

# Wildfire Evacuations in Canada: A Qualitative Review of the Canadian Wildfire Evacuation Experience

Celeste Scott, School of Administrative Studies, Professor Eric Kennedy

## Research Question

What is the current research involving experiences of wildfire evacuees in Canada?

## Abstract

My research looked at qualitative studies of Canadian experiences of wildfire evacuation to determine the key considerations in the evacuation process. A comprehensive search revealed 27 articles that were focused on the Canadian wildfire evacuation experience and were reviewed to reveal themes of what helped or hindered the evacuation.

## Methodology

In June 2020, a search was conducted using Web of Science, Omni, and Google Scholar using the search terms "wildfire", "evacuation", "experience", "shelter", "impact", "Canada", and "Canadian" to find peer-reviewed articles pertaining to our topic. This search method pulled up 791 articles, 19 of which met the inclusion criteria. Relevant articles were inputted into a database and tagged based on themes gathered from the abstracts of the articles. Once these articles were tagged, another search was conducted through the works cited and cited by lists of the articles to procure more relevant articles. This method helped us discover 8 new articles.



Key findings identified from each article were sorted inductively into 5 distinctive themes

## Planning

Communities, especially Indigenous ones, often do not have adequate evacuation plans which can lead to complications in communication, separation of families, and coordination of host communities.<sup>[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10]</sup> Evacuation plans should be created in advance and be tailored to the community with a list of responsibilities and roles assigned to those involved in facilitating the evacuation, a list of vulnerable people who should be the first to evacuate, and host communities.<sup>[1, 3, 4, 9]</sup>

## Wildfire Information

Timely and accurate wildfire information that is specific to each location needs to be delivered to key decision-makers as well as evacuees.<sup>[1, 4, 10, 12]</sup> Unclear wildfire information can lead to late evacuations, unprepared communities, and separation of families.<sup>[1, 3, 8, 9, 11, 14]</sup> Information for evacuees, while they are in host communities, is important for reducing stress.<sup>[3, 5, 10, 12]</sup>

## Families

Families should be kept together during evacuations whenever possible.<sup>[1, 3, 7, 11, 14, 16]</sup> Evacuees with low levels of social support face greater mental health issues than those who have a good support network.<sup>[3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 15, 17]</sup>

## Results

### Host Communities

Communities with similar foods, customs, and language should be selected as hosts.<sup>[3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 14, 18]</sup> Privacy for Indigenous Elders, breastfeeding mothers, and religious practices in evacuation facilities should be taken into consideration.<sup>[5, 10, 19, 20]</sup>

### Resilience

Community resilience can be fostered through social support, community leadership, and coping mechanisms and allows people to adapt while reducing the mental health impacts of disasters.<sup>[4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22]</sup> Things such as separation of families, being thrust into unfamiliar communities without support, and lack of control do not foster resilience.<sup>[10, 16]</sup>



Photo by Serghei Cebotari via MacLean's Magazine