



# Metro Vancouver Extreme Weather Response Report and Evaluation 2008/09

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## Acknowledgements

Each year, the Extreme Weather Response (EWR) has been made possible through the commitment and work of literally hundreds of community volunteers and staff members of shelters across Metro Vancouver. It is impossible to name all of these volunteers and staff workers; however, it is still important to express our thanks and appreciation. Their dedication and nights of lost sleep assist hundreds of homeless people across this region to be safe in shelter during times of extreme weather.

In addition to those who work directly in the shelter sites, there are many people who spend hours planning and preparing for the extreme weather responses in their communities. Many do this work in addition to their regular tasks because of their commitment to helping some of our community's most vulnerable members. Their commitment ensures that the EWRs operate as smoothly as possible. Furthermore, their work provides a crucial community perspective in meeting the needs of the people who are homeless in their community.

The extreme weather response has been facilitated with operational funding from BC Housing since 2005 (<http://www.bchousing.org/>). Despite the pressures and complexity of this particular emergency shelter program, BC Housing has proven their dedication to this area of their portfolio with incredible flexibility and support to all of those who have been involved in the extreme weather response program.

The extreme weather responses across Metro Vancouver are supported through the Extreme Weather Task Group (EWTG) of the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy (<http://www.gvss.ca/>). It was the EWTG that identified the need for additional homeless shelters in the event of extreme weather, subsequently developed a community planning template, and secured the federal funds to develop extreme weather response plans. After the initial two year pilot project, the EWTG secured grants to coordinate implementation from the Government of Canada's National Homelessness Initiative (<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/homelessness/index.shtml>).

The EWTG also provides support and guidance to the consultants who have served as Extreme Weather Regional Coordinators on this project: Michelle Ninow (pilot project and 2003/04), Annie McKittrick (2004/05), Michael Anhorn (2005/06), Mary MacDougall (2006/07 and 2007/08), and Kevin Campbell (2008/09).

In addition, since 2006/07, BC Housing has provided funds for Extreme Weather Community Coordinators specifically for Vancouver (Grant Gayman) and for Surrey (Kevin Campbell, to March 2009). The coordination of this year's extreme weather response has continued to benefit significantly from this sub-regional capacity.

### Extreme Weather Task Group Members, 2008-2009

- Erin Barber, *OPTIONS Services to Communities Society*
- Kevin Campbell, *Regional & Surrey EWR Coordinator*
- Grant Gayman, *Vancouver EWR Coordinator*
- Judy Graves, *City of Vancouver*
- Allison Jones, *BC Housing*
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- Karen O'Shannacery, *Lookout Emergency Aid Society*
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## Introduction

### Purpose and Objectives of Evaluative Report

2008/09 was the sixth season of implementation for the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy (GVSS) Extreme Weather Response (EWR) program. Funding, this year, came from BC Housing, and the Homeless Partnering Strategy of the National Homelessness Initiative. This is the sixth evaluation of the Extreme Weather Response program in Metro Vancouver (formerly Greater Vancouver). Reports from these previous years, beginning in 2003/04, are available on the GVSS website: <http://www.gvss.ca/Other-Docs.html>. This year's report includes information from the eight communities that developed and carried out the Extreme Weather Response shelter planning.

The main purpose of this evaluation is to assess the provision of the Extreme Weather Response across Metro Vancouver, and to support continuous improvement and evolution of EWR programs across Metro Vancouver.

The evaluation has four objectives:

1. To provide an overview of the Extreme Weather Response planning and implementation in the 2008/09 season
2. To identify inputs, outputs and outcomes
3. To analyze the strengths and challenges of the EWR program
4. To provide detailed recommendations for consideration in ongoing development of the program.

### Scope

This evaluation covers the period from September 2008 through to March 2009 – the period that the EWR program was active at the regional level, and in the various communities. Analysis of the strengths and challenges contained within this report provide lessons that will enable greater future capacity for service delivery, more efficient delivery of services, and more accurate assessment of needs for consideration in partnerships with funders and participating community organizations.

### Methodology

This evaluation was created in collaboration with members of the Extreme Weather Task Group. Research methods were designed to be consistent with the objectives stated above.

The preparation of this report drew upon a number of sources, involving both qualitative and quantitative analysis, including:

- GVSS/EWR documents, including meeting minutes
- Service statistics collected and provided by BC Housing
- Ongoing feedback from local and regional EWR organizers
- Planning meetings with local EWR organizers.

## Overview of Extreme Weather Response in Metro Vancouver

### Background

Grassroots and informal extreme weather responses began in and around Metro Vancouver many years ago. For the most part, it was based on individual agencies responding to people standing and lying outside their doors on the coldest winter nights. Over the years, the City of Vancouver joined in and the ability to offer extra shelter sites during cold snaps was noticed in communities across the region.



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EWR plans were developed for Surrey, Langley, Richmond, and New Westminister by 2003, and Vancouver's response was documented. These plans set the framework for expanding community resources for homeless persons during the winter months to prevent hardships from extreme winter weather conditions.

In Richmond, Surrey, Langley, and New Westminister, EWR plans were developed by local steering committees. The community members involved in this planning process represented a broad array of organizations and agencies. The Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy, through funding from the Government of Canada's National Homelessness Initiative, assisted in the planning process through the provision of a consultant. In Vancouver, the plan reflected the Extreme Weather Responses already underway, primarily supported through provincial funding.

In 2004/05, the second year of operation, Richmond, Surrey, Langley and New Westminister continued to fine tune their EWR plans and these four communities, as well as Vancouver, implemented their plans. In addition, planning began in the North Shore (District of North Vancouver, City of North Vancouver, and District of West Vancouver), and Tri-Cities (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and Port Moody) as initial discussions on EWR planning started up in Burnaby.

During 2005/06, the North Shore's EWR Plan was implemented. Burnaby and the Tri-Cities both finalized all aspects of their plans, each with a critical difference: Burnaby required an

appropriate shelter site, while the Tri-Cities required an organization that would supervise and schedule volunteer staff for their EWR shelter.

In 2006/07, formal agreements were developed, through EWR policy requirements from BC Housing – developed in consultation with, and input from, the GVSS/EW Task Group. The EWR now had structured funding and supports, and the communities were required to meet BC Housing Policies and Procedures to access funds.

For the 2007/08 season, the GVSS worked with the eight sub-regions to meet BC Housing’s policy standards. Volunteer training was provided in Richmond, Langley and the Tri-Cities.

### **Purpose and Objectives of the Program**

The overall purpose of the EWR is to protect homeless people in Metro Vancouver from contracting a critical illness, becoming hypothermic, or dying due to exposure to extreme winter weather.

The central objectives for the region’s EWR have been to:

1. Provide safe and adequate temporary Extreme Weather Shelter to homeless people (in Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, New Westminister, Burnaby, Langley, the Tri-Cities, and the North Shore) during periods of extreme winter weather;
2. Coordinate community-based collaborations for all aspects of the EWR including meal provision, shelter, transportation, and communication;
3. Coordinate communication among communities implementing EWR;
4. Foster increased public awareness about homelessness in Metro Vancouver and the potential impacts of extreme weather on the homeless;
5. Develop trained volunteers to support the EWR;
6. Increase the sustainability of the EWR through further community development; and
7. Provide daily reports to BC Housing regarding the implementation of the Extreme Weather Response.

Some indicators for monitoring the success of the Extreme Weather Response planning and implementation are:

- That communities implement their EWR plans, as the weather requires, in a safe and effective manner;
- That homeless people in EWR communities can access shelter beds during extreme weather;
- That information about the extreme weather alerts within a community be circulated quickly and effectively – homeless people know when there is an alert and what resources are available to them; and

- That broader communication is maintained with the media through the EWR Regional Coordinator and at times with assistance of local community resources.

### Program Logic Model

The following logic model chart shows inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes for the Extreme Weather Response.

<b>Inputs</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Funding provided by BC Housing and the Government of Canada, Homelessness Partnering Strategy.</li> <li>2. Planning time given by staff and volunteers from non-profit service agencies, faith groups, municipalities and others with organizational support provided by a contracted consulting firm.</li> <li>3. Community donations from individuals, corporations, service clubs, faith groups and others.</li> <li>4. In-kind contributions, including facility space, food, blankets, winter clothing, hygiene kits, and volunteer time.</li> </ol>
<b>Activities</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review and revision of the eight EWR plans to meet BC Housing policy.</li> <li>2. EWR volunteer training.</li> <li>3. EWR implementation during periods of extreme weather.</li> <li>4. Response tracking coordinated with BC Housing.</li> <li>5. Media relations.</li> <li>6. Communication among EWR communities.</li> <li>7. Communication with funders.</li> </ol>
<b>Outputs</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Number of EWR shelter space nights provided.</li> <li>2. Number of nights EWR shelters available by community.</li> </ol>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improved access to emergency shelter during extreme weather.</li> <li>2. Reduced risk during extreme weather.</li> <li>3. Improved co-ordination of sheltering services during extreme weather.</li> <li>4. Improved understanding of local and regional needs during extreme weather.</li> <li>5. Increased public awareness of homelessness and extreme weather.</li> </ol>

### Activities

As in 2007/08, the two largest communities with the greatest populations of homeless people, Vancouver and Surrey, each had designated EWR Coordinators responsible for facilitating the EWR in their community.

The remaining 6 communities coordinated their responses through their respective EWR committees with varying degrees of success. The focus on effective EWR planning undertaken

prior to the 2008/09 season for all eight communities – consistent with BC Housing policy guidelines – established an effective baseline for EWR implementation, which is reflected in the success of the region’s improved delivery of the EWR.

While funding enabled greater regional coordination and a more coordinated response in Vancouver, each community plan still relied heavily upon donated services and resources, including everything from shelter sites themselves to food, blankets and, most importantly, volunteers. Under the facilitation of the EWR Coordinators in Vancouver and Surrey, and under the respective EWR committees in the other 6 communities, volunteers were trained so that they would be prepared to help provide a safe environment for clients, volunteers, and staff. This training includes guidelines for handling conflicts, protocol for ensuring a sanitary and healthy environment, and guidance on the importance of genuine listening. The training guidebook for EWR volunteers can be found on the GVSS website: (<http://www.gvss.ca/PDF/Volunteer%20Training%20Manual%202007%20Final%20Copy.pdf>).

The implementation of Extreme Weather Responses was quite successful, despite a volume of extreme weather that was unprecedented since the inception of the program. During a winter of significant snowfall and low temperatures, the provision of services was well planned, broadly implemented, and effectively executed. While there are numerous challenges associated with such activities, the increased planning and increasing geographical reach of EWR has provided greater, more formalized access to safe and secure shelter during extreme weather periods.

### Outputs: Service Statistics

Extreme weather, this past year, occurred over a significantly longer duration than previous years. Alerts were declared in Vancouver on 26 consecutive nights between December 12<sup>th</sup> and January 6<sup>th</sup> – an unprecedented stretch of extreme weather. Daily average temperatures hovered below zero during this time, and 89 cm of snow fell during the month of December – less than 1 cm short of the record December snowfall.

There were 67 alerts throughout the 2008/09 season where one or more of the eight communities implemented an EWR. EWR shelters provided beds spanning a range from 21 nights in the Tri-Cities to 47 nights in New Westminster. The bulk of both EWR alerts and EWR shelter nights fell over this cold and snowy period in December/January, although there were also a few EWR shelter openings in February and March, as illustrated in the chart below.

The geographic distribution of EWR shelter use throughout the region reflects a complex set of interactive factors. For example, the use of an EWR shelter will be less in a community with a more adequate supply of permanent shelter services. Conversely, a severe limitation in the provision of EWR shelters, such as a 10 PM opening, will likely impel many individuals to seek a shelter, potentially in another community, where they can attain space at an earlier hour. Aside from various interacting factors such as these, the use of EWR shelter sites can be considered, by and large, to reflect populations of homeless in the respective communities.

### Burnaby

Burnaby's 2008 homeless count found 59 homeless individuals. On the date of the count, Burnaby did not have any homeless shelter services open.

Over the 47 nights that the Burnaby Extreme Weather shelter was open at St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church in 2008/09, 1,175 bed nights were occupied. This sum accounts for 977 by men and 195 by women – an increase of almost 50 percent in EWR bed nights over 2007/08.

### Langley

It has been difficult to get an accurate count of people with no fixed address in Langley, as there has been no permanent shelter available and few places where the homeless congregate. The 2008 homeless count showed 74 absolute homeless people and 12 in a shelter.

Langley provided one EWR shelter site for the 2008/09 season – the Langley Evangelical Free Church. Among 31 nights, 351 bed nights were occupied. This total includes usage as follows: 304 men, 42 women, 5 youth and one family.

### New Westminster

New Westminster's 2008 regional homeless count identified a population of 135 homeless individuals. Local service providers and advocates consider as many as one hundred of these individuals to be 'entrenched' homeless – individuals that have lived without a fixed address for several consecutive years and experience multiple barriers to accessing stable, long-term housing.

For the 2008/09 season, two shelters sites – the New Westminster Salvation Army and the Lower Mainland Purpose Society – provided space for New Westminster's EWR. An alert was issued for 47 nights, with a total of 940 occupied bed nights: 819 by men, 114 by women, and 7 by males under 19.

### North Shore

In 2008, the North Shore homeless count found 128 homeless individuals throughout the community, about half of whom lived on the streets. The sole EWR shelter in the North Shore provided space on 38 alert nights. Over this duration, 373 bed nights were occupied; 359 by men and 14 by women. This total represents a modest decrease from the 2007/08 season.

### Richmond

Richmond's 2008 EWR plan provides a conservative estimate of 56 homeless people, 37 of whom are on the street, but also recognizes a broader population of transient homeless, mostly women.

For the second consecutive year, Richmond had two shelter sites available: Salvation Army's Richmond House and St. Alban's Anglican Church. Between these two sites, 44 and 37 nights of shelter were provided – more than double the 2007/08 season. A total of 469 bed nights were occupied: 401 by men and 68 by women. This use represents a 20-fold increase above the 2007/08 season.

### Surrey

In the 2008/09 season, five shelter sites operated within the City of Surrey. The shelters provided a wide range of nights, from 2 to 44. A total of 3,006 bed nights were filled: 2,231 by men, 749 by women, 23 by males under 19 years, and 3 by females under 19 years.

### Tri-Cities

The Tri-Cities communities have one EWR shelter – Trinity United Church in Port Coquitlam. This shelter was open for 21 nights during the 2008/09 season; 236 bed nights were consumed: 167 by men and 69 by women, including 22 families.

### Vancouver

The 2008 homeless count documented that there were 765 sheltered homeless people and 811 street homeless people for a total of 1,576 people in Vancouver. In 2008/09 the 11 Vancouver EWR sites provided a total of 2,149 bed nights of service. That figure includes 1,919 men, 223 women, and 7 youth under 19 years.

Vancouver's 2008/09 season marked the third year that a sub-regional coordinator was in place to help facilitate the EWR within Vancouver. Experience and relationships gained over the previous two years provided a solid foundation in garnering a large number of shelters to serve the demand of a large population. The progress in communication and coordination over these years also lent to more orderly openings and closures. Where possible, shelters in high volume neighbourhoods were opened on a rotational basis, which lessened the impact in localized areas and on sites themselves and also helped achieve greater longevity during the extended spell of cold weather that persisted through the most of December.

The 2008/2009 season also saw the formation of the Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT), a joint initiative of the City of Vancouver, the Province of BC and the Streethome Foundation. Under this initiative, five shelters were opened in various locations around the city's downtown core. Sometimes averaging over 400 persons each night, these facilities sheltered the increased number of homeless persons on Vancouver streets in a way that the EWR shelters were never intended to. While the availability of the HEAT shelters, with their earlier opening and longer operating hours, greatly reduced the number of individuals accessing EWR shelters in the Downtown Eastside, the average number of individuals in Vancouver's EWR shelters each night of an alert actually increased from the previous year (58 from 57). This reflects an increased number of homeless persons in areas outside of the city core and an increased number of shelter openings in those neighbourhoods.

The principal challenge for the 2009/10 season in Vancouver, aside from the challenges presented by hosting the Olympics, will be finding additional, new EWR shelter sites and service-providers. These are particularly needed outside of the downtown core to supplement the work being carried out at St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Tenth Avenue Alliance Church and Grandview Calvary Baptist Church. Fortunately, a number of potential sites have been identified: St. Patrick's Parish at 13<sup>th</sup> and Main, MOSAIC at Grant and Commercial, and the Vancouver Eastside Vineyard Church at 1648 E. 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue.

### Summary of 2008/09 EWR Data

The eight sub-regions in Metro Vancouver implemented their Extreme Weather Response plans with a span of 21 to 47 nights of extreme weather alerts in 2008/09. The communities provided a grand total of **8,699 bed nights**, offering shelter, warmth and safety on the coldest and most unwelcoming nights. This represents a 59% increase above the 5,457 bed nights occupied in the 2007/08 season which itself was a record.

**EWR Bed Nights by Sub-region and Year: 2003/04 – 2008/09**

City	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Burnaby				249	787	1175
Langley	13	162	61	118	146	351
New Westminister	93	367	346	79	1,396	940
North Shore			71	122	416	373
Richmond	1	2		36	23	469
Surrey	23	223	16	523	865	3006
Tri-Cities				142	212	236
Vancouver	495	1,880	1,613	3,147	1,606	2,149
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>625</b>	<b>2,634</b>	<b>2,107</b>	<b>4,416</b>	<b>5,457</b>	<b>8,699</b>

The preceding table illustrates the growth and development of EWR shelter spaces over the past six seasons of EWR planning and implementation. Despite some irregularities, such as Vancouver's extreme weather spike in 2006/07, there has been a rapid growth in the use of EWR shelter spaces. This growth, by and large correlates to the provision of EWR services in dynamic relationship to the frequency and length of extreme weather events.

### Outcomes

The logic model developed for the EWR program lists five outcomes. A few of these outcomes have quantitative indicators; most, however, use qualitative indicators.

#### Improved access to emergency shelter during extreme weather

During the 2008/09 winter season, there were over 600 extra emergency shelter spaces available to be opened during extreme weather. The availability of these shelter spaces led to 8,699 shelter spaces offered that would otherwise not have been available. This 59 percent increase in shelter beds represents both a significant growth in capacity and the necessity for more spaces because of more extreme weather. Additionally, there were 36 reported turn-aways at EWR shelters – a 27 percent reduction from the 2007/08 season. It should be noted that when turn-aways do occur, efforts are made to ensure the safety of those individuals as much as possible.



Photograph by Harrison Lansing, Copyright 2009

### Reduced risk during extreme weather

For homeless people who stayed at the EWR sheltering sites during extreme weather, the risks of illness, hypothermia and death were greatly reduced. Seven communities with EWR plans also have outreach teams to travel to areas known to be frequented by people who are homeless to disseminate information about the location of EWR sheltering site and to distribute hot drinks and blankets to those who choose to remain outside. In Surrey, recruited outreach volunteers provided this type of service on a regular basis. These outreach activities made a significant impact upon the success of the homeless being aware of the EWR sites, and feeling comfortable to access these sites.

### Improved co-ordination of sheltering services during extreme weather

During extreme weather periods, the Extreme Weather Regional Coordinator provided daily updates to BC Housing and to designated EWR communities as needed. This coordination helped with the overall sheltering services across the region.

The continued appointment of the two sub-Regional Coordinators for Vancouver and Surrey had a significant impact to ensure that there was excellent community information and action to meet the needs of the homeless in these more populous communities. The positive outcome of this coordination is amply visible by the increase in shelter sites and corresponding use.

Additionally, the EWR planning group in each community has developed strategies and contact lists to communicate more effectively with community based organizations, service providers, and directly with the homeless to ensure that those in need of EWR shelters are able to access the appropriate sites.

### **Improved understanding of local and regional needs during extreme weather**

Work with people who are homeless during extreme weather periods this past year taught many communities the importance of the Outreach Teams provided by BC Housing funding to spread the word about the availability and location of EWR shelters.

Lessons learned from previous years were reviewed and steps made to correct and alleviate the issues that were identified. For example, as had happened the previous year in Burnaby, when an alternate shelter site (in a church) was opened to provide respite to the ongoing church shelter site, far from the main homeless area, though transportation to the shelter and back could be offered, few would go to the EWR shelter. So it was noted that in successful planning, the EWR shelter sites need to be in the area, or at least close to the area, that their intended clients reside in.

Previously, the demand for media interviews demonstrated the need for ongoing regional coordination of EWR. The media demands were moderate for the Extreme Weather Coordinator who does not have the responsibility to implement actual EWR Plans. If media demand was placed upon the local EWR leaders who are working to ensure sheltering sites are open, their job tasks would be made much more difficult and would likely become overwhelming. Therefore it was encouraged that all media interests be filtered through the EWR Regional Coordinator who would respond to the media, and arrange media access to EWR sites at appropriate times, so as not to interfere with the work at hand—to open shelters.

### **Increased public awareness of homelessness and Extreme Weather Response**

In October 2008, the Homeless Action Week (HAW) developed by the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness once again served to focus media and public attention on the issue of homelessness.

The HAW public and media awareness events again were critical for the EWR this past year. Media attention contributes to the finding of shelter sites, volunteers and other resources.

Furthermore, the media allow the public to learn about the immense support of the volunteers in the local EWR communities and the need for longer-term solutions such as year round shelters, as well as affordable and supported housing.

## **Sustainability**

### **Local Extreme Weather Responses**

The financial sustainability of local EWR programs has been addressed by BC Housing's commitment to provide funding to communities that have an EWR Plan and that have negotiated a nightly operational budget with BC Housing. Communities are required to continue to be responsible to raise funds for any capital expenses (i.e. for mats and blankets). The Canadian Red Cross has committed to assist various EWR communities with emergency supplies such as hygiene kits and blankets to meet needs during EWR. This is a welcome community partner in this program.

With the financial sustainability of EWR plans secured, the availability of sufficient and trained volunteers continues has been an ongoing matter.

BC Housing also enabled some of the work during EWR that is coordinated by staff people in local agencies to receive monetary compensation for their time. This also strengthened the ability to meet the needs of the homeless during EWR.

### **Regional Extreme Weather Coordination**

The original vision of the GVSS Extreme Weather Task Group was to have the regional coordination phase itself out over time. The Regional EWR Coordinator, however, has continued to provide important services to the local EWR that if not provided at a regional level would make the local planning groups' tasks more difficult.

Before the extreme weather season starts, the Regional EWR Coordinator has proven to be an important position to ensure that each EWR community in Metro Vancouver reviews and updates its EWR plan. The Regional Coordinator serves as the catalyst to start EWR planning, provides administrative support to the planning groups and has support information exchange among the communities. These functions continued this past year, including the two sub-regional co-ordinators, to ensure all communities were ready and activated their EWR plans.

During the times of extreme weather, the Regional Coordinator has acted as a communication hub. During planning and evaluation, the Coordinator has exchanged information between the EWR communities in Metro Vancouver (as well as other areas of BC) so that they know what the others are doing and are aware of the troubles and successes other communities are experiencing. This has helped to maintain a level of consistency across communities.

In particular, the Regional Coordinator has been the main contact for all news media. Having one regional contact for the media has shown important benefits. It has protected EWR planning groups from the dealing with the onerous task of media relations while their time and energy needs to be focused on serving the homeless persons in their communities. It has also allowed consistent messaging with the media across the region.



## Metro Vancouver EWR Strengths and Challenges

### Strengths

1. Local communities were able to respond appropriately based on availability of local emergency beds and local weather conditions.
2. Developing centralized media relations and common key messages helped to manage requests for news regarding the homeless, especially at times of adverse weather conditions.
3. Region-wide communication during the extreme weather event via email worked well and helped to keep many people 'in the loop.'
4. Experience of EWR in several communities has contributed to positive movement towards more permanent services for homeless people.
5. Support for EWR in communities remains high both among those directly involved in planning and implementing the response, and among the public.
6. Communities appreciated the exchange of information and resources from other EWR communities as this helped to minimize the workload and allowed them to take advantage of lessons learned in other communities.
7. Availability of assured funding from BC Housing supported communities to activate their EWR. This relieved a large amount of stress they have experienced in previous years and allowed them to concentrate fully on providing shelter.
8. Collecting statistics and invoices from the sheltering sites, approved through BC Housing in an orderly and pre-determined method, ensured the statistics for this season were reported and funds could be disbursed smoothly.

### Challenges

Many of the challenges identified in past evaluations have been eliminated through the directions and planning by BC Housing, through its policy and procedures for EWR, and by the funding of homeless outreach services.

Challenges faced in 2008/09 included the following:

1. Some communities at times experienced difficulty in determining when to issue extreme weather alerts due to significantly different forecasts issued by different weather services. Communities outside of Vancouver seemed to rely mostly on the Weather Network whereas Vancouver relied mainly on Environment Canada. However, the strategy is for each community to make its own decision in activating their EWR.
2. Definitions of extreme weather, and the criteria for calling alerts in community EWR plans, diverged somewhat over the years. To some extent the resulting differences appropriately reflect the unique sub-regional circumstances. However, there is also a need to review each plan to strengthen consistency of these definitions and criteria.

3. Recently, the world community has become cognizant of the weather changes that are also impacting upon summer weather conditions that could also cause significant health risks for the homeless. This issue of extreme weather related to high temperatures and lack of access to cool accommodation or proper water for hydration needs to be addressed.
4. When an EWR coordinator becomes unavailable to provide services, this can disrupt implementation of the program. For example, when the person providing Metro Vancouver and Surrey EWR coordination encountered serious health issues in March 2009, this created discontinuity and resulted in gaps in the qualitative data for this evaluation report.

Each of these challenges can be addressed through implementation of the recommendations provided below.

### Recommendations

The evaluator offers the following recommendations for consideration by the Extreme Weather Task Group (EWTG) and the contracted EWR coordinators.

1. Encourage community EWR planning groups to develop more consistent extreme weather alert guidelines based on general risk to health and safety, with consideration of temperature, snow accumulation, precipitation and wind.
2. Facilitate end of season focus groups to evaluate the execution of the EWR in each community and consider ideas and options for the following year.
3. Encourage each EWR community to include in their plan the weather service they will use to call their alerts.
4. Ensure there are people ready to serve as back-ups for all EWR Coordinators.
5. Continue to explore options for protecting the health and safety of people living with no fixed address during periods of extreme hot weather.