Building Resilience for Future Emergencies. Recent Insights.

Dr Satyamoorthy Kabilan
Director, National Security and Strategic Foresight
The Conference Board of Canada
October 25, 2016

@Resiliency_CBoC
What Is Resilience?

• Broadly defined as “the ability to bounce back”.

• A resilient entity will suffer a reduced disruption during an emergency.
  – Returns to business as usual faster as well.
  – Just as applicable in wildfires as in any other emergency.

• Can be illustrated through the comprehensive emergency management model.

Image Credit: www.theguardian.com
What Is Resilience?

Resilience
Business as usual

Event
Business Interruption
Business Resumption

Response
Local Authority Recovery
Community Restoration and Rehabilitation

Preparedness
Federal
Provincial
Municipal
Business
Community
Personal
How Do We Build Resilience?

• This question has come up in a number of Conference Board activities.

• We have examined this question through network meetings, webinars, research, study tours and recent major events.

• This is by no means a complete picture but part of the puzzle.
  – Constant learning and evolution is a necessity.

Image courtesy of nokhoog_buchachon at FreeDigitalPhotos.net
Insight 1: You Can’t Do It Alone.

• “The world is changing in ways that can have major effects on the emergency management community.” - FEMA

• We face an increasingly uncertain landscape in emergency management.
  – The number and scale of major emergencies is increasing.
  – Complexity of dealing with emergencies.

• No single organization will have all of the necessary tools and resources to deal with every major emergency.
Insight 1: You Can’t Do It Alone.

• A range of partners are available across government.  
  – The most common source for assistance.

• The military has played a role in many disasters.  
  – During Op LENTUS 16-01 Joint Task Force West shipped 124,700 pounds of freight, transported 367 evacuees and 173 firefighters.

• Need to be aware of potential limitations.
Insight 1: You Can’t Do It Alone.

- The scope and complexity of modern disasters can overwhelm regional and even national capabilities.
  - Firefighters from Mexico, the US and South Africa came to assist.
  - Alberta was able to leverage mutual support arrangements.

- Assistance may need to come from further than you think and you need to be able to scour the globe for help.
Insight 1: You Can’t Do It Alone.

• The private sector has played a major role in a number of emergencies.
  – Provided housing and transportation during the Fort McMurray wildfires.
  – Their role was highlighted during Hurricane Sandy, the Boston Marathon Bombings and the 2013 Calgary flood.

• Private sector partnerships can provide additional resources when we need them most.
Insight 1: You Can’t Do It Alone.

• Partnerships need to be built well before a disaster.
  – Trust and key relationships need to be established.
  – Deeper understanding of capabilities.
  – Exercises are a proven tool for doing this.

• This applies to both public and private sector partnerships.
  – Even public partnerships can fail if they are not built beforehand.

• We need to continue to build and maintain our partnerships across the private and public sector spectrum as well as across our borders.
Insight 2: Build Community Resilience.

• Major emergencies ultimately impact communities.
  – This can happen in a number of ways, both directly and indirectly.

• Resilience needs to start at the community level.
  – Making a community more resilient can limit the impact of a major disaster.

• Numerous campaigns focused on getting people to be better prepared for potential emergencies.
  – How do we foster and strengthen community resilience?
Insight 2: Build Community Resilience.

• At the heart of community resilience is the ability for the community to help itself.

• Numerous stories emerged of community members helping one another.
  – People dumping possessions to make room for evacuees in their vehicles.
  – Similar acts of community in other disasters.

• We need to foster and enable this spirit within communities.
Insight 2: Build Community Resilience.

- Support for the victims of the Fort McMurray wildfires came from all over Canada and all sorts of backgrounds.
  – Community resilience seems to be enhanced by help from beyond municipal and provincial borders.

- We may need to re-define our concepts of community resilience beyond geographic boundaries.

Image Credit: www.ottawacitizen.com
Insight 2: Build Community Resilience.

• The actions of community members near and far can be classified as a form of spontaneous volunteerism.

• Spontaneous volunteers can have positive and negative impacts.
  – They are key to community resilience.
  – They will act whether you want them to or not.
  – Need to find ways to work with them.
Insight 2: Build Community Resilience.

• Communities are at the heart of building resilience to disasters.

• We may now need to expand our definition of community beyond simple geographical borders.
  – Some of the factors that enable community resilience may come from outside traditional community borders.

• The ability of communities to build resilience is underpinned by volunteerism.
  – Spontaneous volunteers will act and we need to be able to work with them and potentially integrate them in emergency response.
Insight 3: People Are Your Pillars.

• While tools and technology are important in an emergency, their utility is determined by the people using them.

• The system will fail if you have all the tools without the right people.

• How you select, train and take care of your teams is key to building resilience.

• But people are not always viewed in this way.
Insight 3: People Are Your Pillars.

• Do you run psychometric testing or other assessments during recruitment to select for traits like teamwork?

• Many organizations want specific traits but don’t recruit for them.
  – Some traits can be trained and reinforced.
  – But a lot is still dependent on the person.

• There is a need to recruit the right skills, culture and attitude when building resilient teams.

Image courtesy of Stuart Miles at FreeDigitalPhotos.net
Insight 3: People Are Your Pillars.

• The mental health of first responders is very important.
  – One of our recommendations from the 2013 Calgary Flood report.

• Tired individuals don’t always make the best decisions.
  – The mental effects of a disaster can linger and take a toll later on.

• It can be difficult for first responders to acknowledge that they need help and rest.
Insight 3: People Are Your Pillars.

• Leadership can make or break your emergency response.

• It enables flexibility, trust and the environment for innovation.
  –Cited as a key driver for FEMA’s successful Field Innovation Team.

• A combination of experience, knowledge and personal traits create good leaders.
  –Organizations need to foster an environment that constantly enables good leaders to emerge.
Insight 3: People Are Your Pillars.

- People can ultimately make or break the response to an emergency.

- Building resilience requires organizations to have the right people with the necessary skills, knowledge and traits.

- The short- and long-term mental health of those responding to emergencies needs to be managed well.

- This needs to be complemented with a leadership that encourages flexibility and innovation while promoting the growth of new leaders.
Three Key Insights For Building Resilience.

• This is not an exhaustive list but covers key recent insights:
  1. You can’t do it alone.
  2. Build community resilience.
  3. People are your pillars.

• We fully expect this list to evolve over time with new ideas.

• Building resilience is not just about meeting a set of targets.
  –It requires constant evolution to meet new challenges.

• Consider how the insights shared across the next few days can be used to build your resilience to future emergencies beyond just wildfires.