



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA
Offices of / Bureaux de
Richard Cannings MP
and / et
Niki Ashton MP

Honourable François-Philippe Champagne
235 Queen St
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0H5

April 17, 2024

&

Honourable Randy Boissonnault
140 Promenade du Portage
Gatineau, Quebec
K1A 0J9

Dear Ministers Champagne and Boissonnault:

We write to you today in your roles as the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada and the Minister for Employment and Social Development. These federal agencies are responsible for developing the National Occupational Classification (NOC).

Our concern with the NOC is the classification of wildfire fighters. Currently wildfire fighters are classified as silviculture workers rather than as workers in front-line public protection services. While in the past wildfire fighting was an additional job expected of forestry workers that is not so today. Due to the increasing frequency and severity of wildfires as well as the expansion of the urban/wilderness interface, battling wildfires is no longer a matter of resource protection and is now a matter of protection of the public.

The current NOC is obsolete, listing the duties of wildfire fighters as:

- complete firefighting reports;
- maintain firefighting equipment;
- dig trenches;
- cut trees; and
- pump water on burning areas to fight forest fires under direction of fire suppression officer or forestry technician.

Today's wildfire fighter is a full time profession with these duties:

- respond to a variety of emergency calls related to wildfires, floods, landslides, and other natural disasters.
- control and extinguish fires using manual and power equipment, such as axes, water hoses, firing devices, chainsaws, chemical retardants, and aviation resources.
- administer first aid;
- ensure proper operation and maintenance of firefighting equipment;
- prepare written reports on fire incidents;
- inform and educate public on wildfire prevention;
- train to maintain high level of physical fitness;
- assist the public, the police and emergency organizations;
- conduct inspections for ensure compliance with wildfire legislation.

In addition to these basic requirements, wildfire fighters may also be required to parachute or use helicopter rope suspension techniques to access fires, both of which require additional training not expected of other firefighters.

While it may seem inconsequential as to how wildfire fighters are classified under NOC, there are serious consequences caused by this exclusion.

Firstly, firefighting is an especially risky profession in both urban and rural areas. Working in dangerous environments, facing extreme temperatures and noises, and exposure to harmful chemicals all have the potential to lead to serious long-term illnesses. Firefighters are at increased risk of cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease, mental health concerns, noise-induced hearing loss and cancer. Due to the different NOC classifications wildfire fighters, unlike urban firefighters, do not have access to presumptive insurance coverage for injury and disability available to other firefighters.

Secondly, since forest fires don't burn on a regular 9 to 5 schedule, a large portion of a wildfire fighters' salary is overtime. These earnings are not included as a pensionable service which means their pensions are severely lower than they should be.

Finally, because wildfire fighters are not included in the NOC as public safety occupations, the federal *Income Tax Act Regulations* prevents them retiring at the same age as urban firefighters.

With these considerations in mind, we ask that the NOC for wildfire fighters be reconsidered to ensure fair treatment of these vital public safety professionals, whose services will be called upon increasingly as our climate changes.

Sincerely,



Richard Cannings MP
South Okanagan – West Kootenay



Niki Ashton
Churchill—Keewatinook Aski