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**Welcome Remarks to the**

**International Emergency Alerting Policy Workshop**

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* Thank you, and on behalf of myself and my colleagues at Public Safety Canada, I would like to join with our co-hosts and extend a warm welcome to all of you who are here today to participate in this workshop on emergency alerting policy and the Common Alerting Protocol - or CAP - standard.
* I would especially like to acknowledge all who have travelled to be with us, some from very great distances. In fact, I understand we have participants from five continents – Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe and North America – and that we have more than 80 registrants for this event.
* I would also like to point out the strong cross-sector participation of governments, industry,

non-governmental organizations and academia. Taken together, your presence is testimony to the importance of emergency communications and alerting in today’s world, a topic that clearly resonates around the globe.

* To give you perspective on why both my organization and I see this workshop as a valuable event, I would like to take a few minutes to provide you with some context regarding emergency management in Canada, and the role of Public Safety Canada.
* In the past, there were relatively few major disasters in Canada. However, starting in the 1960s and 1970s, the number of natural disasters began to increase steadily at the same time that many Canadians moved to large urban centres and societal vulnerabilities began to appear.
* These vulnerabilities began to intersect with a changing hazard environment, and the rate of disasters in Canada began to accelerate.
* For example, to put this in dollar terms to give you an idea by scale of disaster, before the mid-1990s, only three disasters in Canadian history exceeded

$500 Million in damages (adjusted to today’s dollars). However, major disasters caused by flooding in the Saguenay region of Quebec in 1996 and the Red River in Manitoba in 1997, as well as the Ice Storm in eastern Canada in 1998, quickly doubled the number of Canadian disasters exceeding this threshold.

* But the trend gets worse. Over the last 10 years, there have been nine major disasters in Canada costing

$500 Million or more, including wildland/urban interface fires in both British Columbia and Alberta, the 2003 SARS epidemic, the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, and most recently floods in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in 2011. These disasters have combined to cost Canadians over $1.1 billion annually.

* But this hazards and vulnerability interface is not decreasing. Indeed, today:
  + more than 80% of Canada’s population lives in urban areas;
  + one in three Canadians live in earthquake prone regions;
  + urban development is encroaching on forested areas, which is increasing interface fire risk;
  + approximately 20,000 hazardous substances spills occur every year; and
  + almost every major Canadian city is located in a flood plain.
* Given the increases in both hazards and vulnerabilities in Canada, it is more important than ever that public safety authorities have the tools that will allow us to rapidly and effectively alert our citizens to imminent threats to their health, safety and property.
* Within this context, Public Safety Canada is charged with supporting our federal Minister in his responsibilities to coordinate, implement or promote policies and programs that strengthen national public safety. To this end, we work in close collaboration with leaders from across Canada representing provincial and territorial governments, as well as police, fire, and emergency medical services, to strengthen Canada’s preparedness for emergency events.
* Under Canada’s Emergency Management legislation, the responsibility of our Minister extends to:
  + “promoting a common approach to emergency management, including the adoption of standards and best practices”;
  + “facilitating the authorized sharing of information in order to enhance emergency management”; and
  + “promoting public awareness of matters related to emergency management”.
* A key means through which the Canadian emergency communications community is working together towards these ends is through the *Communications Interoperability Strategy for Canada*.
* The *Strategy*, and its corresponding *Action Plan*, were developed to provide a structure for the creation of national policies, standards, and plans to improve responder and emergency communications capabilities in support of safety, operational, procurement and infrastructure efficiencies - with the end goal of leading to increased citizen safety and security.
* Two key priorities included under the 2012 *Action Plan* of the *Strategy* focus on national implementation of systems that utilize our Canadian Profile of the CAP standard - Canada’s National Public Alerting System and the Multi-Agency Situational Awareness System.
* Establishing a National Public Alerting System has been on the agenda of government officials in Canada for well over a decade. Over that time, efforts to create a system have evolved into a true public and private partnership, with Pelmorex Communications, the owner of the Canadian Weather Network television channels, as the builder, owner and operator of the National Alert Aggregation and Dissemination System, also known as NAADS.
* The NAADS collects emergency alerts from authorized government agencies, and makes them available to participating cable and satellite systems, television and radio broadcasters and other media outlets.
* With NAADS as its centrepiece, we have recently reached a milestone toward implementation of a Canadian National Public Alerting System, with Environment Canada and governments from 12 of 13 Canadian provinces and territories now having signed user agreements to issue or receive alerts through NAADS.
* Emergency management officials from all levels of government are continuing to work in partnership with Pelmorex and the broadcast community to implement a National Public Alerting System, and are also keenly interested in expanding the distribution of public alerts beyond television and radio broadcast, through such means as wireless devices and social media, with the objective of reaching as many of our citizens as possible, as quickly as possible, in the event of imminent threats to their safety.
* I also mentioned the Multi-Agency Situational Awareness System, or MASAS, as a key priority for the Canadian emergency management community.
* MASAS is a system-of-systems that can facilitate the sharing of location-based situational awareness information, in near real-time, within and among Canada’s emergency management community, as well as with our international partners.
* MASAS is not a replacement for existing systems now used by emergency management organizations and responders, but rather provides the framework, tools and standards to enable information sharing between organizations.
* Since 2010, MASAS was identified as a priority by Canada’s federal and provincial interoperability partners, and already, MASAS has demonstrated successes, with some provinces and territories and the Canadian Forces already using the system, while many other partners are working toward doing so in the near future. We are also working in partnership with our southern neighbour, the United States, to better prepare for cross-border emergency events, through the integration of Canada’s MASAS and the U.S.’s Integrated Public Alert and Warning System.
* You will hear more specifics from my colleagues later today about Canadian experiences and objectives with the implementation of MASAS and the National Public Alerting systems, along with the governance and management approaches we are taking with Canadian Profile of CAP.
* With the purpose of this workshop in mind, I also wanted to point out that we have recognized and continue to encounter policy challenges with respect to the implementation of national emergency alerting and information exchange systems. As a Department that must provide policy guidance, program support and technological solutions, Public Safety Canada confronts jurisdictional, organizational, regulatory and financial challenges to our interoperability and emergency alerting objectives every day.
* This is the reason that we are happy to be co-hosting and participating in this workshop, as it provides an invaluable forum to share our own experiences along these lines, and benefit from the knowledge and experience that all of you who have come here today bring from your own countries. On this point, I would particularly like to thank OASIS and Norm Paulsen from Environment Canada for the long hours and efforts devoted to making this policy-focused workshop a reality.
* Over the next two days I encourage you to actively participate in the discussions during this workshop. Your contributions and sharing of experiences will help lead to new ideas, better strategies and enhanced ways for emergency management organizations connect with each other and citizens in a timely and effective manner.
* Again, let me extend my warm welcome to this workshop and offer my best wishes for a successful meeting.
* Thank you.