



**NATURE-TRIGGERED
EXTREME EVENTS: WHO
MIGHT/COULD RESPOND?**

MARCH 16TH & 17TH  ROYAL CANADIAN MILITARY INSTITUTE
426 UNIVERSITY AVE, TORONTO, ON M5G 1S9

CO-DIRECTOR: DR. EMDAD HAQUE, UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
CO-DIRECTOR: DR. NIRUPAMA AGRAWAL, YORK UNIVERSITY
PARTNER: DR. KAWSER AHMED, CRRIC



<https://www.cdsn-rcds.com/natural-disaster>
www.crric.org/minds

The workshop will be livestreamed on Facebook and You Tube

CONFERENCE BRIEF

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Mobilizing Insights in Defence and Security (MINDS)

Nature-Triggered Extreme Events: Who might/could respond?

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BACKGROUND

In recent years, the scale and impact of nature-triggered events such as floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, forest fires, and the Covid-19 pandemic have presented situations that could not be managed without assistance from the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to respond to emergencies. The Canadian Defence and Security Network (CDSN) brought together various themes to benefit from their insights through a grant awarded by the Mobilizing Insights in Defence and Security (MINDS) program; as one of the four themes under this grant, the nature-triggered emergency response and domestic operations team is led by Dr. Nirupama Agrawal from York University and Dr. Emdad Haque from the University of Manitoba. This conference was organized in partnership with the Conflict and Resilience Research Institute Canada. This conference took place in Toronto during March 16-17 2023, at the Royal Canadian Military Institute.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the Nature-Triggered Extreme Events: Who might/could respond? event was to engage multi-sector stakeholders and share diverse perspectives on emergency management in Canada, as well as brainstorm better pathways forward. The workshop was successful in bringing together researchers, Emergency Management professionals, and the Canadian Armed Forces to reflect on recent large scale emergency responses and discuss if and how provincial agencies such as the Office of Emergency Management in Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia might be able to work toward adaptation and mitigation strategies in order to reduce disaster impacts and allow the Armed Forces to preserve their resources for international assistance as a priority and as a last resort domestically. Mechanisms to best manage future hazardous events that end up becoming disasters with minimum possible damage to people and the economy while upholding the mandate and priorities of the Forces.

INSIGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES

This conference was part of a series of activities, including two webinars and two workshops, organized to achieve the goals set for the first year of the program. Speakers from various backgrounds and experiences presented stimulating and thought provoking ideas and real world activities. Representation ranged from international allies from NATO and France (MASA) as well as federal actors from the Domestic Operations Joint Task Force Central of the Canadian Armed Forces, along with high-ranking Canadian provincial officials, regional and municipal emergency managers from across the country, NGOs, and indigenous community leaders. Specifically, Ontario Emergency Management, Manitoba Emergency Measures Office, indigenous voices from Norway House Project, Fraser Valley Regional District, Municipality of Hope, NGO Alliance, Niagara Region Emergency Management, Toronto Emergency Management, and Canadian Defence and Security Network were

among the esteemed professionals who shared their insights and vision for the future of a more resilient Canada. Participants included professionals from EM Ontario (Richard Pereira and Ramya Sree), Rosemary Park (retd. CAF), three women members of the CAF (Julia Stecki, Alicia Morris, Erika Palakovic), graduate students from York's Master of Disaster & Emergency Management (Andrew Little, Helena Chuang, Iana Shatilova) and graduate research assistants from the University of Manitoba (Sadman Sakib and Rehnema Mahjabin). Iana Shatilova also served as a brilliant research assistant for this event. Notable panelists Melissa Jennings (CDSN) and Paul Hassanally (EM Niagara Region) carried through the message of strengthening Canadian national security while working toward mitigative planning for reducing disaster risks at home.

The first Keynote speaker, Deputy Minister and Commissioner of Emergency Management Ontario Bernie Derible energized the audience with his keen interest in doing things differently by tapping into existing resources and forging new partnerships. He shared his thoughts with the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members present in the audience that the Forces have their mandate and should focus on specific tasks. His commitment to making communities safer is evident in the Provincial Emergency Management Strategy and Action Plan¹. Some of the upcoming initiatives that the Deputy Minister noted include "Ontarians help Ontarians,": a portal where citizens of Ontario can register their interests and skillsets to be involved and participate in future emergency response and recovery activities. Mr. Derible is determined to shift Ontario's core concept from military support to Ontario Emergency Management (EMO), with key messages such as "Partnerships" and "Vision of Vulnerable."

Assistant Deputy Minister Emergency Measures Organization (EMO) Manitoba Johanu Botha further supported Bernie Derible's ideas in emergency management, as both ministries share the value of partnership, agility, accountability and integrity. Johanu Botha's vision of the healthcare system interconnected with emergency management within one space was presented to the discussion table to enable efficient response and recovery. He talked about the recently launched project dedicated to enhancing the safety of the citizens of Manitoba by developing a portal encompassing geospatial information, an interactive map of the areas at risk of flooding and a discussion board for partners.

Special guest Lt(N) Thomas Ionson, Domestic Operations Officer, Joint Task Force Central at Canadian Armed Forces, highlighted the important role of the CAF in domestic as well as overseas missions. The domestic dimension, he insisted, should always be added as a last resort element of emergency management systems in Canada. He emphasized the core concepts of CAF with a key focus on the safety and security of Canadian citizens, ensured with a variety of modern technologies, including North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD)² in cooperation with its vital

¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/a-safe-practiced-and-prepared-ontario>

² <https://www.norad.mil>

international ally, the United States of America, the only bi-national military command in the world³ as bolstered by President Biden in his recent speech at Canadian parliament. While fully determined to serve the people of Canada, the CAF share the vision of partnership and cooperation as a common approach for military support in large-scale emergencies.

Assembling a completed picture of efficient disaster and emergency management would be incomplete without insightful information brought to the discussion by the Chair of NGO Alliance, Alain Normand (also Consulting Associate for the charity organization ADRA, Canada). His personal commitment to engaging government and community resources for increasing existing capacities of NGOs in Canada was on full display as he brought about many thought-provoking ideas to rally the room and made a deep impact on the audience. He underscored the need for flexibility and willingness by the employers of the volunteers who are compelled by compassion to help disaster-stricken communities around the world. Further, scarcity of financial resources and challenges with quick mobilizing and enrollment of volunteer force due to systemic failures in some areas in Canada and abroad. Professional burnout and dealing with the traumatized affected population should be accounted for, he added. He, however, concurred that the CAF brings specific expertise, capacities, and capabilities that should be mindfully optimized while strengthening the NGO's abilities to help.

While passionately introducing the emergency preparedness plan for the Niagara region for the April 2024 total Sun eclipse event, Patricia Martel, the Emergency Manager of Niagara Region, underlined the uniqueness of the Niagara region and advocated for looking ahead and mobilizing existing community resources, strengthening resilience at local levels to address the area specific situation needs. The audience shared the far-sighted approach to addressing scenarios related to the anticipated rush of tourists who might descend to the region that falls along the total eclipse band.

The inclusion of Indigenous voices into the conversation is of paramount significance. Sharing insights and reflections on past experiences, Gilbert Fredette, former Vice House Chief Norway House Project, Manitoba, emphasized the importance of historical knowledge of the environment in their ownership for the efficient emergency management processes not only for their people but for Canadian society as a whole.

Tarina Colledge, Manager of Emergency Management Fraser Valley Regional District, together with Tom DeSorcy, Ret. Fire Chief of Hope, BC, focused on the partnership with CAF during the emergency responses in the unique Fraser Valley of British Columbia, especially challenges faced during recent seemingly never-ending nature-triggered disastrous events – particularly the flooding of 2021 – and the need for local connections between CAF resources and local emergency management programs to ensure relationships are developed before disasters for both planning and joint exercises.

³ <https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/joe-bidens-speech-to-canada-deconstructed>

Inspired by the unique and impressively efficient emergency response experience of Bangladesh, by the CRRIC & MASA (France) team on AI-driven disaster response and preparedness simulation tool, LCdr (Ret.) Rosemary Park proposed the idea of engaging CAF veterans in the emergency response processes in their local communities, and that Team Rubicon scenarios involve veterans mobilized to respond anywhere in Canada and overseas as needed. As founder of Servicewomen's Salute organization, Park is convinced there are pathways to integrate this highly trained and skilled group of service personnel into the emergency management realm.

Valuable professional expertise in international practices on addressing crises and disasters was shared with the audience by Colonel Orlin Nikolov, Director of Crisis Management and Disaster Response, NATO⁴. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member-states, principles, objectives and framework in joint efforts during disasters were presented by highlighting key strategies of deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperation and security, as well as the emphasis on protecting the values of NATO member-states and partners.

Simon Wells, Founder & Principal of the *Canadian Journal of Emergency Management*, led an enthusiastic and insightful discussion on emergency planning as a core concept of emergency management. He suggests that stronger mobilization of core emergency planning knowledge could decrease demand on emergency systems, especially the Request for Federal Assistance process and the Canadian Armed Forces. One of his calls to action is to consider establishing a Center of Excellence for Emergency Managers in Canada. Wells also advocated for effective resource planning, in particular, mobilizing existing resources at grassroots and community levels.

Melissa Jennings, Chief Operating Officer, Canadian Defence and Security Network, Carleton University, led a panel discussion by sharing CDSN's vision and ideas and expectations through the MINDS⁵ program. She noted the importance of developing databases as credible sources of information for analysis, planning and efficient responses. She shared information about an array of programs offered by the CDSN for professionals and students to engage in research and advocacy, exchange knowledge, and seek feasible and sustainable solutions to ensure the safety and security of Canadians.

⁴ <https://cmdrcoe.org/index.php>

⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/programs/minds.html>

WRAP UP

Professor Nirupama Agrawal led the final and concluding discussion in the afternoon of the 2nd day. She summarized the knowledge and insights absorbed by the participants during the conference. The graduate students of the University of Manitoba and York University and experts in attendance exchanged ideas, insights, and perspectives on enhancing resiliencies not only in communities but the emergency management system itself. Professor Emdad Haque's preference for social learning and a community-based approach was well-received. The author of this briefing shared her unique take on worldview in the context of conflicts and disasters as someone who fled the invasion of her country and found safety for her young family in Canada. A vital point of view was shared by participants from Emergency Management Ontario's training development unit, instructors Sree and Perera emphasized the role of education and updating materials to incorporate the dynamic changes and shifts in society. CAF members shared their experiences of a flood-affected region in recent years where the desire to live near the river – a floodplain - trumped the risks of losing assets and lives, leading to eventually getting rescued by the CAF domestic operations team. Martel and Hassanally shared a recent example of a blizzard in the Fort Erie area, where, as a pilot project, in collaboration with municipal staff, vulnerabilities were identified in advance that saved the day when it came to responding to the event. The agreement in the room was apparent that the parts of the puzzle for an effective response to nature-triggered extreme events are embedded in the collective whole-of-society approach that cuts through all sectors.

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