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Government needs to answer for mismanagement of wildfire crisis

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The government's mismanagement of the 2015 wildfire crisis put families and communities at risk, according to SGEU, and an independent, public review is needed to ensure that the mistakes are never repeated.

SGEU is launching a campaign to urge people from Saskatchewan's north to call for a review, one that would be handled by an objective third party, and released to the public. It is also encouraging northerners to demand that government restore funding that has been cut from the Ministry of Environment in recent years.

"Government failed in its duty to protect and preserve, putting northern families, businesses, and communities at risk," according to SGEU President Bob Bymoer. "Now it's time for government to answer for its failure to be prepared."

SGEU is sending a brochure that highlights concerns about the mismanagement of the wildfire situation to residents in Prince Albert and the rest of the north. It identifies problems that contributed to the difficulties faced by firefighters and community members during the crisis, such as:

- a shortage of trained, experienced firefighters;
- a lack of equipment;
- no fire observers in towers; and,
- questionable management of scarce resources.

"Cuts to staff and resources impaired firefighting efforts, and we are providing information to community members to help them raise issues with their government decision-makers," says Bymoer.

While natural conditions meant this was guaranteed to be a severe wildfire season, short-sighted government decisions made the crisis much worse.

"If government hadn't cut the firefighting budget by almost half, replaced dependable tower observers with unreliable cameras, and cut the size of initial attack teams, there would have been a far stronger response to the fires from day one," Bymoer adds.

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Frontline firefighters have a unique insight into the challenges of the summer's wildfire crisis, but to date, they have not been asked for their assessment of the situation, Bymoer notes.

"We warned government that getting rid of tower observers was short-sighted, and that video cameras could not provide the same degree of accuracy in spotting fires, nor would they assist firefighters on the ground with communications," he says. "Unfortunately, our concerns proved to be well-founded."

"Our hope is that people will call on their government representatives to take responsibility for their actions," he adds. "It's in everyone's best interests to ensure that we have the capacity to handle any future wildfire crisis."

"We all need to speak out to ensure these mistakes are not repeated. Families and communities in Saskatchewan's north deserve better," adds Bymoer.

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View the [brochure](#).

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