize it as something that is needed in the province, and as you can see, we're working, I think, very close to having it solved.

MR. THERIAULT: Thank you . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Can you save the next one for the second round?

MR. THERIAULT: Okay.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Stephen.

MR. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Thanks for your presentation. On Page 8 you said EMO will also implement a program that encourages the province, municipalities and the business sector in the development of continuity plans. Are those plans set? Are they in place now?

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: If you have a business continuity plan, as far as I'm concerned, you have a plan for your home which means you continue with life at home. If you have business continuity at your business, you can continue with your business and hopefully your revenue will continue to come in. I've met with the deputies and they've approved a plan where I'm going to put together a business continuity plan for government and a team for government, and this team will help government have business continuity plans throughout all the departments. We are also training the municipal EMCs in business continuity planning and we're just putting that together.

We want to put a model together that fits Nova Scotia. There are lots of models out there; if you go on the Internet, there are tons of different models. What we want to do is Nova Scotianize a model that we can utilize and we're getting very close to that. I have one person assigned to that task and she's been sent off to Toronto where she's had training. It's probably the only certified training that we have in Canada, there are only two people in Nova Scotia who have it. She's putting this model together and we're going to put business continuity planning into the reviews that we do every two years.

MR. MCNEIL: The outage that my colleague, the member for Digby-Annapolis, spoke about also affected Annapolis. My constituency has four municipalities in it and there are four municipal water services involved in that, one of which is actually gravity-fed so it worked quite well. The other three are not. There's probably two days, maybe two and a half days of water in the reserve. A good portion of my constituency is just well water. What was happening was the municipalities were beginning to run out of water, but they couldn't find generators. It's not the regular generator, you need about a three-phase, 600-volt generator. It became difficult to find one. I'm wondering, are there any plans in place to deal with municipal water services around the province?

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: None right now. I think it's certainly a municipal problem that needs to be addressed at the municipal level and I think that's probably under the critical infrastructure and protection. I think when the municipalities are having their meetings that they have to identify that and make those priorities the critical infrastructure within their localized government.

The generator program that Minister Fage put forward last year saw over 100 generators throughout the province for comfort centres. This year, it will be announced shortly, I'm hoping for mid-November, that we'll have our program together to once again have generators spread throughout Nova Scotia for warming centres. He's quite clear on that. That's where our biggest complaints came from. When I first took the position, we had that snowstorm early in February and people had no place to go. Down in the Valley, let's say, the well wouldn't work because the pump wouldn't work and the house was cold and so we'd have a warming centre set up and then the volunteers would have food and social services would be there.

I don't have the exact numbers, but I could get those for the committee, but we have expanded our warming centres across the province - I would say - fivefold since last year and now we're going to start that program again in November.

MR. MCNEIL: I look forward to my fire halls accessing some of that generator money.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Absolutely.

MR. MCNEIL: One of the challenges, though, and I would encourage you to look at this, once the outage goes beyond 36 hours, municipal water services become a problem, especially in rural areas. Once people get the comfort of being warm, then it becomes that issue of where they are going to get that water supply. Let's be honest, if we can get water, we can survive for quite a long period of time. What happens in a lot of my constituency, which is rural areas, they're invited into the towns to start accessing that water supply. I'm obviously looking at my constituency of Annapolis, but I think you could transpose that across all municipalities and say, if you can hook up that municipal water system, all of us could come in and get enough water to keep us going until we can deal with the emergency that's at hand. So I would encourage you to make that part of the overall plan for the province.

[10:15 a.m.]

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: I think, if I might, I sit on a committee across Canada of senior officials for emergency preparedness. One of the things that's critical is infrastructure protection, and I agree with you, I think eventually as we go down this road there's going to be identified what is critical - and if it's water, which I agree with you is one of the most important things, well, maybe there will be a plan there. Will it be a cost-shared event again and something like the DFAA, or something like JEPP, the Joint Emergency Preparedness Program, that when those are identified through a national program, perhaps we'll be able to get funding for them. I really do see that as we move down the road. I think we're only starting with the generator for warming centres. I think eventually it's going to be the responsibility of all levels of government to ensure that we have critical infrastructure, that our people can survive during harsh times and so on.

MR. MCNEIL: And one large generator mobile would deal with a lot of municipal water services. Once you begin to fill up the reservoir, it would last for a few days.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Agreed.

MR. MCNEIL: I just want to go to the Auditor General's Report of June 2004 which talked about emergency planning for homes for special care that needed to be reviewed. In his report, on Page 10.19, it said that was not done, or the fact that you had not received a list of all the homes for special care in the province from the appropriate departments, the Departments of Community Services and Health. In my constituency, in the last power outage that we were speaking of, a long-term care facility had to be evacuated because there was no generator.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Yes.

MR. MCNEIL: I find it extremely hard to believe that that would not be a priority with the Departments of Health and Community Services that the most vulnerable people in our communities, in our society, our seniors, would not be in a facility that would have access to a generator. Long-term care beds all over this province are unavailable and yet now we're having

to evacuate one of the facilities in the riding of Annapolis to places that don't exist. So I'm wondering if that review has been done, if it's in the process of being done, and at what point we get access to it.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: There's actually a problem, and it's not our problem, we have asked and we said, you must remember, I have six people alone on the EMO side of the house. I only have three people in the field who work with homes for special care, to help them exercise, along with all the other exercising that needs to be done, and we've asked them to provide us with the homes. We said that we would do x number of homes per year and, you know, help them with their planning and their exercising. They have failed to provide us with those lists; they failed last year and they have failed this year.

MR. MCNEIL: Who has failed? (Interruptions)

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: It would be the Department of Health.

MR. MCNEIL: And they have not provided you with that list again after . . .

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Not for exercising purposes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I have Gary and then Judy.

MR. GARY HINES: Madam Chairman, in starting out, Mr. MacLaughlan, I want to compliment you in doing one of the most important things that's necessary in order to make anything work and that's to define whose responsibility is what. You've made it clear here that there are differentiations between federal, provincial, municipal, and other entities and I think that you've done a good job with that. In defining that, you leave less out in terms of making your accomplishments, if you want.

I've got a couple other comments and then I will get to a question. Regarding the radio, I know the stations are independent and they like to have control over what they do. The CBC is not, it's a public entity, and I made a suggestion before that the CBC be mandated to make their station the response unit for EMO and emergency situations. Also, the new station that is on the air now, a talk station - 95.7, I think it is - I'm sure they would be very interested in accommodating this because they seemingly are seeking for material now to keep their program flowing. So it may be a good time to jump in and make what they do a part of what you do.

Another area I think that can be very beneficial to you, and I'm going to get to my question, is the area that's not very popular in the news today and that's the off-road vehicle people. I know for a fact that when there's an emergency anywhere in this province, the off-road vehicle people make themselves available to do rescue and to do anything that you might ask them to do, and seemingly we don't get the recognition for that group that we should get. How well is that organized? Do those organizations register with EMO? I know the one in Noel, where I was born and brought up, with our club that we established, we identified ourselves to a local fire station, in terms of being able to respond to these issues. Is that

organized so that ATVANS, SANS and those groups identify with you what is available out there for emergency situations?

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: I would presume they would be registered with the municipal EMOs.

MR. HINES: I think that we need to give them a lot of credit for what they do. Another issue - and it's a more proactive issue, I've talked to you briefly about it - is wildfire. Because of the damage from Hurricane Juan and global warming, wildfire is something we should recognize for our rural communities. I want to sit down and talk to you and Mr. Lathem soon, regarding that. I issued the challenge to the Halifax Regional Municipality, and their local fire chiefs were very interested in it, but I didn't get the response from the top that we needed in order to put that component together so that EMO, Search and Rescue, Natural Resources and those departments could do a piece of information to bring to the local fire stations. I would like you to meet with me sometime soon on that issue, and make my constituency and my areas that I have concerns about, perhaps, a pilot project. We can get into it and be proactive with that situation, as well.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: The lead would be Natural Resources. We would be pleased to sit at that table and discuss where we could or would fit in.

MR. HINES: The problem I was having was getting permission from the fire chief at HRM to accommodate it, because it would be their facilities that would be accommodating it and they would be a part of it. They are part of the response team. I'll work on them again, but I'd like to sit down with you and Andy, Mr. Lathem, sooner rather than later, so we could put that in place.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: No problem.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Judy.

MS. STREATCH: Thank you for your presentation this morning, it was extremely informative. I was particularly interested to hear the discussion about the generators. The vast majority of my constituency is of a rural nature, in particular the communities of the New Ross area in Lunenburg County. I was extremely pleased to see the community take the lead.

They were quite disturbed with the inability and the isolation that occurred during what we've termed as White Juan. So I was extremely pleased to see them take the lead just a few weeks ago, to put a committee in place, to organize a buddy system to make sure that our seniors and individuals in our communities who most need to be contacted during an emergency could be contacted.

I was contacted by that group, as well as a group that organized Hubbards, wondering what exactly one needed to do to become a comfort station or a warming station. I guess that's my question to you. How does a group or a location become qualified as a warming station or a comfort station?

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Very simply, those groups just contact the local EMC for the area. The EMC there would be able to help them coordinate and identify what areas are comfort centres. I think that's the way to work through that.

MS. STREATCH: Is there a limit? One of the concerns during White Juan was that we literally couldn't get to our warming stations or our comfort stations because of the challenges we faced with DOT. I know that's not your department. Is there a limit to the number of comfort stations that a community or a municipality could have? For example, we have the community of New Ross, which may only be five kilometres down the road from the community of the Forties, but each community was looking to have their own comfort station in case of a challenge of being able to get to the next community.

MR. WEBB: I can answer a bit of this, because the comfort centre is a very good concept, and it's not a concept that's used a lot in other provinces. As you know, when emergencies happen, we do an assessment. We're always playing catch-up in an emergency. We're always doing an assessment after the emergency - in advance of emergencies, we're pre-positioning resources and people, but after an emergency is when we have to assess what needs to be done. One of the assessments is, should we have shelters or reception centres that are run by Red Cross?

What happened is the communities are taking this initiative to have comfort centres, especially in the county areas, mostly in fire stations. One of the awkward parts is we're there to deal with the most vulnerable, so there needs to be an assessment made. A lot of these comfort centres were opened up just to do that. They set up meals, and then they called us after Community Services and Red Cross and asked can you provide all the meals? It's very good that they went to a comfort centre, but a lot of the people weren't necessarily very vulnerable people. They were people who went for comfort. So it's the awkward part, the community is setting all those places up, there is no limit and they set it on their own.

We met with the fire departments that said if they want to do that, certainly, that's a very nice initiative and a good initiative, but we'll still deal with the most vulnerable and we'll do an assessment to see if we should be involved. If they just want to provide a meal for their people - in an emergency, cold meals may be practical for a number of days, but they were providing hot meals in a congregated area to get information, and it was very admirable. That's one of the problems, if they're not controlled at the municipal level, there could be a comfort centre every two miles down the road in cross purposes and cross resources. It's a bit of a difficulty, but it's a nice difficulty, better to overdo resources rather than under-do them.

We are trying to get a handle on it, we've put a resource out there with the municipalities. We met with your group and we met with the fire chiefs as well, to say if they do set up comfort centres, call us, we'd like to send at least one Red Cross person there to do an assessment and to ensure there's not one started down the road that may be in cross purposes. That is one of the problems, in the county areas, if they don't have power they sometimes then don't have water or sewer. That's the difficulty in the cities, that usually puts up, even though there's more people. That is something that we'll work at closer, but it's always difficult to say, is it just a convenience they want to provide or is it to deal with those who really need the assistance.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Also, one of the other things that we're doing, because it's so difficult to staff five or six different places within municipalities, we've begun a program called REMO, Regional Emergency Measures Organization. You'll have several communities that will come together working under one umbrella. I'm also very pleased to say that on the southern shore I have, before Cabinet now, a proposal for a full-time emergency measures coordinator out of my office, who will live, reside and work with the people on the southern shore.

MR. WEBB: I will add that this is one of the things that some people may say, we got a lot of criticism for Red Cross and Community Services. These comfort centres sprung up in a lot of the areas and then they started making calls to say, where's Red Cross, why aren't you there helping, and we didn't know anything about them. What we're trying to do now is backtrack and communicate with a lot of those comfort centres. There was a lot of criticism I know in the Digby area, in the Kentville area, and on the Eastern Shore. We had a massive number who wanted us to staff them and also provide all the resources, so to get a handle on that was very difficult, so we know we have our challenges.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm just wondering, committee members, our vice-chairman isn't here and I just have a couple of quick questions, do you mind if I ask them from the Chair?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Go ahead.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You mentioned earlier in your presentation that one way to reduce the effect of an emergency is to have prompt reporting of the emergency. I'm just wondering, is there any legislation or requirement for private business to report a potential emergency? I'm just thinking, for example, take the oil refinery which is in my constituency, very close to your own headquarters, is there any requirement on their part in terms of the length of time it takes them to notify you or the municipality, or the citizens, as to a potential emergency situation? Or is that completely left up to their own judgment?

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: I'm not saying that there isn't and I'm not saying there is, I personally don't know. There may be something under the municipalities Act, but I'm just not sure. Maybe under the Environment Act or something, I don't know. Mike.

MR. MYETTE: I guess having seen portions of plans that impact several industries in Nova Scotia, certainly the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations that are very stringent in this province have an impact and place a strong onus on business owners to protect the health and safety of their employees. Many of these industries rely on first responders, particularly fire. I know of no reason why, where if health and safety were impacted, they wouldn't be very prompt in reporting on the basis of those considerations, at least.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Do you think this is an area that could be beefed up? I'm thinking that there are a number of spills and circumstances where the general public may be more at danger than the employees of a particular business. I'm just wondering if there are some gaps there in reporting that could put the general public in harm's way?

[10:30 a.m.]

MR. MYETTE: Well, certainly the Emergency Measures Act authorizes the minister to require plans from any particular entity - public or private. For example, we have plans that apply to all of the dams that are in the province operated by Nova Scotia Power, and that's a situation where a dam overflow could have an impact on public safety of residents. That's an instance where we have indeed requested to have the plans, and the plans are updated on a regular basis.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: I think the liability risks, be it government or private business, would be so high. I can't think of, in my career today or in my past career, one that wasn't reported. I don't think it's a serious problem.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just quickly, the American television stations seem to use scrolled warnings quite a bit in terms of notification of accidents, weather disturbances, any kind of potential emergency. We don't seem to have that practice in Nova Scotia - is that anything you've looked at?

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: That's part of this plan that I spoke about earlier, about the Communications Nova Scotia provincial communications plan. That's part of it, that's in there.

MR. MYETTE: Again, television communications are regulated by the CRTC. There is an application before the CRTC for a public notification on television stations that the CRTC is considering. A company by the name of Palmorex, which operates also the Weather Channel, is petitioning the CRTC. They've also met with representatives of all the provincial governments in Canada to get their support. We've thrown our support behind that initiative, and again it's an issue that I believe we're waiting for the CRTC to decide what safeguards have to be in place to balance the right to information versus the access to information that doesn't apply to everybody.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: I think the Act is quite clear that the minister has the authority under the Act to take all steps that are necessary to manage the emergency. I think what I'm hoping at the end of the day is that this committee that has been set up with Communications Nova Scotia will in fact do whatever they can legally to broadcast and get out there what we need to get out there.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Committee members, we're really running behind time here and so we're going to start our second round. Could I just encourage you to ask quick questions and hopefully we'll get fairly quick answers. We actually have a couple of housekeeping things to do at the end of the meeting, so we should finish up at the very latest by 10:55 a.m. We need to allow time for the presenters to do their closing presentation.

So far for the second round I have Howard, Jerry, and Junior - is there anyone else? Stephen, okay.

Howard.

MR. EPSTEIN: First I have a suggestion and then I have a question. The suggestion actually had to do with the focus on apartment buildings - earlier there was discussion about what to do about all the people who live in apartment buildings, because potentially many of them are vulnerable. I think 40 per cent of Nova Scotians live in rental accommodation rather than are owners - and it is this, that if you're thinking that the owners should take some responsibility, perhaps through their supers and so on, there actually is a point of entree, there's an organization which is called the Investment Property Owners Association of Nova Scotia. So if you haven't been in touch with them, you might want to at least start with them. I don't think all apartment building owners belong, but it is at least an organization that's out there. IPOANS would be, at least, a starting point. They have staff and you can get in touch with them.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Okay.

MR. EPSTEIN: Now I want to move over to this question of personal preparedness. If I understood correctly, in addition to municipal preparedness, you're emphasizing to us very strongly - and we've heard this from EMO before - that people have to take a lot of responsibility for their own dealings with emergencies, and I don't disagree with that. That seems to me entirely correct. What I'm wondering is whether you actually have any data on how prepared people are - do we actually know how many households have candles, flashlights, wind-up radios, generators, a heat source, a plan, cellphones, anything along those lines? Does that information exist anywhere?

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: No, not that I'm aware of. It is something we have talked about, different surveys that we may want to enter into to help us with our strategic business plans down the road, but I'm not aware of that data.

MR. EPSTEIN: Okay, in that case, I have a second suggestion which is that the data be sought. I know some of it would probably be available from Statistics Canada - you know, homes that have cellphones - that probably exists somewhere, but as to who has an emergency plan or has talked about it inside their family, or has actually put together what it is that they need, I suspect that even if you did some random sampling at some point and began to use this as a base for publicizing it, it might be useful.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: If I might, on this topic, if I could just ask Dennis Kelly to give a quick brief on some of the things because I know that you're interested in some of the training that we're looking at with vulnerable people.

MR. DENNIS KELLY: Sir, one of the things certainly that I've impressed since coming to EMO is to try to look at the training. I'm going to be very brief for you. Historically, a lot of the training for municipalities and for provinces were done by the Canadian Emergency Preparedness College in Ottawa, it used to be in Arnprior. They have scaled back. The problem with that is we were only able to send a small number of people to Ottawa to receive the training. So a lot of the responsibility for training provincial, municipal and individuals has now fallen to the Province of Nova Scotia to do. So we're building that in a big way.

There are many courses that are already established, but there are several new ones that we have been looking at. One of those we talked about, as recent as yesterday, Craig and I, has to do with educating the public. We do a fairly good job with municipalities. We do an excellent job, I feel, with the municipalities and certainly at the provincial level, but we don't have training or awareness courses - I would put it more an awareness course - where we would be able to go around the province, to the local fire hall, or town hall, do a two and a half hour meeting, no charge, everybody just come as they want, and we will educate the general public on how to be prepared in their homes. We feel that will help us in that it starts with the individual and moves, once it's beyond their capacity, to the municipality to handle, then of course up to the province and to the Government of Canada.

So that is on my radar. Unfortunately, we are only two people in our training unit, but it is on my radar for the next business calendar year to try to develop. Now, the problem is the capacity of delivering that training. We would certainly be looking at the train-the-trainer model. We would go out to the municipalities, hopefully train people at the municipal level, first responders and so on who would be able to deliver the training on our behalf. So I have to get my head around that a little bit, but it is on our radar. Does that help a little to answer your question?

MR. EPSTEIN: Yes, thank you very much for mentioning that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Pye.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, it's great to hear that there will be a training program and that it is on your radar. I represent a constituency where 61 per cent of the residents live in multi-unit residential developments, and that in itself poses a very serious problem. The case that I brought to you earlier where the individual was locked in her unit as a result of a power outage, I hope that you take some of my advice and go back, and when someone is readily identified as needing to come to an emergency shelter, that someone at least goes out and makes an attempt to bring the individual there, or at least provide services that will keep the individual in their unit and protect them until such time as someone else can come forward. So I certainly hope that you look at that.

I also want to bring another issue to your attention. During Hurricane Juan, there were emergency centres set up. One of the emergency centres was set in the Dartmouth Sportsplex in the north end of Dartmouth, I do believe, at that particular time. Two or three days had gone by and the power had not come on and individuals were in need of a shower. So as a result, individuals went to the Sportsplex to have a shower, and they were charged a fee. I really think that is unconscionable, when the power outage is there and they're using these facilities that they be charged a fee. So I'm wondering if you look at where community facilities or centres are part of the emergency centres' operation that individuals are not charged a fee for essential needs that they would certainly be searching for.

The other is with respect to mobile generators. I do know that this is primarily in rural Nova Scotia. I do know that I have received a call from some senior citizens in Inverness. Inverness County, as you know, is an extremely long county. Some of the seniors were quite concerned, the local fire station assured them and the local EMO that they would have

generators in their seniors' facilities, but they would be, in fact, mobile generators. They may only have them for a short period of time and all of a sudden they were concerned that they would lose them to go 150 kilometres up the highway to another seniors' centre and so on.

John, you made mention earlier to facilitating all seniors' centres with generators and particularly having a central room aside in each of the seniors' facilities for those very needs of the technical aids that might need electricity such as oxygen and other mobility devices.

Madam Chairman, I know you mentioned that you were talking with Jen Powley, who is with the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities, I believe . . .

MR. WEBB: She's the chairman of the persons with disabilities committee.

MR. PYE: She's the chairman of that persons with disabilities committee. I would also want to see within your Communications Nova Scotia, a separate sheet set out for persons with disabilities to look at, so when they put it on the screen they can see that's available and what they should do, because that's not here as I presently see. It's for all other segments of our society, but not for the disabled community. So hopefully you will bring that forward, and a brochure. I'm just offering some advice while I have the opportunity to have EMO here, Madam Chairman, and making sure that I get my two cents' worth in. (Interruption)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You just took those as suggestions, you don't need to respond.

MR. PYE: That's right.

MR. WEBB: I'll just comment that we're in the process of doing those brochures and having them approved. If you would like, I could go back to the committee and make sure that you get a copy before it's released.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That would be excellent. Thank you, Jerry. Junior, did you want to ask that other question?

MR. THERIAULT: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman. You touched on this already, coordination. In that storm, in Digby, for three or four days the coordination there was not good at all. The local town opened up the school. The local fire department opened up the fire department. Red Cross did not get involved there for two or three days. When Red Cross came, they didn't know whether the school was the place to be, or the fire hall was the place to be. There just didn't seem to be a captain aboard that ship. Nobody knew where to go, where to turn. The people - we didn't even really know. It was just a mess there. The coordination, no one really headed it up. There was no captain to head that up in that community.

MR. WEBB: Most emergencies are mid-size, and the hurricanes and those are massive. There are three things that I've learned at the emergency college that you have to work on in every emergency - communication, communication, communication. Up and down, across, whether it's with media, it's with agencies, people-to-people, between agencies, and the ups and downs. In every emergency that becomes a question. In the western area, it's our most

challenging because there are - I'm not sure exactly how many - a lot of municipal units, they are trying to coordinate their emergency measures coordinators as well.

We're lucky that in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality and HRM, there's one emergency coordinator and it goes a lot better. If there are problems, they get channelled in.

[10:45 a.m.]

So having so many emergency measures coordinators, we are all calling our one Red Cross coordinator in the region. She was overwhelmed. We were working a number of other areas, and we recognized that. It took a day or two to get other resources in, even though she had Red Cross volunteers, there were some areas that were a problem in the large-scale emergency, and we are taking steps to shore up the western area especially, and try to communicate. Having teams, even since then, it's two or three years now that we have teams now in the Digby area and the Kentville area. Our minister is in the Kentville area, but all the areas, in Yarmouth there are full teams now, and we're trying to ensure that our Red Cross volunteer lead goes to the meetings in advance so that sort of thing doesn't happen again. There was a lot of catch-up, and it's catch-up anyway, but in the western region there are certainly a lot more challenges that we are working on. So I appreciate your comment.

MR. THERIAULT: Just one thing on the generators for communities. I have a community, Maitland Bridge, right in the middle of the province, at the end of my riding, and there are 70 families there, approximately. All they have is one little community hall that they can put the people in and they have asked me if it's possible for them to have a generator in that area - they have no fire hall, nothing, just one community hall, so I said I would ask.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: The best thing they could do is contact whoever the EMC is for that area. So as not to cause confusion and for us in EMO to better understand where our generators are throughout the province, we're pushing everything through the EMCs. They should know what's needed within their communities and then they'll push the list to us, and then we'll start having the funds distributed.

MR. WEBB: I should mention there's the other area. On December 26th there was a power outage I guess in Digby and those areas. There was some question that the Red Cross never showed up. We checked all our resources and Red Cross was never called. Of course, that's where the communication has to be shored up. We don't go and look for - we wait for the network of calls that come in and then we respond. That's where we have to ensure that we're there - available - to answer the phones and get our resources.

MR. MCNEIL: One suggestion and one question. You mentioned earlier that the province is looking at buying new equipment to disperse across the province in strategic locations. I would make the suggestion that probably if you go to the Valley, you should locate that in the constituency of Annapolis, anywhere around Middleton, it's kind of the heart of the Valley - just so I can get that on the record. (Interruptions)

The Auditor General's Report in June 2005 brought to light that the Department of Transportation and Public Works did not have to notify the Department of Environment and Labour around contamination of diesel oil fuel or any other environmental contamination that happened on their sites. I'm just wanting a little bit of your feedback on what you think of that, and if there was a future reason for EMO to be called out to that site, wouldn't it make sense that you know about the contamination problem?

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Again, EMO is not a first responder; EMO would not go to the site. The local EMO may do an evaluation, but that's a municipal employee, and I think it would be hard for me to really comment on that question because that's really something that perhaps someone from the Department of Environment and Labour should answer.

MR. MCNEIL: You should be a politician. You did a very good job of doing that.

I'm just curious though - if your staff was going to a site that had been contaminated, it just seems strange to me that the rules apply to me and you as a citizen of the province, that if something happens on our property and it gets contaminated it's our responsibility, we need to contact the Department of Environment and Labour immediately. It's our responsibility to clean it up, yet a government department, the rules don't apply, and yet you're also going to be - if not you, municipal employees with EMO - are going to be called out to deal with future emergencies on that site. Would it not make sense that all that information be out so that when you're landing on that site you know what you're dealing with right off the bat?

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Agreed. I think any emergency service provider who would go to any site under the Occupational Health and Safety Act or the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act, there are all kinds of requirements there. To answer your question - if I was going, yes I would want to know what I'm going into.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't have anyone else on the second round, so I would like to ask or perhaps offer a quick suggestion. We have talked a lot about the personal responsibility for being prepared for disaster and just getting back to some of my opening comments - there are a number of people in this province, especially people on social assistance and disability pension, who can't afford to take any more money out of their food budget in order to buy some of these supplies, the flashlights or the wind-up radios, or whatever, and I'm just wondering, Mr. Webb, has the Department of Community Services ever looked at setting up a fund where they could actually provide emergency preparedness kits to people who live in extreme poverty so they, too, could feel that they have some resources in order for them to develop a family emergency plan and sort of be on a more level playing field with other citizens?

MR. WEBB: Number one, I know the department hasn't looked at it. I think the department could look at it, but in light of all the priorities that are there, is that a high priority? I certainly will bring it back to ask that question. My experience, my request would be to challenge the community to see if there are community agencies or businesses that may be able to provide us with the resources that we could distribute to our clientele. For example, Wal-Mart, Canadian Tire, all have emergency response funds that they like to give in advance of

emergencies. Perhaps those are the avenues that might be able to help with that type of initiative. I will bring it back to our department.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, I would suggest either the department take the responsibility for enabling these families to be equipped or they have to take the responsibility for making sure the support and responding services are there after an emergency.

MR. WEBB: For sure.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I mean you can't throw it all back on people on social assistance and persons on disability pensions because, you know, they're struggling on a day-to-day basis as it is.

MR. WEBB: Yes, and the choice might be to give them flashlights and emergency supplies as opposed to special needs, transportation, all the other special needs. I was a social assistance district manager for years and I know the difficult decisions just in attempting to supply all the special need requests and given an inadequate social assistance rate, that's a challenge.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, I am just saying that I think the department has a special responsibility to that particular group of vulnerable people.

MR. WEBB: For sure.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'll just leave it with you.

MR. WEBB: For sure.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would like to offer both of you a chance just to sum up or add anything that perhaps didn't come out during our discussions this morning. We just have a few minutes, so if you could keep it brief we would really appreciate it.

MR. WEBB: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Again, I'm very pleased to be here today, especially in light of the experience that I've had over the last few weeks. I know one of the things I did learn at the emergency college, that I took years ago, was the only thing more difficult than planning for emergencies is trying to explain why we didn't. Certainly in the U.S.A., through CNN and all those, they are doing a massive job at that, and we do that in emergencies; in every emergency we have had to explain what are the things that we missed and what do we work on. So that is very difficult. Secondly, communication, communication, communication, we said is something that we're constantly aware of, that we'll be continuing to work on.

I will mention that we are second responders. We deal with the Red Cross, and they are building the capacity with their volunteers and us, and the Department of Community Services as well are building their capacity with volunteers, the partners in mutual aid, especially in the western area that was identified most vulnerable in trying to enhance our

ability to respond effectively to emergencies. I'm proud of the department to be part of the emergency social service response system and preparedness system and what we are achieving with the resources we have.

We are not like the southern States where they have a constant program due to the risks that they have to go through, but I'm very pleased to be part of the system, and we look forward to building our capacity and being one of the best in Canada. I'm also the chairman of the Council of Emergency Social Services Directors of Canada, and I've seen other programs, except for B.C. that has eight full-time and, Quebec, nine full-time emergency social services people, because of the ice storm in Quebec, and in B.C. because of the threat of earthquakes, I think we can be very proud of our emergency system here. I believe we have a way to go, but I'm proud of the system that I'm part of here. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacLaughlan.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Madam Chairman, we at EMO/911 are a small organization with a large mandate and we are identifying what we believe is required within emergency management within our communities throughout Nova Scotia. I, along with my team members, have developed a five-year strategic plan that has been approved by the minister, hopefully that will increase our services throughout the province. I would ask for your patience, your guidance, and your assistance as I move EMO/911 forward in making Nova Scotia a province that is prepared for emergencies, a safe place to raise our families, and to encourage other families and businesses to move here to Nova Scotia. I'm hoping that Nova Scotia will be known as a best practice in emergency management in Canada. So thank you from myself and my team members, and thanks to John for joining me here this morning. I guess that's it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We want to thank you. With the limited human and financial resources that you both have, we think you're doing a tremendous job. We see great improvements and any suggestions we made today were meant in the spirit of constructive criticism and we're certainly on your side.

I think we're all working towards the same goal and anything you can do to help us, as MLAs in our areas, to become more knowledgeable and perhaps be able to take on a leadership role in any future emergency or crisis situation, we would appreciate that kind of information and training or awareness, or whatever, because often people do come to us as part of the first level of response and we need to know how to best use our offices and our caring for the people in our communities.

So thank you very much, and if you don't mind waiting two or three minutes while we clear up a couple of housekeeping things, then we'll have a chance to say goodbye and thank you personally. We really appreciate you coming today.

MR. MACLAUGHLAN: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Committee members, I just want to draw your attention to the second page of the agenda. We have a response from the Departments of Justice and

Community Services regarding information on grandparents' rights that we need to deal with, and we have two requests to be added to our future agendas - one from Alice Housing and one from the Dartmouth Family Centre. So I'm just wondering what you want to do with those correspondence items.

MR. MCNEIL: Madam Chairman, how many people are already on our list to appear?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We have a fair number. I don't have it in front of me, but I'd suggest three or four, perhaps - six.

MR. MCNEIL: Can we suggest to these two groups that once we deal with some of the people already on our list, that we'll contact them about a future date?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We can. I'm not sure about the Dartmouth Family Centre, but I believe the Alice Housing one is a bit time-sensitive in that they're hoping to have their presentation impact on the next provincial budget. Do we want to take a look perhaps at our next meeting and perhaps prioritize? We'll add them to the list, let them know that we've accepted them, but perhaps we'll do a re-prioritization at the next meeting - would that be okay?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: All right. Now, what about the response from Justice and Community Services, what action do you want to take there? My only suggestion is that - apparently it has gone before the Law Reform Commission - perhaps we ask for a timeline because it's not something we want to see dragged out. Perhaps we could get back and ask them how long before a decision will be made and whether or not they're going to look at changes in the legislation, would that be appropriate?

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, we have no confirmation from the Law Reform Commission that they will take this on as a project . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, that's right.

MR. PYE: . . . and we need to find out for certain if they're going to take it on as a project, because if they don't take it on as a project there's a requirement for us to respond back to the Grandparents Rights For Nova Scotia Association on what we have done. So I think it's important to find out, however we do that, through what mechanisms, to contact the Law Reform Commission or the Department of Justice to see if they have committed to take it on.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So if we sent a letter to the Law Reform Commission encouraging them to take a positive response to that request and asking them to get back to us by the end of next month, would that be suitable?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The next meeting date, I just want to confirm with you that everyone is committed to this Forum on Poverty being held in the Red Chamber. We would like to see three representatives there from each of the Parties. If an individual member can't make it, it's their responsibility to make sure someone else from their caucus is available to fill in for them, because we have a number of people coming on both days, and this is a serious topic and they expect to see full representation there.

MR. MCNEIL: Are both days 9:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes. The afternoon of the second day is set aside for the committee itself to do the brainstorming and decide what action we want to take on what we've heard. We found that was a weakness in the first forum we did on family violence, that we didn't set aside time.

MR. MCNEIL: Pardon? (Interruptions)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm just explaining that we've changed the structure a little to make it a little more efficient for the committee to respond. So all caucuses are committed to full representation? (Interruptions) Okay, that's excellent.

MR. MCNEIL: Do we start at 9:00 a.m. or 9:30 a.m?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: At 9:00 a.m.

We stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:00 a.m.]