

# GREAT CANADIAN FIRE CENSUS 2022



The annual Great Canadian Fire Census, completed in April 2022, offers a comprehensive overview of fire departments nationwide. It gathers information on firefighters, services, call volumes, safety, and expenditures to assess the sector's status, address concerns, and suggest future recommendations.

## Results:

While the Census highlights the sector's exceptional productivity, it also reveals challenges such as **declining firefighter numbers, rising emergency calls, growing training costs, equipment expenses, and the reclassification of firefighting as a top-tier carcinogenic profession**. These factors pose a significant threat to Canada's overall fire, all-hazard, and emergency response capabilities. Table 1 summarizes some key findings:

**Table 1: Key Findings**

	Estimates	Percentages
Total number of firefighters	126,000	.
Number of volunteer firefighters	90,000	71% of total
Number of career firefighters	36,000	29% of total
Number of vacant positions	15,000	12%
Number of women firefighters	14,000	11%
Number of firefighters over 50	31,000	25%
Number of departments reporting calls due to consumer fireworks	600	18%
Number of departments reporting deaths or injuries in homes that could have been sprinklered	144	4%
Total number of calls	2,021,218	.
Percentage of calls related to fire suppression	7%	.
Percentage of calls related to extreme weather events	9.5%	.
Percentage of medical-related calls	44%	.
Total expenditures	\$5,885,419,607	.
Number of departments that deferred purchases	1418	41%
Number of departments that deferred training	775	24%
Number of fire trucks needed	800	25%
Number of fire stations needed	600	18%
Number of departments who need new communications systems	600	18%

Sources: CAFC, 2022

## Discussion:

Three key areas:

1.  
**Protecting & retaining Canada's supply of firefighters & response capacity**

2.  
**Reducing community risk**

3.  
**Improving the government's ability to address the following concerns**

## Concerns to address:

**Declining supply of firefighters:** it is estimated that Canada has about 126,000 firefighters within its 3200 fire departments, a drop from 156,000 as reported in a Canadian study conducted by National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

**Increasing demand for service:** With declining supply of new firefighters, demand for service is going up. Fire Departments responded to an estimated 2M calls. Only 10% were fire suppression related. An astounding 50% were due to emergency medical responses; 30% were due to all-hazard responses, from vehicle extrication to high angle, water rescue, dangerous goods and other; and 10% was due to atypical climate emergencies. This may be due to the convergence of the climate crisis, healthcare crisis, and personnel shortages.

**Increasing risks:** Call volumes and severity are intensified by the known risks of firefighting. Firefighting is inherently dangerous. There were at least 600 injuries and over 60 deaths that are considered line of duty deaths, whether they were at the active line of duty, presumptive, or succumbing to mental health injury.

**Firefighter exposure:** Repeated exposure to trauma is associated with high risk of post-traumatic stress disorder. Adding to the awareness of mental health injury and highlighting the physical dangers of firefighting, the International Association of Cancer Research recently reclassified firefighting as a top tier carcinogenic profession.

**Resource challenges:** The CAFC's study showed that 41% of the country's fire departments have had to defer training and equipment for more than two years due to fiscal pressures. Of the \$5.6B in fire department expenditures, only 15% is attributed to the 2000+ volunteer fire departments.

## Recommendations:

Reinstate a federal Joint Emergency Preparedness-type program to replenish firefighter resources, support Bills like C224 for Firefighter Cancer, and C-201 for the volunteer firefighter tax credit. Sustain federal commitment to first responder mental health.

Mitigate community risk by implementing sprinklers in new affordable housing, FireSmart™ practices against wildfires, and a ban on consumer fireworks sales. This will enhance safety and reduce fire-related fatalities and injuries.

Explore the establishment of a national fire advisor and administration, akin to the US Fire Administration, to foster a comprehensive government approach to the fire sector, addressing multifaceted challenges.

## Conclusions:

The 2022 Census, involving collaborative efforts, reveals key challenges in the Canadian fire sector: reliance on volunteers, vacancies, and financial issues. Despite responding to 2 million calls, inherent dangers occasionally lead to injuries and fatalities. The Census reflects a united sector, with nationwide department participation, showing commitment and community support.



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**NOTE:** The information presented within the current summary report is not an exhaustive list of the available results. For more details, please read the full report [here](#).