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SEARCH AND RESCUE VOLUNTEER ASSOCIATION OF CANADA HUMANITARIAN WORKFORCE



LABRADOR CITY WILDFIRE EVACUATION Request for Federal Assistance (RFA) - HWF Deployment 15 to 25 July 2024

AFTER-ACTION REPORT

Final - 25 November 2024

HWF2024-002

**Labrador City Wildfire Evacuation
Request for Federal Assistance (RFA) - HWF Deployment
15 to 25 July 2024
After Action Report
HWF2024-002**

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1. INTRODUCTION:

With Canada's ever changing disaster risk profile, the ability for governments at any level to effectively respond to emergencies is increasingly being strained under the sheer frequency and severity of disasters. Recognizing the need to better engage and support Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in emergency management, the Government of Canada created The *Supporting a Humanitarian Workforce to Respond to COVID-19 and Other Large-Scale Emergencies* program.

Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (PSC), understanding the inevitable challenges to the capabilities of today's emergency management response, accepted the Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada (SARVAC) application to initiate a national concept of operations so that the Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) Associations across Canada could respond en masse with trained volunteers to assist with humanitarian aid where and when needed.

SAVAC developed the National Search and Rescue Operations Concept (NSOC) to clearly identify the plans and actions required to execute a national emergency surge response for SARVAC and its associated members. This timeline approach, with guidance and directives, allows SARVAC to respond to an incident based on a clear understanding of the response requested and its own capabilities.

In response to the Labrador Wildfire Evacuation Request for Federal Assistance (RFA), SARVAC Humanitarian Workforce (HWF) employed the 10 Phases of the NSOC:

1. Notification
2. Survey
3. Alert
4. Formation
5. Mobilization
6. Deployment
7. Tasking
8. On-Site Debrief
9. Demobilization
10. After Action Report

Phases 1 through 9 of the NSOC encompassed all actions taken to effectively respond to the RFA.

This document, prepared under the authority of the SARVAC President and under the direction of the SARVAC HWF Program Director, is Phase 10 of the NSOC and the culmination of a National After-Action Report (AAR) exercise which included the participation of the SARVAC Executive and Board of Directors, participating Provincial and Territorial GSAR Associations, and GSAR responders.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

On Monday, 08 July 2024, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture advised that a forest fire (2024-619: Lac Hugette West) was burning West of the towns of Labrador City and Wabush, near the Quebec – Labrador border and that the province was actively monitoring.

By Friday, 12 July, the province was observing severe fire behaviour that was expected to continue into Saturday and that the fire had the potential to grow significantly closer to Labrador West in the next 24 to 48 hours. Consequently, an Evacuation Order was issued for Labrador City which would affect close to 9000 residents.

While local GSAR teams from Happy Valley - Goose Bay, Churchill Falls, and Labrador West were already activated by provincial and federal policing authorities on 12 July and supporting the evacuation efforts, an RFA from the province, including support to be provided by the SARVAC HWF was approved on 14 July. A SARVAC HWF budget submission and Contribution Agreement was approved on 17 July but backdated to include all HWF response preparations and activities as of 15 July.

A phased deployment commenced on 15 July and by 20 July all HWF Responders were on site and fully engaged in providing the supports as requested under the RFA.

On Saturday, 20 July it was declared that forest fire 2024-619 was now “under control” and that the evacuation order would be fully rescinded by Monday, 22 July. The demobilization of SARVAC HWF Responders commenced on Wednesday, 24 July and by Thursday, 25 July all personnel had returned to their points of origin.

This AAR will explore the SARVAC HWF deployment in response to the RFA (chronology of events), readiness activities to prepare for the planned HWF response, the deployment successes, the challenges experienced, the lessons learned, as well as an analysis of the feedback received from the SARVAC HWF Responders under NSOC Phase 8: On-Site Debrief, the After Action Hotwashes, and the responses received from the Post-Deployment Online Survey.

Once the AAR is approved by the SARVAC Executive, Board of Directors, Executive Director, and the SARVAC HWF Program Director, the lessons learned will be incorporated into an Improvement Action Plan which will help the HWF program grow and mature to be better prepared for future deployments.

3. CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS:

On **Monday, 08 July 2024**, the Province of NL, Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture advised that a forest fire (2024-619: Lac Hugette West) was burning West of the towns of Labrador City and Wabush, near the Quebec – Labrador border and that the province was actively monitoring.

By **Friday, 12 July**, the province was observing severe fire behaviour that was expected to continue into Saturday and that the fire had the potential to grow significantly closer to Labrador West in the next 24 to 48 hours. Fire # 619 was officially declared to be “Out of Control”, and an Incident Management Team (IMT) was established in the Province of NL Provincial Emergency Operations Center (PEOC) in St. John’s, NL and was fully activated by 1200 NDST on Saturday, 13 July.

The Town of Labrador City, with an estimated 9,000 to 10,000 residents, was placed under an **Evacuation Order** and the Town of Wabush was placed under an **Evacuation Alert**. Residents of Labrador City were requested to travel to Happy Valley - Goose Bay (HVGB) where they would be registered at the local arena.

Emergency Social Services (Salvation Army and Canadian Red Cross) were activated by the province to assist with reception services, and local GSAR teams from HVGB, Churchill Falls, and Labrador West were tasked by provincial and federal policing authorities to support the evacuation efforts.

On **Saturday, 13 July**, the President and Provincial Training Officer for the Newfoundland and Labrador Search and Rescue Association (NLSARA) joined the IMT at the PEOC to help coordinate GSAR activities in Labrador. As it was determined that an RFA was forthcoming, to include HWF resources, the SARVAC HWF Program Director (PD) also joined the IMT at the PEOC in the morning and later held a virtual briefing with the SARVAC HWF Project Team to advise of the pending RFA and the actions to be taken.

On Sunday, 14 July, an RFA was submitted to PSC by the province for the provision of short-term accommodations and food services for evacuees. While HWF support was requested, the requirements were not clearly identified to PSC. As it was anticipated that these supports would be soon clarified, and that the RFA would receive Ministerial approval, a second team member was brought into the PEOC by the SARVAC HWF PD to assist in information gathering for the preparation of an RFA budget submission.

The SARVAC HWF National Incident Support Team (NIST) was stood up and Command and General Staff positions were assigned.

By late evening on Sunday, 14 July, the RFA was approved by the Minister of Public Safety.

On **Monday, 15 July**, work by the SARVAC HWF NIST concentrated on the drafting of a RFA project submission and budget to determine the logistics, travel requirements and the costs associated with deploying 100 SARVAC HWF responders to Labrador for up to 14 days. The drafting of an Incident Specific Service Agreement (ISSA) between SARVAC HWF and the Province of NL for the provision of HWF support as requested under the RFA also commenced. Two surveys under the SARVAC HWF

Data Management System (DMS) were initiated by the SARVAC HWF NIST Operations Section Manager (OSM) to determine the availability of GSAR volunteers in Atlantic Canada (wave 1) and Quebec and Ontario (wave 2) to deploy as the SARVAC HWF.

The Town of Labrador City declared a **State of Emergency**.

By **Tuesday, 16 July**, over 6,365 individuals had registered with the Canadian Red Cross as evacuees. 6 shelter sites were established for evacuees, one site being Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) 5 Wing Goose Bay which was already at capacity with 725 evacuees. The other 5 shelters housed the remaining evacuees who could not secure personal arrangements for meals and lodging and the province required the support of local GSAR teams at these shelters for the provision of site security and safety.

Work also commenced by the province and NL Hydro to re-commission a section of the Muskrat Falls Hydro Electric Project Construction Camp (45 kilometers west of HVGB) which housed the workforce while the dam and power station were being built. As the project was completed in 2022, the camp had been dormant for 2 years and required some rehabilitation work to allow for safe occupancy by evacuees. Once partially re-commissioned, it was anticipated that up to 450 rooms would be made available to the evacuees being sheltered in HVGB (other than 5 Wing), thus allowing for the closure of the 5 other shelter sites in HVGB. Once the Muskrat Falls Construction Camp opened, the SARVAC HWF mission of shelter support would migrate from HVGB to the Muskrat Falls Camp.

On **Wednesday, 17 July** at 1145 NDST, the SARVAC HWF RFA Project and Budget Submission was officially approved by PS (and backdated to start of business on Monday, 15 July). As the mission objectives remained the same, GSAR volunteers already field deployed in HVGB and Labrador West officially transferred from provincial GSAR jurisdiction to SARVAC HWF jurisdiction.

Additional SARVAC HWF Responders from GSAR teams near St. John's were activated. SARVAC HWF support equipment was removed from storage in St. John's and prepared for ground transport to HVGB, departing on the morning of Thursday, 18 July.

Ground transportation for SARVAC HWF Responders already deployed in HVGB was secured through vehicle rentals.

HWF Responders in HVGB forward deployed to the Muskrat Falls Work Camp to assist in the preparations to receive evacuees commencing on Thursday or Friday, while also still providing shelter support in HVGB.

Efforts continued to identify GSAR volunteers from Atlantic Canada who were still available to deploy as SARVAC HWF Responders and air and ground transportation arrangements were made for the movement of additional personnel to Labrador.

On **Thursday, 18 July**, 12 SARVAC HWF Responders travelled to HVGB to augment HWF responders already on deployment. Shelter support continued at HVGB as well as support to the province and NL Hydro in preparing the Muskrat Falls Construction Camp to receive evacuees.

A Mission Incident Support Team (MIST) was established at the Muskrat Falls Construction Camp.

Some SARVAC HWF Responders began to demobilize for rest and recovery as they were relieved by responders who had recently deployed.

On **Friday, 19 July 2024** another 12 SARVAC HWF Responders travelled by air transport to HVGB to augment those already on deployment. The Muskrat Falls Construction Camp opened and started to receive evacuees and 5 shelter sites in HVGB began to close as evacuees relocated to Muskrat Falls.

On **Saturday, 20 July 2024** an additional 13 SARVAC HWF Responders travelled from Atlantic Canada to Muskrat Falls to support operations at the Muskrat Falls Construction Camp. Shortly after their arrival, it was announced by the Province of NL that Fire # 619 was now “Under Control”, the Evacuation Order was being lifted and a phased re-entry approach to Labrador West would be implemented. Essential workers were permitted to return to Labrador West immediately, with a full rescinding of the Evacuation Order by noon on Monday, 22 July.

At the request of the province, a road checkpoint was established by SARVAC HWF Responders at the junction of Route 500 and Route 510 to monitor the road travel of essential workers from HVGB to Labrador West.

While the support being provided by SARVAC HWF had expanded to include road checkpoint duties for the repatriation of evacuees from HVGB to Labrador West, through discussion with the Province, the NIST and the MIST Response Coordinator (RC), it was determined that given the low number of evacuees currently housed at Muskrat Falls, and with the number of SARVAC HWF Responders now on deployment, all further deployment efforts would cease as the mission could now be safely and effectively managed by the number of HWF Responders currently on deployment.

On **Sunday, 21 July**, SARVAC continued to provide site security and safety at the Muskrat Falls Camp as well as maintaining the road checkpoint at the junction of Route 500 and 510. It was observed that the number of evacuees housed at the Muskrat Falls Camp was declining as evacuees began to return to Labrador West.

Work commenced at the MIST for the conduct of the On-Site Debrief and the finalization of the Demobilization Plan.

On **Monday, 22 July** the province advised that all evacuee shelters would close at noon on Tuesday, 23 July and that SARVAC HWF would be able to demobilize at that time. Flight arrangements were made by the NIST to demobilize all SARVAC HWF Responders to their point of origin on Wednesday, 24 July and the ground transport of SARVACH HWF deployment support equipment to the storage depot in St. John's would commence at the same time.

Site security and safety continued at the Muskrat Falls Camp and the road checkpoint at the junction of Route 500 and 510 was maintained.

On **Tuesday, 23 July** site security and safety continued at the Muskrat Falls Camp and the road checkpoint at the junction of Route 500 and 510 continued. By late afternoon, all evacuees had left the Muskrat Falls Camp to return to Labrador West. An On-Site Debrief was held with all SARVAC HWF Responders and more HWF Responders from local Labrador GSAR teams began to demobilize.

On **Wednesday, 24 July** the MIST at the Muskrat Falls Camp stood down and all SARVAC HWF Responders began the demobilization phase by air transport to their points of origin and by road transport to convey the SARVAC HWF deployment support equipment back to St. John's. By 1700 NDST on Wednesday, all SARVAC HWF Responders who had travelled by air transport had safely arrived at their point of origin.

By 1700 NDST on **Thursday, 25 July** the remaining SARVAC HWF Responders who had travelled by ground transport had safely arrived at their point of origin. The NIST stood down and the SARVAC HWF Labrador Wildfire RFA response ended.

4. READINESS ACTIVITIES:

The following readiness (and follow-up) activities were undertaken by SARVAC and the HWF Project Team in response to the RFA from the Province of NL to support the Labrador City Wildfire Evacuation.

4.1 National Search and Rescue Operations Concept (NSOC) Phase 1 – NOTIFICATION:

- SARVAC was notified that the Province of NL would be submitting an RFA including the provision of support services by HWF.
- The SARVAC HWF Program Director assumed the role of the NIST Director (DIR).
- The SARVAC Executive was made aware of the RFA-related query.
- The NIST DIR initiated the formation of the NIST.
- The NIST OSM initiated the SARVAC HWF Responder Availability Survey.
- The drafting of an RFA proposal and budget commenced in addition to the drafting of an ISSA between the SARVAC HWF and the Province of NL.
- The Communications List was established in the SARVAC DMS, www.monday.com.

4.2 NSOC Phase 2 – SURVEY:

- A survey was disseminated on behalf of NIST DIR to establish the availability of HWF Responders.
- The Survey Dashboard was monitored, and it was identified that the Responder availability and skill set met the numbers and capabilities requested by the Province through the RFA.
- The SARVAC President accepted the recommended RFA response which was conveyed to PSC.
- PSC advised that they authorized SARVAC HWF to proceed with deployment preparations.

4.3 NSOC Phase 3 – ALERT:

- The NIST DIR issued the Alert Status Notice to the affected Provincial GSAR Associations that the deployment is **CONFIRMED**. Responders from Provincial GSAR teams began to organize and ready themselves for deployment.

4.4 NSOC Phase 4 – FORMATION:

- The structure and complement of the NIST was reviewed and deemed to be sufficient at this time for the deployment.
- The NIST DIR appointed an RC who would establish the MIST to support SARVAC HWF operations while on deployment (as required to meet the requirements of the mission).
- The DMS Survey Dashboard was continually monitored, and a “Code of Conduct” was drafted and disseminated to all GSAR personnel who were selected to deploy.
- Mission Ready Groups (MRGs) were assigned.

- The RFA Proposal and Budget were approved by PS through a Contribution Agreement with SARVAC HWF which then formed the Incident Support Plan (ISP).
- The ISSA between the Province and SARVAC HWF was signed by SARVAC HWF and the Province.
- The Agency Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) in cooperation with the Salvation Army confirmed that meals and lodging would be provided to all SARVAC HWF Responders for the duration of the deployment.

4.5 NSOC Phase 5 – MOBILIZATION:

- Travel arrangements for HWF Responders from their points of origin to the Base of Operations (BoO) were confirmed.
- Travel documents were provided, and pre-deployment briefings were held with all HWF Responders.
- The location and status of all HWF Responders was continually monitored.
- The status of all supplies and equipment was continually monitored.
- All costs were tracked for the duration of the incident.

4.6 NSOC Phase 6 – DEPLOYMENT:

- All HWF Responders arrived at the BoO and were checked-in by the RC who remained accountable for their location, safety and well-being at all times.
- Accommodations were assigned and Orientation Briefings were held.
- Sufficient time was allotted for rest, relaxation and self-care.

4.7 NSOC Phase 7 – TASKING:

- The RC confirmed that all SARVAC HWF taskings were as identified in the RFA proposal and agreement, that they were shared on an equitable basis among all HWF Responders, and that they were conducted in a safe and efficient manner.
- The RC maintained open communications with Site Supervisors at the Muskrat Falls Work Camp, the NIST and Agency Representatives in the PEOC.
- Daily Operational Briefings were held with HWF Responders and the RC provided daily Status Reports to the NIST DIR and the NIST.
- Information and resources were provided to all HWF Responders concerning self-care and mental wellness.
- No deviations from the approved RFA submission and the ISSA were identified.

4.8 NSOC Phase 8 – On-Site Debrief:

- Prior to demobilization an On-Site Debrief was organized by the RC and held with all HWF Responders.
- Mental wellness resources were made available to all HWF Responders once they returned to their point of origin.
- Hotwashes were also held with all HWF Responders who deployed under the RFA.

4.9 NSOC Phase 9 – DEMOBILIZATION:

- The AHJ advised that the Evacuation Order was being lifted and that the SARVAC HWF could stand down.
- The Demobilization Plan was activated, the necessary ground and air transportation arrangements were made, and all travel documentation was provided to HWF Responders.
- The travel status of all HWF Responders was monitored from their point of departure until their arrival at their point of origin.
- All HWF Deployment Support Equipment was tracked during demobilization, inventoried, cleaned, repacked, and readied for the next deployment.
- The NIST DIR received confirmation that all HWF Responders had returned to their point of origin.
- Once all logistics tasks were completed, the Logistics Section stood down.
- A follow-up mental wellness e-mail will be sent to all HWF Responders.

5. DEPLOYMENT SUCCESSES:

1. No health and safety, near misses, challenges or concerns were identified or experienced during the Labrador City Wildfire Evacuation RFA.
2. The SARVAC HWF effectively deployed to Labrador, NL and met the services and supports requested by the Province of NL under the RFA in the timeline required.
3. The SARVAC HWF was able to effectively negotiate and implement an ISSA with the Province of NL prior to the HWF deployment.
4. The SARVAC HWF was able to negotiate an RFA Budget and subsequent Contribution Agreement with PS to support the deployment under the RFA issued by Province of NL.
5. Monday.com was implemented as a new data management system and proved to be an effective and efficient platform for the planning and support of the SARVAC HWF deployment.
6. Standardized GSAR training across Provincial and Territorial Associations proved to be effective and efficient when GSAR volunteers from across two provinces were deployed under the RFA to achieve a common mission.
7. The on-hand inventory of SARVAC HWF Deployment equipment ensured that the necessary supplies to support the HWF Responders was available, ready, and in place for the personnel and operations when they arrived at the BoO.
8. The leadership displayed by the SARVAC Board, Executive, Executive Director and Program Director was exemplary and provided clear direction to the NIST and MIST as to the expectations for RFA service delivery.

6. DEPLOYMENT CHALLENGES:

6.1 - RFA Deployment Funding Challenges:

While the intent of the SARVAC HWF program is to timely and effectively respond to large scale emergencies in Canada from coast to coast to coast, constraints remain on the activation and deployment of SARVAC HWF Responders.

Funding is provided to the SARVAC HWF in an annual project budget delegation to develop emergency readiness (capacity building). Funding for the reimbursement of expenses for emergency response under an RFA must be identified and negotiated through a separate Budget Submission and Contribution Agreement which is only approved after an RFA is received. Even when an RFA Budget Submission is approved and a Contribution Agreement is in place, expenses incurred during an emergency response must be borne through existing SARVAC delegations and reimbursed after the fact. In the case of an HWF deployment or long duration or of a large magnitude, subsequent RFA deployments, or one that occurs later in a fiscal year, SARVAC HWF response efforts will likely be impacted due to cashflow issues resultant from the lack of available funds within existing, in-year delegations.

In the case of the Labrador Wildfire Evacuation RFA, the budget submission was accepted within 48 hours of the approved RFA, and the Contribution Agreement was in place shortly thereafter. There were also sufficient in-year funds available in the existing SARVAC delegation to cashflow the anticipated, short, 14-day deployment. It should be noted however, that in the 2-days waiting period for funding approval and the Contribution Agreement, planning did continue but no actions were able to be taken without having these approvals in place.

This will likely not always be the case and therefore, other methods for funding SARVAC HWF deployments under a RFA should be explored so that resourcing does not become an issue during an emergency humanitarian response.

6.2 - Negotiating Incident Specific Service Agreements “In-Situ”:

As was the case in the RFA to the Nova Scotia Snow Event in February 2024, SARVAC HWF once again found themselves in a position where they had to enter negotiations with the province for an ISSA during the RFA, and before any deployment of personnel and equipment could commence.

In this incident, the SARVAC HWF PD was co-located with the Director of Emergency Services (appointed as the Incident Commander for the province) when the PEOC was activated. Negotiations surrounding the ISSA were therefore face-to-face, included all interested parties such as the Department of Justice, were streamlined and efficient, and consequently an ISSA was signed and in place when the RFA Budget Submission was approved.

This was not the case with the RFA for the Nova Scotia Snow Event in February 2024. Partners were in different provinces and therefore negotiations of the ISSA were conducted virtually. As meetings

and discussion could not take place face-to-face, bringing all parties together in crisis management, the process stalled, negotiation of an ISSA failed, and the SARVAC HWF was unable to deploy to support emergency response efforts in Cape Breton.

As has been previously identified, the negotiation of overarching Service Agreements between SARVAC HWF, Provinces, Territories and Indigenous Governments / Communities should take place before Canada, Canadians and Indigenous Peoples find themselves in a time of need when an emergency response surge capacity is so desperately required but not readily available. With Overarching Service Agreements already negotiated and in place, only specific details will be left to be identified and resolved when an RFA is received and the SARVAC HWF is requested to deploy.

6.3 - The Incident Command System Operational Period Planning Cycle (Planning P):

In the first two-days following the declaration by the Province of NL that the Labrador West Wildfire was “out of control” and the invocation of an Evacuation Order for Labrador City, the operational tempo was such that the SARVAC HWF personnel imbedded the PEOC became “task saturated” and consequently there was very little interaction with the remainder of the NIST, with formal briefings only taking place during the morning and evening situation reports or on an ad hoc, as required, basis.

When the concept of the NIST was adopted in 2022, it was agreed that SARVAC HWF would follow the Incident Command System (ICS) doctrine which follows the Incident Action Planning (IAP) process to help synchronize operations and ensure that they support the incident objectives and to provide a consistent rhythm and structure to incident management.

The IAP provides clear direction and includes a comprehensive list of the tactics, resources, and supports needed to accomplish the objectives. The various steps in the process, executed in sequence, help ensure a comprehensive IAP. The IAP is a cyclical process and follows and Operational Period Planning Cycle (Planning P).

The “Planning P” has the steps for planning in the shape of the letter “P.” The leg of the P (lower portion) is where the planning cycle starts. This consists of the occurrence of an incident/event, notifications to responders, initial response and assessment, incident briefing and the initial Incident Command meeting. These actions all constitute the “Initial Response”. Once the incident moves into more long-term planning the steps in the loop of the letter “P” are activated. This includes the Objectives Meeting, Command and General Staff Meeting, preparing for the Tactics Meeting, Tactics Meeting, preparing for the Planning Meeting, Planning Meeting, IAP Preparation and Approval, Operations Briefing, New Operations Period Begins, and Execute Plan and Assess Progress.

The SARVAC HWF NSOC is not an operational function but rather a planning function which follows 10 distinct phases with associated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The adaptation of the “Planning P” to fit the NSOC will allow for a more clear, structured, and controlled approach to deployment planning in the initial hours and days of an incident. The adoption of the “Planning P” will also ensure a consistent rhythm within the NIST that will synchronize planning and guarantee that all personnel are always engaged in initial and ongoing response planning. The ICS “Planning P” can be found in Annex 2 of this document.

6.4 - Provincial GSAR Jurisdiction and SARVAC HWF Jurisdiction:

In Canada, emergencies are managed at the local level (hospitals, fire departments, police and municipalities). If they need assistance at the local level, they request it from the province or territory. If the emergency escalates beyond their capacity, the province or territory seeks assistance from the federal government.

An RFA is how the province or territory formally requests support from the federal government in their emergency response efforts.

In the case of the Wildfire in Labrador West, which resulted in an Evacuation Order for the Town of Labrador City, NLSARA and their GSAR teams in Labrador West, Happy Valley – Goose Bay and Churchill Falls were activated under a provincial agreement.

Once it was determined that the provincial resources would soon be overwhelmed by the sheer number of evacuees who would require support, an RFA was issued and approved, and the SARVAC HWF was requested to activate and respond.

When the RFA was approved and SARVAC HWF activated, the support services requested of the SARVAC HWF under the RFA were the same as those already being provided by the GSAR responders currently employed, therefore all responders migrated from provincial GSAR association jurisdiction to the SARVAC HWF jurisdiction.

Had the support services currently being provided by provincial GSAR responders not aligned with the support services requested under the RFA, then these responders would remain under the provincial GSAR authority or the RFA would have to be amended to place all GSAR responders under the SARVAC HWF umbrella.

As is the case in ICS doctrine, the “Transfer of Command” is the formal function of moving responsibility for incident command from one Incident Commander to another. It does not mean that the individual assuming responsibility for the incident is more qualified, it simply identifies a change in jurisdiction. If possible, it should take place face-to-face, include a complete briefing capturing essential information, and formally documented.

In the Labrador Wildfire Evacuation response, both NLSARA and SARVAC HWF were imbedded in the PEOC which did lead to some ambiguity with respect to which association was the responsible authority; both internal to the GSAR community and externally to response partners once the RFA was approved.

While it is recognized that the requesting Province or Territory is always in charge of the overall response in their jurisdiction, inevitably, Provincial or Territorial GSAR associations will always be “first on the scene” for disaster response ahead of the SARVAC HWF. When SARVAC HWF is activated and responds under an RFA, and the support services align with those requested under the RFA, a process to formally identify and acknowledge who is the responsible authority should be adopted to provide more clarity going forward.

In addition, the SARVAC HWF should, where possible, avoid co-locating senior NIST personnel with the AHJ during a deployment. Instead, a SARVAC Agency Representative should be assigned to represent the interests of the SARVAC HWF in the Emergency Operations Center established by the AHJ. This should also assist in establishing clear lines of authority and communications.

6.5 - The National Incident Support Team (NIST) and Time Zone Challenges:

Canada is a large country, spanning almost 10 million square kilometers, with 13 Provinces and Territories, and 7 time zones, and while the intent of the SARVAC HWF program is to timely and effectively respond to large scale emergencies in Canada from coast to coast to coast, our vast geography does pose some unique challenges.

One such challenge is planning and managing a SARVAC HWF response when the Command and General staff of the NIST live in different Provinces or Territories across the country. Some Command and General Staff currently reside in the Newfoundland Time Zone while others are in the Pacific and Mountain Time Zones.

For the NIST to effectively manage the SARVAC HWF response to the Labrador City Wildfire Evacuation RFA, some staff were required to start their day very early in the morning while others were not able to finish until late in the evening, which afforded very little time for rest and recovery. These hours of work in support of the NIST did not include other SARVAC HWF duties that are part of regular work plans and could not be ignored.

While this operational tempo can be maintained for short periods, it is unrealistic to expect that it can be sustained over time in the event of longer HWF deployment.

SARVAC HWF must explore and employ options to operate as a NIST more effectively to manage an HWF deployment while at the same time ensuring employee health, safety, wellbeing and the ability to manage workload. Options to consider may include:

- The sharing of responsibilities. Assigning two people to senior Command and General Staff positions to ensure availability when required, while at the same time providing sufficient hours of rest and the ability to attend to other SARVAC HWF duties.
- Training additional personnel to the minimum level of Incident Command System I-300 and providing operational mentoring and experience so that “time-on / time-off” rotations for NIST staff can be established.
- Evaluating the scale and magnitude of the RFA early in deployment planning to determine which of the following courses of actions for the NIST activation would best meet the national-level planning and support oversight required by the NIST when deployed:
 - Maintaining a virtual NIST and working within the constraints of the time zone challenges.
 - Deploying the NIST to the SARVAC Headquarters in St. John’s, NL.
 - Deploying the NIST to a central location, preferably in the same time zone of the Province or Territory where the HWF has been activated and deployed.

6.6 - SARVAC HWF Communications with GSAR Volunteers Regarding HWF Deployment:

The SARVAC HWF offers sincere thanks to the many GSAR volunteers across Central and Eastern Canada who responded to the Labrador City Wildfire Evacuation RFA Availability Surveys and for their frank and honest feedback that was provided in the Post-Deployment On-Line Survey and during the Deployment Hotwashes. The opinions and comments can be found in Annex 1 of this document.

In addition to the feedback provided, the internal Deployment Hotwash of the SARVAC HWF Project Team also identified many of the same concerns and areas for improvement. While some of the issues can be attributed to the project migrating to a new DMS in June 2024, which will be resolved as the system is fine-tuned, others will require more in-depth analysis and potential refinement of the NSOC and the associated Phase SOPs.

Responder Availability Survey: Once it was determined that an RFA was being issued by the province, a Responder Availability Survey was initiated by the NIST. This survey gathered the basic responder information, the identification of the requisite skills that were required under the RFA, and the availability of volunteers to deploy for periods of 7, up to 14 days.

Given that the request was for up to 100 HWF Responders for up to 14 days, the survey capture area was expanded to include Central and Eastern Canada to ensure that sufficient volunteers would be identified to meet the needs of the RFA.

While efforts were made to confirm that a deployment was not imminent and that not all respondents would be selected to respond, communications from the NIST were sometimes vague and often duplicated, and many volunteers assumed that once they positively responded to the survey, that they were now on standby to deploy and therefore began to alter personal, family and work plans to ensure their availability.

The period from the initial survey to the actual deployment spanned several days and as time passed, the window of availability for several responders began to close. Some volunteers rightly identified this as a source of frustration as they waited for definitive information and action from the NIST. Several suggestions were brought forward to help refine the survey process to better align the needs of the RFA deployment and the valuable contributions being offered by HWF volunteers:

1. Given the small number of personnel requested and the short duration of the RFA, SARVAC HWF should have assumed that they would identify the number of volunteers, and the skill sets required for the RFA. A firm deployment date and plan should have been established before the Availability Survey was initiated. This would reduce the waiting period of the volunteers and better ensure their availability.
2. Instead of requesting availability for 7, up to 14 days, a calendar block of days should have been identified so that the request for availability would be clearer and those available for 14 days should have been considered first due to their flexibility (wave 1, wave 2).
3. Once it was identified that the requirements of the RFA would be met by the GSAR associations in Atlantic Canada and that the period of the RFA would likely be shorter, the remaining Associations should have been stood down sooner.

On-Site Deployment Communications. Several survey respondents felt that communications while on deployment should have been more formally structured such as the Initial Briefing, Daily

Briefings, and the procedures for the transfer of duties (i.e. fire watch and roadside checkpoints). While many of these procedural documents exist and are clearly identified in the NSOC Phase SOP's, all policy and procedure documents associated with HWF communications at the MIST level should be provided to the RC as a Deployment Handbook and include in all future deployments.

Deployment Briefings: While the Deployment Briefings were well received, several volunteers felt that they should follow a more structured format to keep them shorter and more concise, that meeting topics should be addressed by the position responsible (i.e. operations, planning, logistics, finance, etc.), and that once the meeting was completed the meeting recording should be distributed to all volunteers who were deploying but may not have been able to attend the meeting.

It was also suggested that a one-page briefing should also be provided to outline important deployment information such as ground transportation on site, accommodations, meals, weather to be expected, duties and responsibilities, and a packing checklist for personal items.

It was appreciated that sufficient time was allotted for a question-and-answer session.

6.7 Live Log Keeping:

While all NIST and MIST personnel kept comprehensive notes during the Labrador City Wildfire Evacuation and information regarding important decision gates are captured in e-mails and the DMS software, SARVAC HWF has currently not adopted a mechanism for live log keeping by all personnel during an HWF deployment.

Live log keeping during an HWF deployment is crucial for several reasons:

Real-Time Coordination. Accurate and timely logging helps coordinate efforts between the NIST and the MIST. This ensures that resources are allocated efficiently, tasks are prioritized appropriately, and responses are synchronized, reducing the risk of duplication or gaps in assistance.

Situational Awareness. Live logs provide a continuous update on the evolving situation. This allows decision-makers to understand current conditions, track progress, and adjust strategies as needed. It helps in adapting to changes on the ground and responding to emerging needs more effectively.

Resource Management. By keeping a live log of resources deployed, consumed, and needed, teams can manage logistics better. This includes tracking supplies, personnel, and equipment, which is essential for maintaining effective operations and ensuring that critical resources are available where they are most needed.

Communications. Live logs facilitate communication amongst the NIST, MIST and MRG's on field deployment by providing a shared, up-to-date record of activities and decisions. This helps in maintaining transparency and ensuring that everyone involved has access to the same information.

Documentation and Accountability. Accurate logging serves as a record for accountability, helping to document what actions were taken, by whom, and when. This is important for evaluating the effectiveness of the response, learning from the experience, and providing a basis for any future inquiries or reports.

Evaluation and Improvement. After the mission, live logs can be reviewed to assess what worked well and what could be improved. This helps in refining protocols, training, and response strategies for future missions, ultimately enhancing overall response capabilities.

In summary, live log keeping is essential for efficient management, coordination, and communication during an HWF response, and it plays a key role in ensuring that the response is effective and well-documented and SARVAC HWF should make every effort to identify, adopt and implement a deployment live logging capability as soon as possible.

7. CONCLUSION:

The Labrador Wildfire Evacuation RFA was only the second activation of SARVAC HWF in the two-year existence of the program (support to the NS Snow Event in February 2022 stood down at NSOC Phase 4: Formation). While the program is still under development, and its structure and supporting documentation is still being refined, clearly the National Search and Rescue Operations Concept and the accompanying Standard Operating Procedures proved to be effective tools in supporting the structure and planning of the SARVAC HWF deployment.

The HWF Project Team are to be commended for embracing the challenges of standing up the activation and deployment as many are still new to the project and disaster response planning and delivery. The leadership shown by the SARVAC BoD / Executive, Executive Director and HWF Program Director was exemplary.

Most noteworthy was the “can do” attitude displayed by the many GSAR Volunteers who answered the call for assistance and remained in a standby posture to respond for several days; including several volunteers who were stood down the evening before deployment. A heart-felt thank you is offered to all GSAR Volunteers across Canada for their continued support of SARVAC and the HWF program.

While the SARVAC HWF deployment in response to the Labrador Wildfire Evacuation RFA was safe, effective and successful, it also proved to be a valuable learning exercise for the project and has identified area for improvement in the refining of the NSOC and supporting documentation and processes.

Clearly the negotiation of Overarching Service Agreements with Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, Provinces and Territories, and Indigenous Peoples and First Nations is of the highest priority. While these are obstacles that must be overcome, with the leadership and support of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, they are not insurmountable and the collective desires of all who reside in this Country to protect all residents in their time of need will no doubt serve to efficiently resolve these concerns to better align all first responders and resources for the efficient provision of disaster relief across Canada.

ANNEX 1 – HWF RESPONDER HOTWASH / SURVEY FEEDBACK:

The following narrative responses are taken from the online survey that was provided to the HWF Responders who were selected and did deploy under the Labrador Wildfire Evacuation RFA in addition to those who were selected but did not deploy due to the deployment ending earlier than anticipated or were no longer available. Duplicate answers have been filtered. It should be noted that only NSGSARA and NLSARA deployed under this RFA.

ASSOCIATION	Y / N	DID YOU HAVE ANY ISSUES WITH OUR COMMUNICATIONS PROCESS?
AQBRs	Y	It is hard to specify if I am available with no dates. It took a week from the initial survey asking if I was available to finally have the deployment confirmation. So that it 2 weeks in total if availability. The email sent everyday was much appreciated.
NBGSARA	Y	I had no overall major issues with the communication, and I wholly recognize the massive IT issue that occurred during this deployment, the only thing I could say is having more than a daily update. Have perhaps a portal in the future for us to log into that way we can monitor the situation in real time and have emails solely for deployment issues. An initial email saying "hey we may see a deployment in said location please follow up with said survey and monitor our portal for updates and if you're choose for deployment, you will an additional email" kind of idea. The length of time between emails was frustrating to say the least as I was part of the group that was asked to gather in Halifax for a Saturday night and wasn't made aware till late Friday evening that we couldn't go. Not angry at all just my two cents. Thank you for all you guys do!
NBGSARA	Y	it would have been good to know if one was picked to be part of one or more groups going and in what wave. To know one was selected it would have been beneficial in preparation for the trip as well as planning to be away for specific period. Without knowing if one is in a state of limbo reading the updates and surmising that you are being notified because you selected?
NLSARA	Y	Too many emails. Could have easily been condensed at first. Daily updates were good though.
NLSARA	Y	After receiving the "Urgent Request" on July 13th with deployment as early as the 14th, I began clearing my schedule for the following days. I checked in as the days passed and I completed the survey twice more in response to further emails from SARVAC. As the deployment was to be for a minimum of 7 days (understandably so), my window of availability soon closed, and I had to withdraw my name. I later learned that members were deployed on July 18th - 5 days after the initial urgent call. I understand the time and planning necessary to send members into an already overburdened area. I'd like to suggest that when a HWF need arises in the future, NLSARA / SARVAC make a conservative estimate of the number of members we can deploy and then go ahead and seek the necessary approvals, and make the necessary travel, accommodation, and other logistics plans. Then, once that is in place, send out the "Urgent Request". Alternatively, if 5 days between initial call and deployment will be the norm going forward, the request for members could state that members will be deployed in 4-5 days for a minimum of 7 days - this will help members plan their availability more effectively. I hope this suggestion is helpful! I'd also like to note that I would be

		more than happy to assist with logistics and planning for future deployments if you need someone based here on the west coast.
NSGSARA	Y	No ability to insert special qualifications.
NSGSARA	Y	<p>Obviously quicker response re: deployment would have been better for mental health as many found they felt anxious from first registering to deploy and responses days later. A lot of life plans had to be changed, rushed or put on hold as we heard only the day before of confirmation as well as flights.</p> <p>I was on a search out of town at the time as I hadn't heard from SARVAC and figured it might be longer before hearing confirmation. Was able to confirm while on search in CB, drive home, get few hours of sleep and then get to the airport for early morning flight.</p> <p>Less generic emails in the beginning and quicker communication re: plans would be appreciated where possible, but I do understand at times during emergencies this is not possible and that SARVAC staff did the best they could, especially with flight complications.</p>
NSGSARA	Y	The communication was great in all respects with the exception that I feel it may have been helpful to know if we had been selected. By that, I mean when I read that more people had volunteered than required, I was unsure if I had been selected until the day prior to deployment. I am also certain the overhead team had a lot on their plates and with shifting availability, it may have been challenging to determine if the people selected would still be available at the appropriate time.
NSGSARA	Y	It was a little hairy not knowing until 12hrs before deployment whether we were even on the roster to go, especially since it was indicated that the response was beyond what was needed and we weren't sure what criteria was being used to select people (amount of experience, specific skillset, etc.)
OSARVA	Y	<p>1. After I opted out, I continued to receive emails marked confidential.</p> <p>2. To attend the deployment my employer required a letter from SARVAC. They knew the deployment was not guaranteed but needed something in writing for the request to be considered and the email was not sufficient because I was not named. My employer had verbally pre-approved to go for 14 days however they required a written letter to do the final approvals. I asked for this letter twice and didn't receive it. I have several levels of government to go through to get an approval to leave work and that takes a day or two. They were exceptionally frustrated that I couldn't provide the documentation that stated "a deployment has been requested for days 1-14, and is not guaranteed".</p> <p>3. In addition to the issue with the letter: as a suggestion my employer indicated that they could approve me for leave without pay or leave with pay depending on the wording of your letter. Can the letter be customized for that situation as they indicated they have no problem paying my wage while deployed as they understand the nature of this work.</p>
OSARVA	Y	To little accurate timely information, many of us are employed and willing to jump when asked but if you are not required then proper notification should be given in a timely manner.

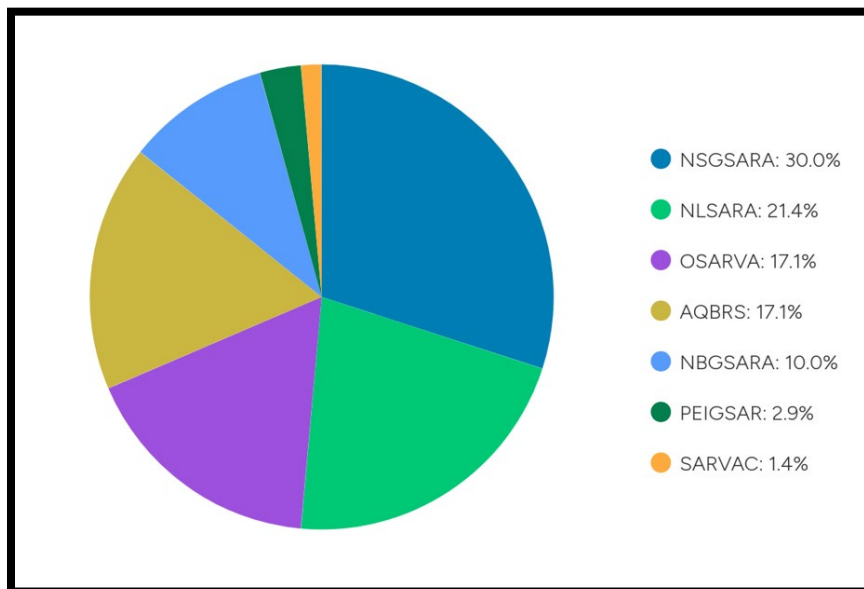
ASSOCIATION	Y / N	Were the initial survey questions appropriate? Please share any suggestions for other pertinent questions that should be included?
AQBRS	Y	Dates should be set for possible mobilization periods/dates, as you may be available at the time of the survey, but as time goes by, planned commitments and appointments may interfere with the initial commitment.
AQBRS	Y	Just my opinion, It would have been convenient to know if I was on the list of people to be deployed but on standby. The general email was a little confusing because it kept me in a state uncertainty. Just a little confirmation that I was on the list but on standby would have sufficed. I understand that you didn't want the volunteers to start preparing and not deploy. I guess there is no perfect answer. I am just glad that I am part of the SARVAC team. Hopefully we will meet in person one day.
AQBRS	Y	I would have appreciated the possibility of entering my availability dates or an additional comment. The surveys didn't allow us to do this.
NBGSARA	Y	There were insufficient options to provide specifics i.e.: which dates I was available instead of just 7 days, 14 days, etc.
NBGSARA	Y	In the qualifications section, you should have another Tab so those that have pertinent qualifications or training other than the SAVAC training. Example, risk management, wildlife fire courses, other pertinent leadership courses not by SARVAC.
NSGSARA	Y	I thought the questions were great, but I wonder if it would have been useful to have a blank section for people to list specific qualifications that they possess that may prove beneficial to the tasking?
ASSOCIATION	Y / N	Was the information provided in this meeting suitable and sufficient?
AQBRS	N	When confirming availability, send us a list of the equipment and materials required for mobilization.
NSGSARA	N	No flight information available.
NSGSARA	Y	The information meeting was scheduled to be a 1/2 hour but ended up being 1 hour after some information was repeated. Normally would not have minded but was travelling back from a search and listening from the car. Would like the option to watch recorded meeting when possible.
NSGSARA	Y	I have no complaints about the meeting. It was very much appreciated that sufficient time was available at the end for questions.
NSGSARA	Y	We were told we didn't need to bring our packs, but they weren't offered to us on taskings outside the base so would have had to have an alternative for packing snacks, water, additional clothing. While we didn't need the tactical SAR gear the pack itself is valuable space.

ASSOCIATION	Y / N	Did you receive sufficient travel information for the deployment?
NSGSARA	Y	The travel agent we were booked through used an app that we had to download prior to departure, but realized information was repeated in email. Found there to be a lot of docs and information but guessing that may have been because bookings were last minute and not a direct charter as SARVAC organizers had hoped.
OSARVA	Y	Tickets were not issued as the flight was cancelled but all other information was received in good time. I was kept aware of what was happening and why.
ASSOCIATION	Y / N	When you arrived at your deployment destination was an orientation briefing held to inform you of your duties while on deployment?
NSGSARA	Y	Would have appreciated being shown to our rooms to lay down bags, refresh and be better ready for taskings. Felt exhausted this trip with very early leave from home for flight -2 stops with airlines -drive to Muskrat Falls -helping unload food from truck and then orientation before being shown rooms/bathrooms/getting familiarized with space and events. Was thankfully not on the first taskings and was able to rest before dinner and tasking.
NSGSARA	N	More frequent updates and briefing. As the situation changed more information passed on would have been more helpful.
NSGSARA	Y	We had a bit of a demo for fire watch but there was no real safety, comms or org briefing. Did not realize there was no overnight overhead on.
NSGSARA	N	We didn't get a briefing until later that evening.
ASSOCIATION	Y / N	Were the meals and snacks provided suitable?
NLSARA	Y	I understand it was through the Salvation Army, and no, we weren't hungry. However, meals could've been better.
NLSARA	N	The food service and our work schedules were not in sync resulting in many missed meals leaving granola and Kool Aid to start the day. Food portions seemed very guarded. Being served a potato as a main course is simply not enough. The lack of food options and ongoing hunger impacted the group. I heard many of the team feeling frustrated by this. We attributed this in the early days to the set up and thought it would work itself out. However, it did not. My first cold bottle of water was delivered to me at my post three days into our post. Not all people are resilient to deal with these limitations for the entire week and should be looked at in planning for any future situations.
NSGSARA	Y	Some meals were good. Others were left over portions or ran out during meals. For the volume of food that was loaded back onto trucks. More food should have been available.
NSGSARA	Y	I can appreciate that the Salvation Army people deployed are not chefs and I certainly appreciate all the work they did to feed the group, particularly as they worked such long hours (from about 5:30 am to 9:30 pm). My suggestion would be to include more fruit and vegetables in the menu.
NSGSARA	Y	Given the potential for the numbers that could have been there, the food was suitable. With only a small kitchen staff we were well taken care of. If the numbers of displaced persons had increased, there would have needed to be more people.

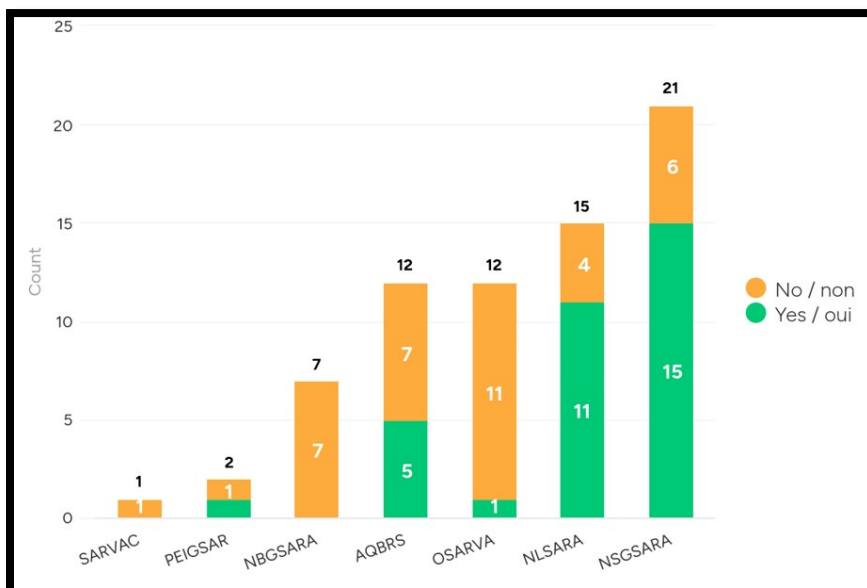
ASSOCIATION	Y / N	Were the accommodations that you were assigned suitable and as expected?
NSGSARA	Y	They were a lot better than expected.
NSGSARA	Y	Anticipated sleeping in arena/school on sleeping pads with others, so accommodations at Muskrat Falls workers residence was a wonderful surprise. Very grateful to have individual room and 1/2 bath for privacy and shared shower with only one other volunteer. The St. John's food staff and cleaning crew were wonderful as well.
ASSOCIATION	Y / N	Was the equipment provided by the SARVAC HWF project suitable to support you?
NSGSARA	N	No equipment other than a vest was provided. In the pre-deployment brief, we were told not to bring gear/ packs. As they would be provided. As a member of SAR its difficult to not have gear when you are used to having access to it.
NSGSARA	N	Theoretically yes but we heard from people that they were not as available as we were led to believe that people were on the road with no ponchos etc.
NSGSARA	N	In retrospect, I would have brought a headlamp and flashlight. These were in the kits, but the kits were not needed to be used.
ASSOCIATION	Y / N	Please share any suggestions about the duties assigned.
NSGSARA	Y	We were deployed just as the fires came under control and not as many people stayed at the huge residence, so much less busy or tasks needing done than expected. Most of the NS SAR team did fire/security watches in residence, but with repetition, low numbers of evacuees and only covering the wings with people in them it was at times hard to motivate to keep going, especially during the overnight watches when talking was kept at a minimal to not disturb. Some of the NS SAR members were asked to go out to the road for checks. If longer time on deployment would have liked to rotate tasks.
NSGSARA	Y	Hard to say as we weren't involved in the plans process and came in near the end. It did seem a bit like there was a handful of people doing the lions share. Would have likely recommended a secondary overhead team to allow main overhead appropriate rest, and they could have strictly done plans we had enough people to be in the field they didn't need to extend themselves beyond
NSGSARA	Y	We could have done more than the duties assigned, although we arrived as the evacuation orders were being lifted. Had there been more people in the residences or had the fire started to impact Labrador City like Jasper, we would have been ready and able to do more.
ASSOCIATION	Y / N	Were you given daily tactics briefing?
NLSARA	N	Daily briefings, on the ground updates if things change throughout the day.
NSGSARA	N	Fire watches we were not asked to check in or out, only to pass along radio and any pertinent notes to the next shift. We always had phone numbers and radio contact with leaders if needed.
NSGSARA	N	I do not think we were given specific briefings, but we all kept in touch, and I do not think anyone was not aware of what was going on as the information was passed from HQ to members who disseminated the information to the teams.

ASSOCIATION	Y / N	From a Mental Wellness perspective, do you feel that you received the necessary information to ensure the wellbeing of you and your immediate family?
NSGSARA	Y	Appreciated the concern for health and wellness by SARVAC, the leaders on the ground and my co-volunteers from all organizations.
NSGSARA	Y	I think that if this were a bigger operation, it would have been necessary to divide the time into operational periods so that a 12 on, 12 off, cycle could have been used to keep our three folks in charge better rested. They were 'on duty' too much.
ASSOCIATION	Y / N	Did you receive a travel expense form?
NSGSARA	Y	11 of 13 people had their luggage left in Goose Bay. Most received it the next day, but some took two days to receive it.
NSGSARA	Y	It was all very last minute, but demobilization information was shared with the group on location as soon as possible, once gathered by SARVAC leaders.
NSGSARA	Y	As previously mentioned, it would have been appreciated to know we had been selected for a team earlier in the process, even if we did not know the specific departure date/time. However, I was not part of the organizing committee, and I am sure they had a lot to take care in a short period of and this was likely just an oversight.
ASSOCIATION	Y / N	Is there any other information, observations or concerns that you would like to share with us?
NSGSARA	Y	Very much appreciated the planning, efforts and heart that went into this evacuation deployment. We did not get to see beyond the compound where we were staying so sometimes hard on our mental health, but leaders organized a visit to the Dam which was great to see more of the area and spend time off-site. Would have loved to have had down time in Goose Bay or St. John's but understand this is not always possible. Grateful for the opportunity to connect with other SAR volunteers from across NS and NL and would love to be considered again for future search and humanitarian missions.
NSGSARA	Y	I know this was a bit of a first, and larger than anything else and there were some red tape hold ups in the process, so I just want to be clear I think everyone did GREAT with what they were given! It's always going to be a learning curve. I do think there should have been more structure to the taskings, IE checking in, checking out, letting them know we arrived at and are leaving from taskings. Should have been at least one overhead on overnight (and that should be a fresh person), we didn't realize overnight we were on our own and don't know who would have been on the other end of the radio had something come up.
NSGSARA	Y	Overall, for me as a SARVAC Volunteer it was a satisfying and enjoyable experience.

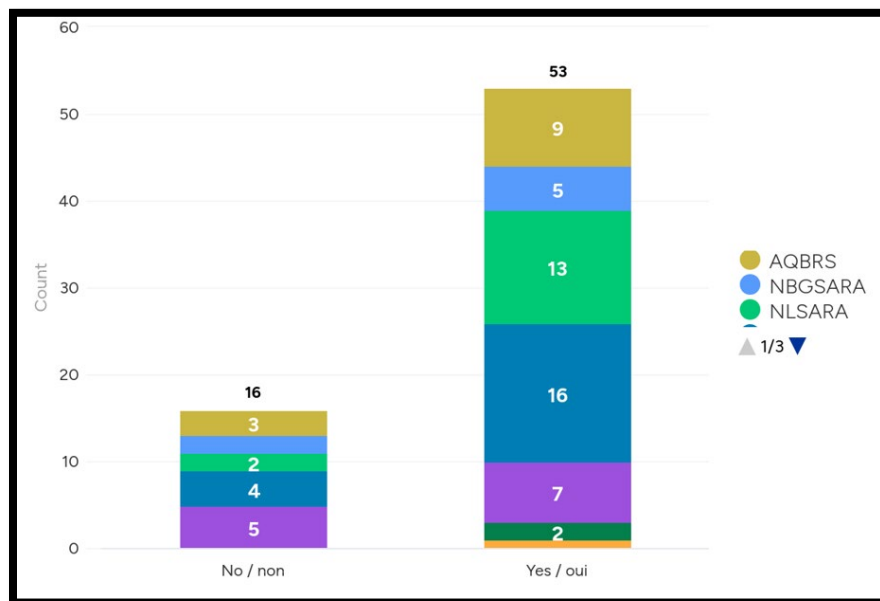
The following charts depict the feedback data that was received from the online survey provided to the HWF Responders who were selected and ***DID*** deploy under the Labrador Wildfire Evacuation RFA in addition to those who were selected but ***DID NOT*** deploy due to the deployment ending earlier than anticipated or were no longer available. ***It should be noted that only NSGSARA and NLSARA deployed under this RFA.*** Other respondents who identify as having deployed, can be attributed to survey structure and/or errors in data collection.



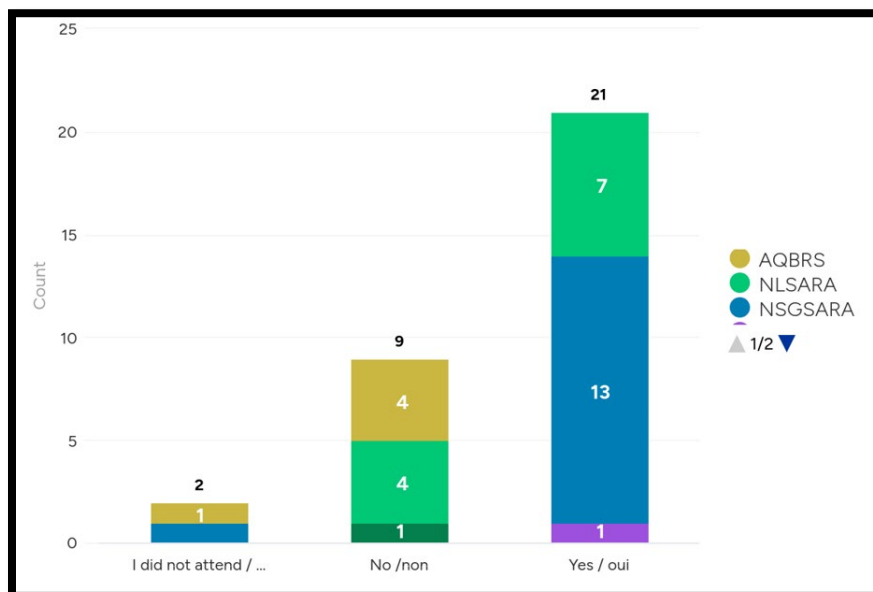
Survey Respondents by Association



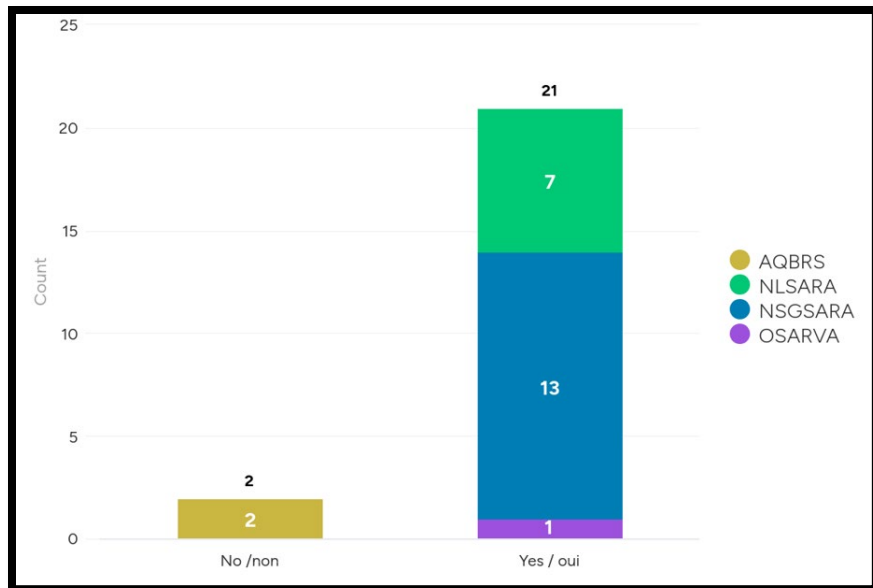
Selected and Deployed vs. Selected and Did Not Deploy



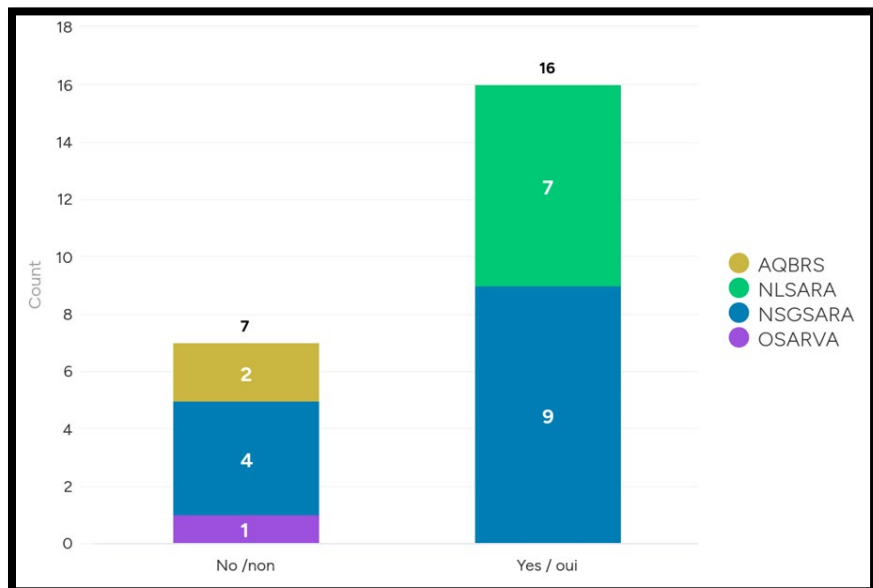
Were the initial Survey Questions appropriate?



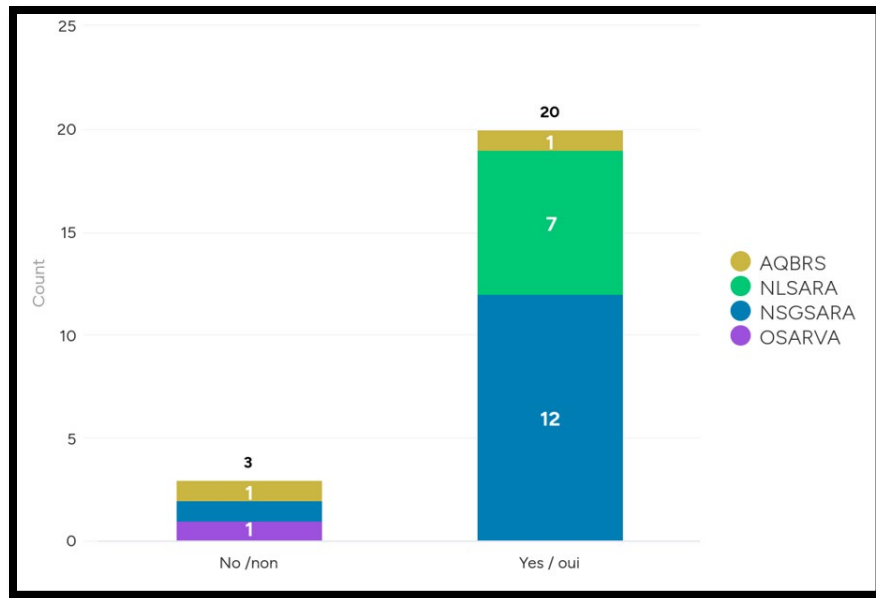
Were you invited to a virtual meeting to discuss the deployment?



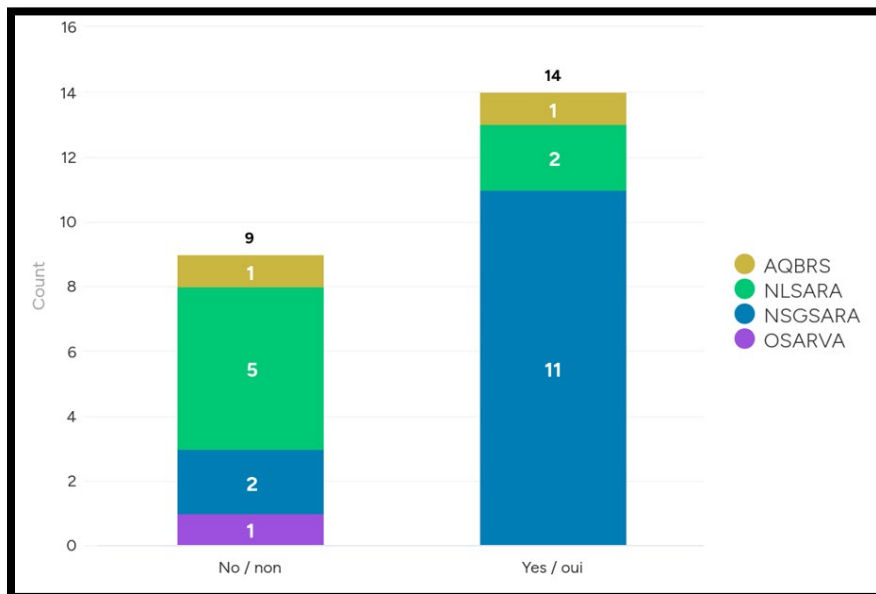
Did you receive sufficient travel information for the deployment?



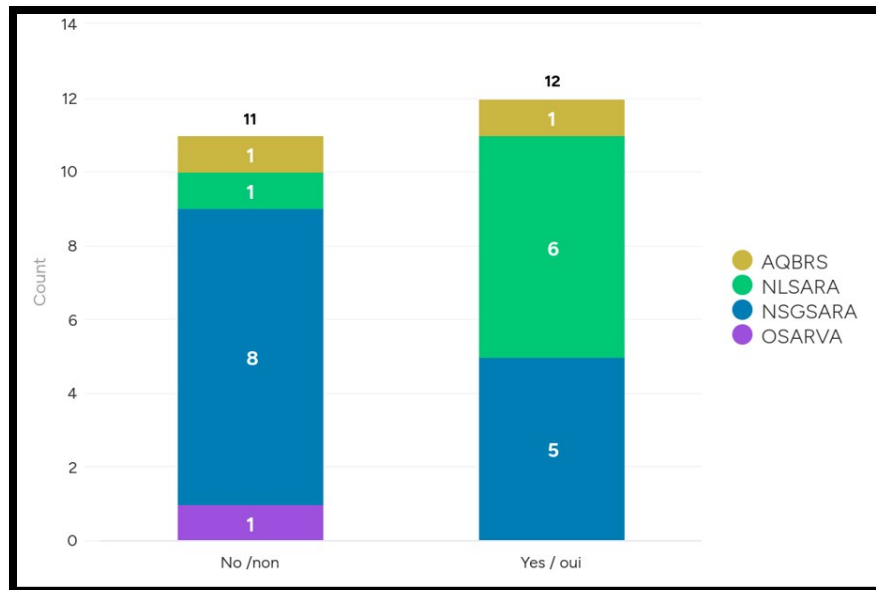
When you arrived at your deployment location was there an Orientation Briefing?



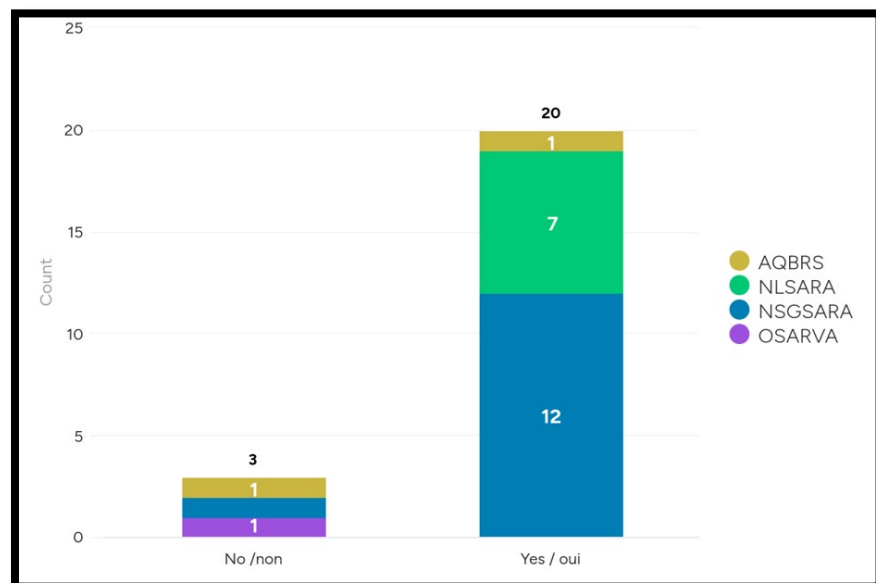
Were the accommodations suitable?



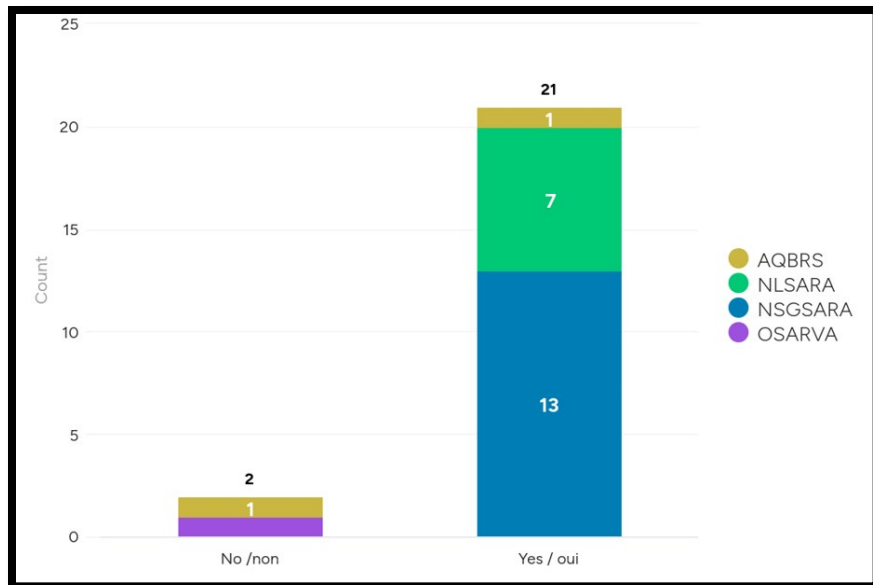
Were the meals and snacks which were provided acceptable and as expected?



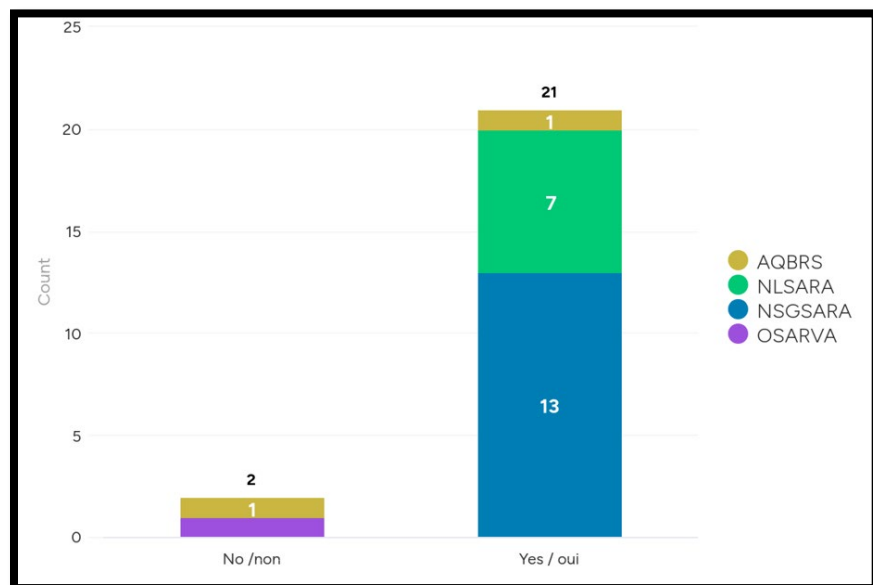
Were you given a daily tactical briefing?



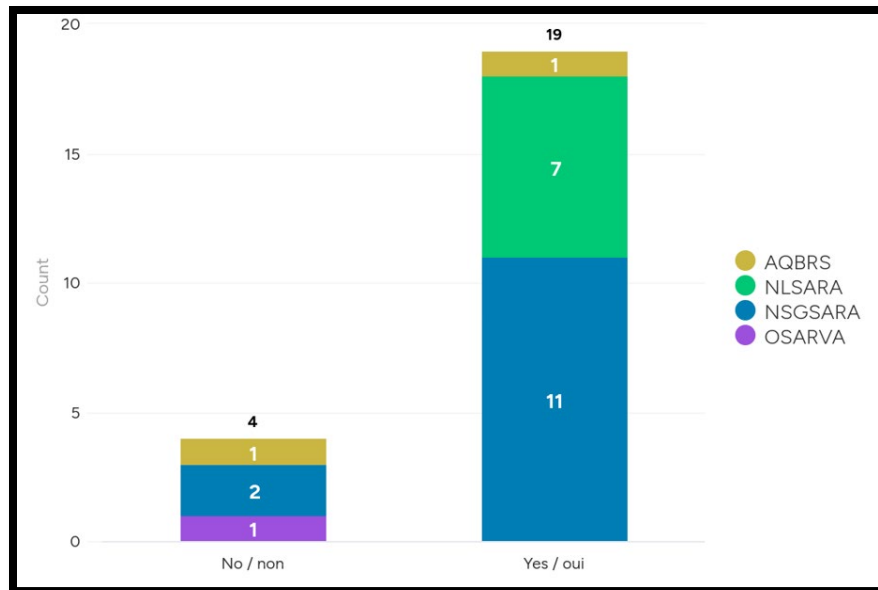
Were the duties assigned on an equitable basis?



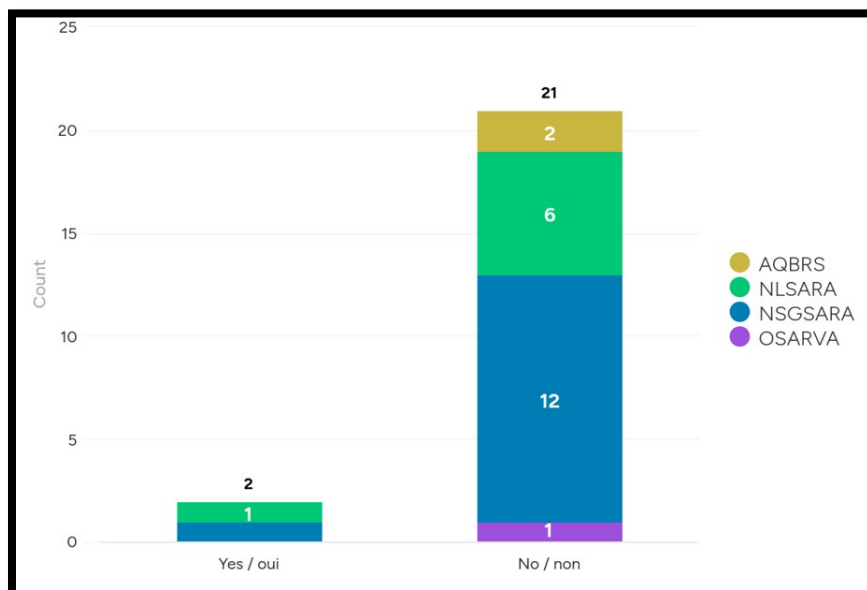
Were you satisfied with the deployment duties assigned to you?



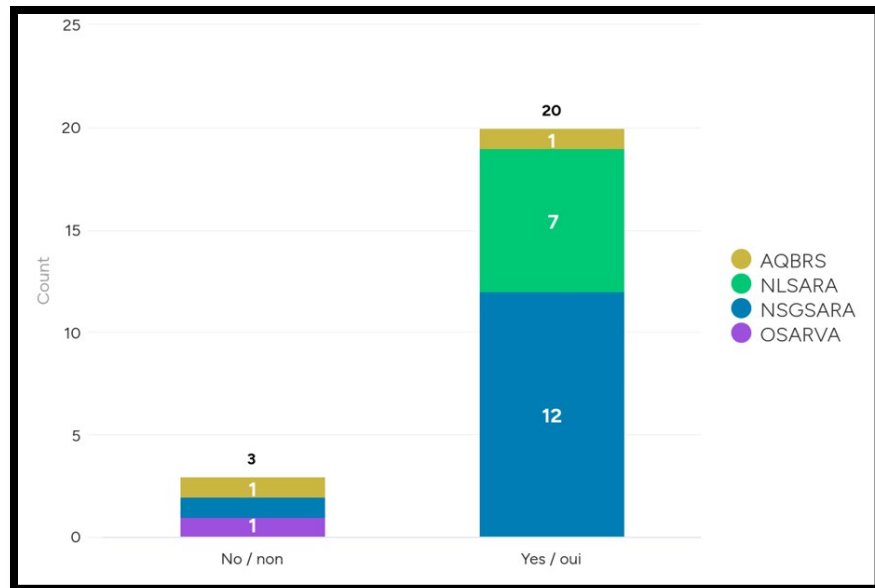
Were you provided with sufficient hours of rest?



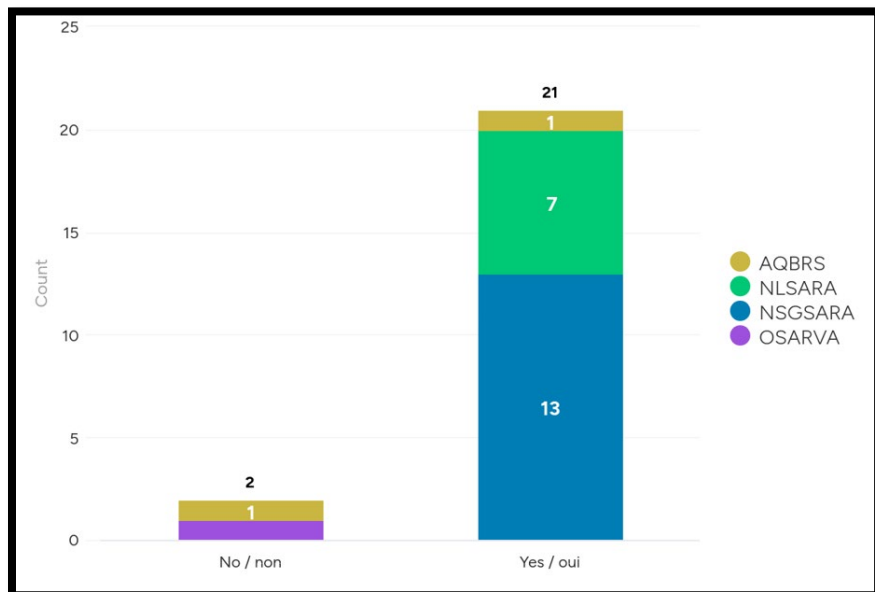
Was the equipment provided suitable?



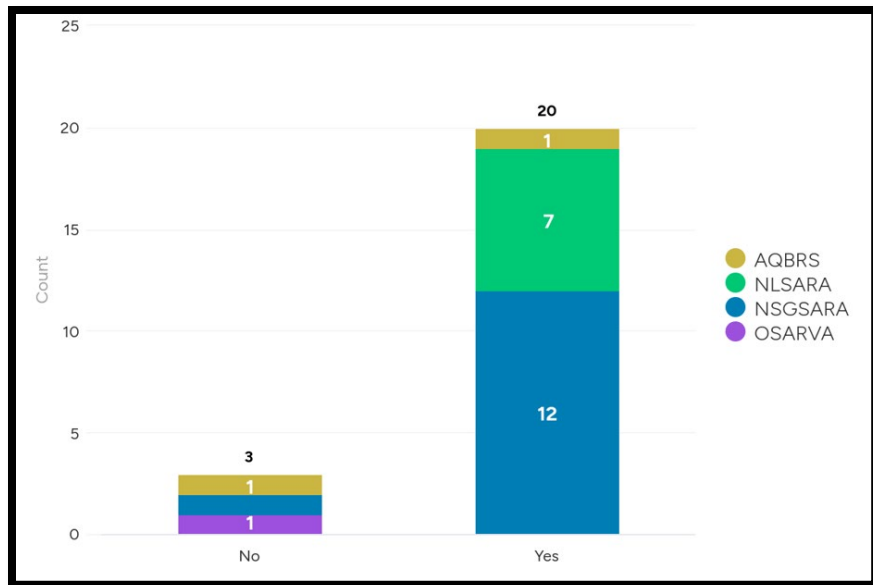
Did you observe or experience any issue with respect to health and/or safety?



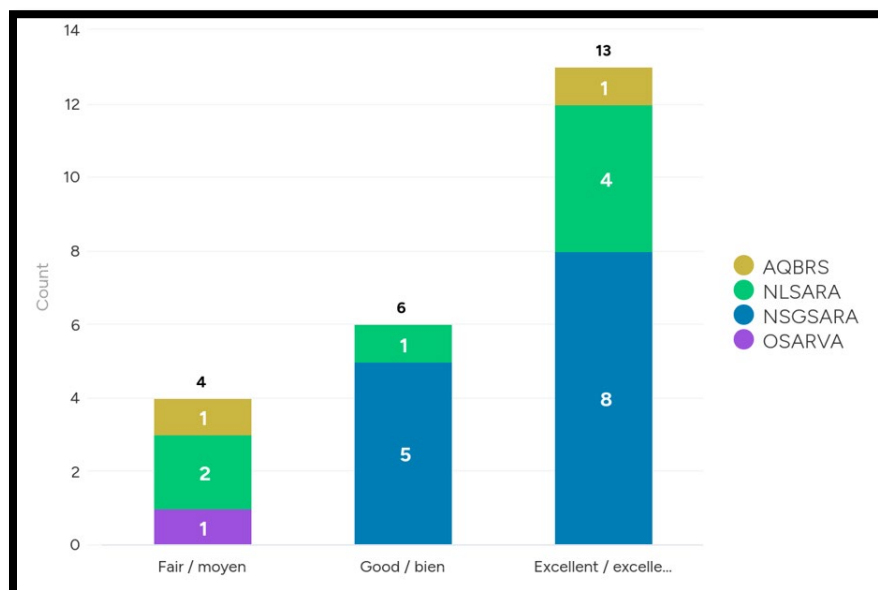
Did you receive notice of demobilization in a timely manner?



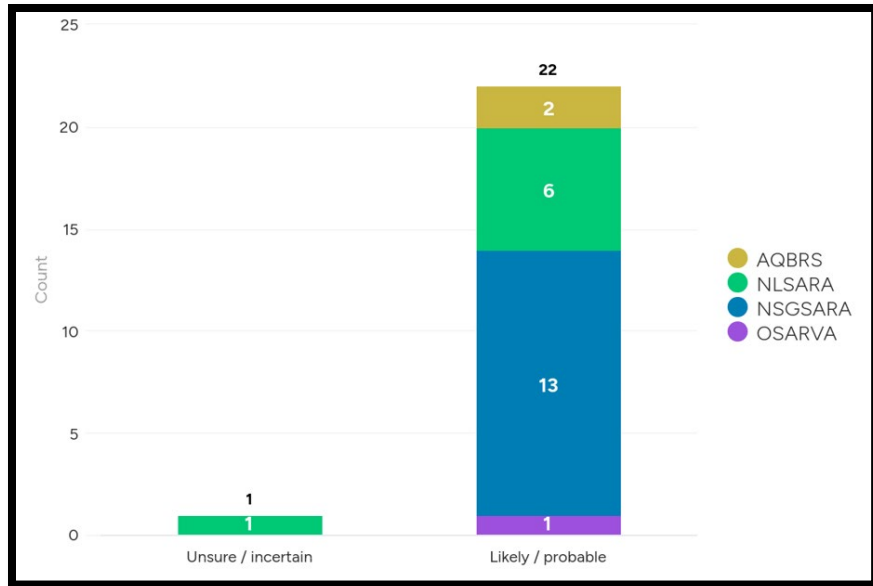
From a mental wellness perspective, do you feel that you received the necessary information to ensure the wellbeing of you and your immediate family?



Was the information provided to you for submitting the travel expense form clear and concise?

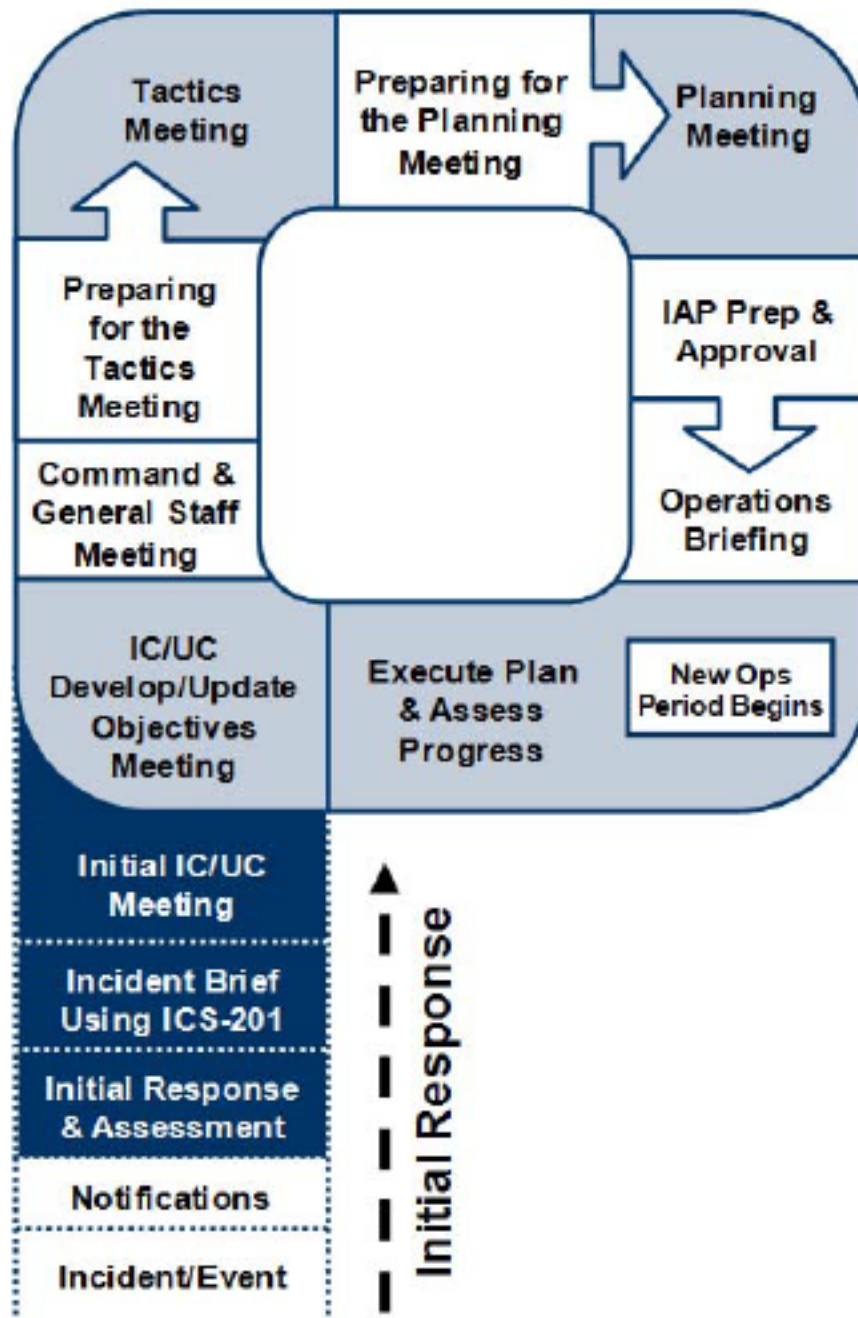


How would you rate your HWF deployment overall?



How likely are you to participate in another SARVAC HWF deployment?

ANNEX 2 – OPERATIONAL PERIOD PLANNING CYCLE (PLANNING P):



ANNEX 3 - ABBREVIATIONS:

AAR	After Action Report
AHJ	Agency Having Jurisdiction
BoO	Base of Operations
CAF	Canadian Armed Forces
DIR	Director
DMS	Data Management System
DND	Department of National Defense
GSAR	Ground Search and Rescue
HVGB	Happy Valley – Goose Bay
HWF	Humanitarian Workforce
IAP	Incident Action Plan
ICS	Incident Command System
IMT	Incident Management Team
ISP	Incident Support Plan
ISSA	Incident Specific Service Agreement
MIST	Mission Incident Support Team
MRG	Mission Ready Group
NDST	Newfoundland Daylight Savings Time
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIST	National Incident Support Team
NL	Newfoundland and Labrador
NLSARA	Newfoundland and Labrador Search and Rescue Association
NSOC	National Search and Rescue Operations Concept
OSM	Operations Section Manager
PD	Program Director
PEOC	Provincial Emergency Operations Center
PSC	Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada
RC	Response Coordinator
RFA	Request for Federal Assistance
SARVAC	Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure

ANNEX 4 – IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN:

TITLE	ISSUE	CORRECTIVE ACTION	ELEMENT	OPI	COMPLETION DATE
Deployment Funding	<p>Deployment funding under an RFA must be negotiated through a separate Budget Submission and Contribution Agreement which is only approved after an RFA is received. These negotiations may negatively impact response timelines.</p> <p>Response efforts and ongoing program delivery will likely be impacted due to cashflow issues when the RFA is funded through existing SARVAC delegations and not through other funding sources.</p>	<p>That a more streamlined process be identified to expedite the negotiation of the RFA Budget Submission and Contribution Agreement.</p> <p>That other methods of funding SARVAC HWF deployments under an RFA be explored so that resourcing does not become an issue during an emergency humanitarian response.</p>	Policy Finance	French Coultres Sheppard PSC	01 Jan 26
ISSA	SARVAC HWF had to negotiate an ISSA with the province during the RFA before any deployment of personnel and equipment could commence. This led to delays and could have resulted in the cancellation of the deployment if	As has been previously identified, the negotiation of overarching Service Agreements between SARVAC HWF, Provinces, Territories and Indigenous Governments / Communities should take place before Canada, Canadians and Indigenous	Policy	French Coultres Sheppard PSC	01 Jan 26

	negotiations were not successful.	Peoples find themselves in a time of need when an emergency response surge capacity is so desperately required but not readily available. With Overarching Service Agreements already negotiated and in place, only specific details will be left to be identified and resolved when an RFA is received and the SARVAC HWF is requested to deploy.			
Planning P	When the concept of the NIST was adopted in 2022, it was agreed that SARVAC HWF would follow the ICS doctrine which follows the Incident Action Planning (IAP) process to help synchronize operations and ensure that they support the incident objectives and to provide a consistent rhythm and structure to incident management.	That SARVAC HWF adapt the “Planning P” to fit the NSOC which will allow for a more clear, structured, and controlled approach to deployment planning in the initial hours and days of an incident. The adoption of the “Planning P” will also ensure a consistent rhythm within the NIST that will synchronize planning and guarantee that all personnel are always engaged in initial and ongoing response planning.	SOP	deBreyne French Conway	01 Feb 25
Transfer of Command	When the RFA was approved and SARVAC HWF was activated, the support services requested of the SARVAC HWF under the RFA were the	That SARVAC HWF adopt a formal process for the “Transfer of Command” to formalize the movement of responsibility for	SOP	deBreyne French Conway	01 Feb 25

	same as those already being provided by the GSAR responders currently employed. Therefore, all responders migrated from provincial GSAR association jurisdiction to the SARVAC HWF jurisdiction. Some confusion ensued as to which GSAR jurisdiction had authority.	incident command from the P/T GSAR authority to the SARVAC HWF. If possible, it should take place face-to-face, include a complete briefing capturing essential information, and formally documented.			
NIST and Time Zone Challenges	The planning and managing of a SARVAC HWF response are challenged when the Command and General staff of the NIST live in different Provinces and Territories across the country. Some staff must start their day early in the morning while others do not finish until later in the day, which affords little time for rest, recovery and the management of other workload.	That the SARVAC HWF explore and employ options to operate as a NIST more effectively to manage an HWF deployment while at the same time ensuring employee health, safety, wellbeing and the ability to manage workload across different time zones.	Policy	deBreyne French Conway	01 Apr 25
Comms with Volunteers	Feedback received from GSAR volunteers as well as from the HWF internal hotwash identified some concerns and areas for improvement in the Responder Availability Surveys,	That the SARVAC HWF undertake an in-depth review of Phase 2 – Survey of the NSOC and the associated SOPs to fine-tune the Deployment Availability Survey process and the	SOP	deBreyne Devanney French Conway	01 Apr 25

	On-Site Deployment Communications, and Deployment Briefings.	<p>NSOC Phase 7 – Tasking and the associated SOPs to further formalize communications when on deployment.</p> <p>That Deployment Briefings be more structured and formalized to streamline and speed up information sharing.</p>			
Log-Keeping	While all NIST and MIST personnel kept comprehensive notes during the Labrador City Wildfire Evacuation and information regarding important decision gates are captured in e-mails and the DMS software, SARVAC HWF has currently not adopted a mechanism for log keeping by all personnel during an HWF deployment.	That log keeping is essential for efficient management, coordination, and communication during an HWF response, and it plays a key role in ensuring that the response is effective and well-documented. SARVAC HWF should make every effort to identify, adopt and implement a deployment live and/or hard copy logging capability as soon as possible.	Policy SOP	deBreyne Devanney French Conway	01 Apr 25