



Advocates for Safer Airports in Canada

Briefing Note

Emergency Preparedness Gaps and Implications for Airport Response Capability in Canada

1. Key Finding — Auditor General Report

The Office of the Auditor General of Newfoundland and Labrador identified systemic deficiencies in emergency preparedness, including:

- Only a small percentage of municipalities have emergency plans
- Existing plans are often outdated and untested
- No consistent validation of emergency response capability
- Limited oversight to ensure operational readiness

➔ **Conclusion:** Emergency response capability is not demonstrably operational in many jurisdictions.

2. Why This Matters for Airports

Airports—particularly regional airports—rely on municipal fire services through:

- Mutual aid agreements
- Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)

These arrangements assume that municipal resources will:

- Respond quickly
 - Be adequately staffed and equipped
 - Integrate effectively with airport emergency operations
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3. The Risk Gap

Assumption (Current Model)	Reality (AG Findings)
Municipal response is reliable	Not validated
Response times are known	Not measured
Systems are coordinated	Not tested
Resources are available	Not assured

➔ **Key Issue:** Emergency response capability is being **assumed, not demonstrated**

4. Implications for Aviation Safety

Transport Canada’s ARFF risk assessment currently treats delayed municipal response as “unlikely.”

However:

- There is no verified data supporting this assumption
- Municipal systems have not been consistently tested
- Capability under real-world conditions is unknown

➔ **Result:** A critical risk may be underestimated or misclassified

5. Core Conclusion

Canada’s aviation safety system currently relies, in part, on emergency response capacity that has not been demonstrated to exist.

This creates a gap between:

- **Assumed capability**, and
 - **Actual operational readiness**
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6. Recommendations

1. **Validate emergency response capability**
 - Measure response times
 - Conduct realistic exercises

- Confirm resource availability
 - 2. **Reassess risk models**
 - Remove reliance on unverified mitigation
 - Reclassify scenarios where capability is unknown
 - 3. **Limit reliance on MOUs without proof of performance**
 - Require demonstrated capacity before integration
 - 4. **Establish national standards**
 - Ensure airport emergency preparedness is based on tested, measurable capability
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Bottom Line

Emergency preparedness cannot be measured by the existence of plans or agreements.

It must be measured by the ability to respond effectively when it matters most.

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