

BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING – COVID-19 RESPONSE

Issue

The Minister may be asked questions with respect to the continuity of the department's operations and its planning activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Messages:

- The Department of Justice is currently refining its operational planning in response to the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic within the Northwest Territories.
- The department is working closely with other GNWT departments and with Federal, Provincial, and Territorial counterparts on best practices and preparations.
- The department's operational priorities when confronted with any emergency include:
 - Ensuring the safe and secure custody of inmates
 - Ensuring continuity of essential court operations
 - Reducing impacts as much as possible on vulnerable populations who receive services from the department or are impacted by its operations
- Staff safety is always of paramount concern, especially for our frontline service providers. The department has implemented a range of measures to protect staff, including advisories on mitigation best practices and procedures, assessment tools for COVID-19 indicators, potential service delivery changes (i.e. working remotely), and protocols in the event of client or staff exposure within the workplace.
- Departmental contingency plans will be utilized in the event of staff shortages and include a range of options for ensuring continuity of essential operations.
- The RCMP have their own emergency management planning committee in accordance with their operating standards, and have a continuity plan in place. The RCMP also participates on the Territorial Planning Committee which supports NWT-wide emergency response planning.

Current Status

Continuity of Operations

- The department has activated its Business Continuity Plan and is closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation while working with other GNWT Departments, Federal/Provincial/Territorial counterparts and emergency management officials, to both plan for and assess impacts on our operations.
- Corrections is an essential operation for the department and has been a focus of planning activities in recent weeks. Operational planning within Corrections started in January 2020. Plans are in place for the health and safety of inmates as well as contingency plans for staff shortages.

- Corrections Management including Facility Management will facilitate regular calls to provide status updates. The frequency will be dependent on level of activity, but will not be less than once per week.
- Corrections has existing procedures in place to handle cases of influenza and other respiratory illnesses such as the COVID-19 virus. Specific mitigation activities in response to COVID-19 are:
 - Enhanced screening of inmates upon intake utilizing a COVID-19 specific assessment tool
 - Increased health information signage
 - Reinforcement of standing orders and directives with respect to communicable diseases
 - Increased hygiene regimes (i.e. washing of hands, cleaning of high contact services, etc.)
 - Screening of visitors entering the building; those who appear to be symptomatic will not be granted access.
 - Bolstering of personal protection equipment supplies

Confidential to the Minister

- Corrections Senior Management is currently assessing approved leave within the correctional facilities. Direction may be required to recall essential staff to duty due to operational requirements. The department is working with the Department of Finance to determine messaging and the point at which notification would be sent.
- Corrections security protocols and contingency plans cannot be shared publically. Plans are in place to assess risk and respond accordingly via a variety of operational contingencies including:
 - Increasing temporary absences
 - Isolating inmates who are sick in designated areas within the facilities;
 - Closing and/or repurposing the smaller facilities
 - Redeploying facility staff
 - As a last resort and only in the case of severe staff shortages, lock downs would be considered. This would in part be needed for the safety of redeployed staff who may have limited security training.
 - Inmates who are symptomatic would be locked down and isolated. They would still be offered daily showers and fresh air with appropriate personal protective equipment supplied (as operationally sustainable). Corrections consults with the Chief Public Health Officer to determine the best courses of action for implementing isolation and maintaining inmate wellbeing.

- The Chief Judge of the Territorial Court and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court each issued a directive on Friday, March 13th with respect to court operations. The directives:
 - Cancel all circuit courts until May 1st for Supreme Court and June 1st for Territorial Courts
 - Cancel all jury trials until May 1st
 - Require the utilization of video conferencing/phone appearances for a range of court matters
 - The full directives are available online on the NWT Courts website

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- The Chief Judge and the Chief Justice are convening a joint criminal “Bench and Bar” meeting at noon on Monday, March 16. Representatives of PPSC, the defence bar, Courts Administration and the Territorial Prosecutor have been invited. It is reasonable to expect that the two directives could be adjusted as a result of that meeting.
- The department continue to engage with regional staff as part of its information sharing and preparedness activities.. Most recently teleconferences with all Corrections Managers (Probation Managers and Facility Wardens) and NWT Courts staff were held on Friday, March 13th.
- A summary of the department's services that will be maintained as essential is attached as Appendix A.

Potential Service Delivery Changes and Disruptions

- The department is making arrangements for several areas within the department to work from home (if required and feasible) to maintain service delivery. Several areas are able to perform functions over the phone and work from home to maintain service delivery, including portions of Community Justice and Policing operations, Legal Aid, Probations and corporate management functions.
- Communication plans are in place to respond to changes in any service delivered by the department (essential or not). In the event of service delivery changes or disruptions advisories are planned through notifications to key stakeholders, website updates, posting of signage and through corporate communications.
- In the event of severe impacts (and on a “worst case scenario” basis) several areas within the department may close depending on staff levels and the potential need to redeploy non-essential personnel to maintain essential operations. Areas that are subject to closure in these circumstances include:
 - Maintenance Enforcement
 - Rental Office
 - Office of the Public Trustee
 - OROGO

- Legal Registries
 - Family Information Liaison Units
 - Corporate management functions
- Given that several of these areas have statutory mandates it could be necessary to introduce legislation to retroactively “bless” a shutdown.

Background

- The COVID-19 respiratory virus was first detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019.
- An outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 3, 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- The COVID-19 viral disease was declared a pandemic by the WHO on March 11, 2020.

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Key Messages:

- The Department of Justice is currently refining its operational planning in response to the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic within the Northwest Territories.
- The department is working closely with other GNWT departments and with Federal, Provincial, and Territorial counterparts on best practices and preparations. Examples include sharing of business continuity plans and operational procedures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several provincial/territorial counterparts have shared operational level planning as has Corrections Service Canada.
- The department's operational priorities when confronted with any emergency include:
 - Ensuring the safe and secure custody of inmates
 - Ensuring continuity of essential court operations
 - Reducing impacts as much as possible on vulnerable populations who receive services from the department or are impacted by its operations. **Note for Minister:** Officials from HSS, ECE, JUS and NWTHC are meeting this morning to discuss services provided to vulnerable populations in light of the pandemic.
- Staff safety is always of paramount concern, especially for our frontline service providers. The department has implemented a range of measures to protect staff, including advisories on mitigation best practices and procedures, assessment tools for COVID-19 indicators, potential service delivery changes (i.e. working remotely), and protocols in the event of client or staff exposure within the workplace.
- Departmental contingency plans will be utilized in the event of staff shortages and include a range of options for ensuring continuity of essential operations.
- The RCMP have their own emergency management planning committee in accordance with their operating standards, and have a continuity plan in place. The RCMP also participates within the Emergency Management Office (EMO) coordinated by MACA.
- The Territorial Planning Committee, also led by MACA, provides oversight of the NWT Emergency Plan and coordinates/leads emergency management planning for the GNWT and public agencies.

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- Corrections is an essential operation for the department and has been a focus of planning activities in recent weeks. Operational planning within Corrections started in January 2020. Plans are in place for the health and safety of inmates as well as contingency plans for staff shortages.
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Appendix A

Department of Justice Essential Services: COVID-19 Response

Operating Area	Essential Services	Continuity of Delivery
Corporate Management Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal Division to support HSS/MACA (emergency issues) • Legislative support to HSS/MACA (emergency issues) • Media/policy support to Minister and Department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote work capabilities enabled if required.
Coroner's Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Community Coroner's have been identified to assist in a back-up capacity if needed. • Remote work capabilities enabled if required (to provide support to community based Coroner's)
Public Trustee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution of payments on behalf of represented persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote work capabilities enabled if required.
OROGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incident Response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote work capabilities enabled if required.
Maintenance Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote work capabilities enabled if required.
NWT Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service delivery pursuant to Chief Justice and Chief Judge's direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritization of courts, remote work capabilities enabled for portions of service delivery, staff re-deployment

		identified if required.
Victim Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victims of Crime Emergency Fund payments • Support to victim service workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote work capabilities enabled if required.
Correctional Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe and secure custody of inmates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingency plans implemented as needed.
Probation Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court ordered client contacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote work capabilities enabled if required.