

Mental Health and Ice Breakup In Fort Simpson

April 27, 2022



Hello residents of Fort Simpson!

As we come to the end of April, we know that there's a lot of stress, fear, and anxiety building in the community about the possibility of flooding this spring. The Fort Simpson Volunteer Fire and Ambulance Department wanted to acknowledge this, and reach out to residents with some suggestions for how we can work together to prepare ourselves for the coming weeks. While we cannot affect what our rivers will do, we can affect how we plan for the situation and support each other as we go forward.

Now is the time to act, not worry!

Preparing for an emergency is the most important step and sometimes all that we can do in natural disasters. If you live or work on the island, ensure all important items are removed from your basement, that the drains are blocked, and that you know how to turn off your utilities in an evacuation. If the items are important enough to you that you cannot afford to lose them, get them ready to move off the island. If you have any family grave sites in low lying areas, such as the graveyard near the Manor, please consider removing flowers or other items so they can be replaced after the threat has passed.

You can find more preparation tips at:

<https://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/en/services/be-ready-emergencies/be-ready-floods>

If water levels rise, space will be made available at the Fire Department training ground to park vehicles including RVs, trailers, boats, and snowmobiles (the road at the top of the hill, opposite Rowes). Be sure to take pictures of all important items on and off island before you leave them unattended. Please note that those staying in their RV's for the duration of the evacuation are asked to instead park them at the designated camping spot (across the Highway beside the Village Shop) or elsewhere.

Pack for two weeks!

It is important that you prepare food, water, and warm clothing for you, your children, your Elders, other family members, as well as supplies for any pets you have. The Village of Fort Simpson is asking that people have enough food and supplies stocked up to last their family **THREE** days minimum. If we are not back in town by then, the Village will begin to distribute food and supplies to residents. Remember that a freezer full of moose meat or other items may

not stay frozen without power for long periods; make a plan for what you will do with it and other perishables.

Be sure to bring medications, important documents, a list of emergency contacts, and cash. If you are camping, take the time to inspect and test all equipment.

How to make a Family Emergency Kit:

<https://www.getprepared.gc.ca/cnt/kts/bsc-kt-en.aspx>

Regardless of your final destination, remember that conditions can quickly change in an emergency; pack extra safety supplies if possible. The VOFS and GNWT are committed to help those in need of assistance, but it is important we all do our part to ensure the safety of our families.

If you are still worried, that's OKAY!

A natural disaster is a very scary thing to experience as many of us learned last year. The threat of it happening again can be overwhelming, no matter where in Fort Simpson you live. If you are experiencing feelings of fear and anxiety about the possibility of flooding, please reach out for help.

Some ways to get help in our community are:

- Call a friend or family member
- Contact the regional Community Counseling Program at 695-2293
- Access free resources and crisis lines available such as:

Mental Wellness tips:

<https://mindyourmind.ca/>

Red Cross disaster relief and recovery:

<https://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/emergencies-and-disasters-in-canada/get-help-disaster-relief-and-recovery>

Hope for Wellness crisis line for Indigenous peoples:

web chat (<http://www.hopeforwellness.ca>) or 1-855-242-3310

NWT Helpline: 1-800-661-0844

Canadian Suicide Prevention Line 1-833-456-4566

How to talk to children and Elders about the flood

We often forget that children and Elders are at a higher risk in a natural disaster. These age ranges can restrict people physically and mentally from fully processing last year's flood or understanding the possibility of it coming again this year. It is important that you talk about the possibility of flooding with your family, while also reassuring them that you have a family plan, and that you will all be going to a safe place. Things are replaceable, but people are not. By talking with our families and friends about our plans, we can prepare them and ourselves mentally for the stresses of an emergency evacuation.

Emergency Planning for Children:

<https://www.getprepared.gc.ca/cnt/plns/mrgncychldr-en.aspx>

Kids Help Phone:

online chat (<https://kidshelpphone.ca/urgent-help>) or 1-800-668-6868.

In the event of a crisis or emergency please call 9-1-1 immediately. You can contact the fire and ambulance department directly at 695-2222 if required. The nurse-on-call can be reached at 695-3232.

Please remember to only call for an ambulance or nurse-on-call in the event of an emergency medical situation. But if it's an emergency, then that's what we're here for!

What if it floods again!?

This is not an unfounded fear, as this GWNT report (<https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/2022-spring-water-level-outlook-and-snow-surveys-high-snowfall-hay-and-liard-basins>) indicates there is still a possibility for flooding to occur. This uncertainty can worsen our fears and stress because we never know how high the water will get and we have no control over it!

Good emergency planning is the best way to mitigate the stress and damage an emergency can cause. If your home is in the flood risk zone, please prepare yourself in any way you can to safeguard yourself, your family, and your property. Those who are not at risk, please continue with your support of displaced friends and family. We know that last year was stressful for you as well!

Like all members of our Community, the FSFD has been feeling the stress as the river breakup approaches. In preparation, we have adjusted Department protocols to address issues brought up during our internal flood debrief, conducted additional training for our members (including mental health training), and have been working closely with the VOFS, LKFN, and other agencies to make sure a potential evacuation can be conducted as safely as possible.

We would like to thank the people of this Village for their continued strength and patience. We feel pride and gain courage from knowing that we are #FortSimpsonStrong and #DehchoStrong. It is by uniting as a community and looking out for one another that we will get through this.

Please share this post to inform our friends and family about the importance of supporting each other and our mental health during this difficult time.

Mahsi, thank you -

Your Fort Simpson Volunteer Fire and Ambulance Department

