

A New Direction for Disaster Response in Canada

At a time of budget constraints and increasing natural and man-made disasters, Canadians should look to international best practices to save time, money and ultimately lives.

A new approach to disaster relief and emergency response in Canada based on the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) would have tremendous advantages for Ontario and for Canada.

This concept would make the best use of the assets already in place and it would bring in members of the huge pool of motivated but unused citizen-volunteers in Ontario and across the country. In the most cost effective way it would enhance Ontario's ability to best support municipal response and ultimately, if accepted by all levels of government, it could result in the establishment of a national disaster relief organisation.

Germany, like Canada, is a federal state in which emergency management is responsibility of the states or provinces. For more than 60 years, the THW has dealt with disasters of all kinds at home and abroad. The THW is one of the founding members of INSARAG, the UN International Search and Rescue Advisory Group.

Today, the THW is one of the most modern disaster relief organisations in the world; it operates on a model that has been modified and strengthened over the years. It is built on a country-wide structure made up almost entirely of volunteers. Its members and their units are based in almost 700 large, medium and small communities across Germany. These THW detachments are organised, trained and equipped to respond quickly to local emergencies at the request of local first responders.

The THW's first priority is disaster mitigation in support of first responders (e.g., shoring of damaged buildings and other structures). However, it also has a very important rehabilitation and reconstruction role in the follow-up phases of disaster relief operations.

Members are ordinary men and women drawn from all walks of life trained to the highest standards. They have one thing in common, readiness and the training needed to help people in distress. The THW operates under the principle of identification with and proximity to the citizens most affected by disasters who are very often their neighbors.

The organisation promises responsive and efficient help in a threat situation. It gives the population confidence in the ability of local, state and national governments to provide quick and effective action to protect their safety and well-being.

The German model would have to be adjusted to Canadian needs. But the concept is well-proven and could serve as a model for a Canadian disaster relief organisation. The German government and the THW are ready to give Canada the benefits of their experience of over 60 years of operations domestically and internationally.

We are currently determining how the German THW legislation could be adapted to Canada.

Please find below a short overview of the THW. More detailed information on the THW is available at <http://www.canada.diplo.de/contentblob/4043682/Daten/3664226/thwdownload.pdf>

I would be very happy to answer any questions you may have and I look forward to discussing the concept with you in more detail.

Many thanks for your interest and for including me in your Roundtable discussion

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German Federal Agency for Technical Relief, THW



The THW is a federal institution which works closely with states and municipalities to provide trained personnel and equipment to support local first responders in dealing with man-made or natural disasters, such as floods, large fires, explosions and earthquakes.

The THW is special – it is unique in its structure – worldwide. So far, it is the only technical disaster relief organisation which is **based almost entirely on volunteers**. 80.000 volunteers based in detachments in all the major cities and towns in Germany make an invaluable contribution to Germans as well as internationally. Although the THW is federally funded and equipped, its detachments provide a quick and effective response to the needs of local governments in times of emergencies. In Germany, as in Canada, emergency management is the primary responsibility of the Länder or provinces. The THW was founded after WWII (1950), more than 60 years ago; it is indeed a proven and valuable organisation.

THW has continually adapted its structures to changing threat situations. But well-trained specialists and modern equipment are the basis for its continuing high efficiency.

Range of tasks

It is its wide range of capabilities, its commitment and the quality of its work which have earned the members of THW the excellent reputation it has both at home and abroad. Whatever kind of technical support is needed, THW volunteer experts are ready to help.

The organisation's tasks, listed below, are legislated by the German parliament in the Act of the Federal Agency for Technical Relief:

Technical Threat Prevention

- Search, rescue and salvage
- Clearing and blasting
- Rescue from water dangers
- Fight against flooding and inundation
- Lighting of operational areas

Technical Support to Infrastructure

- Electricity supply
- Drinking water supply
- Waste water disposal
- Bridge work

Command/ Communication, Logistics

- Establishment and operation of command centres
- Command support
- Creation of temporary telecommunications systems
- Establishment and operation of logistic bases
- Catering and care of operational staff
- Maintenance of material, repair and maintenance work for mission equipment
- Transportation of consumer items for mission demands

Technical Support in the Protection of the Environment

- Mitigation of oil damage
- Water analysis

Help to the Population

- Electricity and drinking water provision
- Waste water disposal
- Establishment and equipping of emergency accommodation and collecting points with matching infrastructure (such as temporary camps for Syrian refugees in Jordan)

Further Technical Support

- Technical help on traffic routes
- Rescue from heights
- Diving
- Temporary road works
- Maintenance of civil protection facilities (emergency wells, shelter)

As members of a respected civil protection organisation, THW citizen-volunteers become valued partners of the state. They help governments at all levels to meet the public expectation that the state will provide a basic level of care in threat situations. THW volunteers think of themselves as partners with the state in a common cause – to protect the population as best they can from a wide range of possible dangers.

The THW has a thriving youth group that is its most important recruitment tool. It also ensures that children and teenagers grow up in an environment in which they see the importance of taking responsibility and helping people in need and learn valuable skills and knowledge for the rest of their lives.

For more information please see: http://www.thw.de/EN/Homepage/homepage_node.html