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Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union

# NEWS RELEASE

**For immediate release**

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## **Demolishing fire tower observer posts risks public safety**

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The provincial government is putting public safety at risk by moving to demolish cupolas on the province's fire towers, according to SGEU. Destroying this infrastructure means that it could be extremely costly to return to the current human monitoring system that has proven effective and reliable.

"There is no need for the government to destroy these structures, especially without having tested the surveillance system in our environment," said SGEU President Bob Bymoan.

"We need to keep families and communities in forest fringe areas safe. And, we need to ensure that the lives of fire crew members are not in jeopardy. Fire tower observers are an essential link between frontline fire fighters and base headquarters. Video cameras can't perform that crucial three-way communications role," added Bymoan.

"The government is putting public safety, natural resources, and emergency response crews at risk by eliminating the jobs of fire tower staff. In addition, local economies will be hurt by the loss of fire tower observers, who support local businesses in the communities where they live and work," Bymoan said.

SGEU is asking the government not to proceed with destroying the fire tower cupolas where the fire tower observers are stationed.

"There are legitimate questions to be asked," Bymoan said. "Will the automated system function effectively in Saskatchewan's extreme weather conditions? Who will be monitoring the new system? What training have they received? And, who will provide the necessary communications link between fire fighters on the ground and base headquarters when all the fire tower observers are eliminated?"

"We ask government to be transparent with its plans for wildfire detection and management. Families and communities have the right to know how their safety will be affected by these changes," Bymoan said.

It is important to remember that no other jurisdiction in Canada relies solely on automated camera surveillance to detect and manage wildfires. “Why put Saskatchewan people and communities at risk when there is so much at stake?” asked Bymoan.

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