



Mainland BC **Military Family Resource Centre**

News release

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BCMFRC pilots first ever emergency preparedness training for the ones left behind

Vancouver, BC – In times of crisis and natural disasters such as the recent spate of wildfires, we rely on the help of military members and first responders to keep us safe. But while they're looking after us, who's looking after their loved ones?

The Mainland BC Military Family Resource Centre (BCMFRC) is putting families first and piloting the first ever emergency preparedness sessions in BC specifically designed to meet the needs of families of military members and first responders.

"During a crisis, the natural reaction for families is to gather together as quickly as possible. However, for families of military members and first responders, that instinct often must be temporarily set aside so service can be given to others. BCMFRC is presenting these sessions to ensure family members are equally prepared when they become the ones left behind," said Tracy Cromwell, executive director of BCMFRC.

The lives of military and first responder families are unique in light of the combination of stressors they face that may include frequent relocations, persistent short and long-term separation, and the constant risk involved in training and deployed operations. In a thesis examining how military and first responders endeavour to balance professional and personal duties, author Joseph Shorrocks concluded that personal and family disaster preparedness and planning were found to significantly reduce the professional's perceived role strain and conflict.

Captain Jeffrey Daley, an adjutant/operations officer stationed in Kelowna with the Canadian Armed Forces British Columbia Dragoons, is a living example of the impact of being separated from family while serving country and community. Deployed five times internationally and three times domestically, he has also been the force generator for the local reserve unit and sent troops to assist with the BC forest fires. Over the course of his career, he has missed his children's births and supported from overseas his wife's transition to leading the household and making command decisions on her own without her spouse.

For him, the upcoming emergency preparedness sessions are vital in enabling him to serve his country and community to the fullest capacity.

"Self-sufficiency is the key takeaway of these important sessions. If our families cannot be self-sufficient, then it makes us less effective," said Captain Daley. "To explain, a soldier will want to take care of his or her family if he or she knows they cannot support themselves and will not want to deploy. We have to know our families are safe so we can help others. If I know my family is good, then my country knows it can count on me 24/7 doing what needs to be done."

The emergency preparedness sessions for families of military members and first responders take place in

Kelowna on Oct. 28 and Vernon on Oct 29 respectively. To find out more and/or sign up, go to www.bcmfrc.com. Additional sessions are planned in the New Year for Trail and Chilliwack.

Emergency preparedness tips for civilians

In light of recent forest fires that have resulted in massive community evacuations, here are some helpful tips that may be applied to any family – military, first responder or civilian.

- Have a 72-hour emergency kit ready. In addition to food and water for your family and pets, don't forget to include copies of prescriptions and some cash as ATMs may not be working.
- Establish in advance how family members will contact each other in event of an emergency.
- Predesignate a meeting place in case you are separated.
- Educate your family on how to respond to an emergency, decide on roles and responsibilities, and practice your plan using drills.
- Create an important documents file – hard copy or electronic – that you can take if you have to leave your home. Include bank and mortgage documents, powers of attorney, representation agreements, medical cards and records, insurance policies, passports, and birth, marriage and adoption certificates.
- Write a disaster love letter for your children to have on hand in case you are separated. Keep the letter short, age-appropriate, genuine (so it sounds like you), personal, and reassuring (for example, "I love you, and will be with you soon.").

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