

PRESS RELEASE

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**With spring around the corner, Canadian cities score an uninspiring C+ on flood preparedness**

Canadian cities received an uninspiring grade on flood preparedness, the costliest type of natural disaster, a [new national study](#) has found.

The study, conducted by the [Intact Centre on Climate Adaptation](#) at the University of Waterloo, shows that many cities have made little progress to limit their risk of flooding over the past five years. In a survey of 16 municipalities, cities scored an average C+ in flood-readiness in 2019/20 — the same score a near-identical study found in 2015.

The general lack of readiness means that if a large-scale flooding event were to occur this spring alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact on Canadians could be “catastrophic,” said Dr. Blair Feltmate, co-author of the study and head of the Intact Centre. “Many people could find themselves in harm’s way with a basement full of sewer water.”

The municipalities’ scores were calculated based on detailed interviews with 53 municipal officers responsible for managing floods and emergency services across the 16 largest municipalities. Respondents included representatives of municipal governments such as city managers, directors and senior planners, and in some cases with representatives of public utilities and conservation authorities who had relevant expertise.

Among the study’s key findings:

- Six cities—including some that experienced severe floods in recent years—were slightly *less* prepared for flooding in 2019/20 than they were in 2015.
- Comprehensive and up-to-date flood maps, supported by funding from Public Safety Canada, should be mandatory for a city to qualify for federal flood-recovery aid, according to municipal managers.
- Only half of the 16 cities assess the potential for municipal stormwater to back up into basements, even though basement flooding is the No. 1 catastrophic cost to homeowners and insurers.

Municipal officers repeatedly warned that cities must do a better job of preparing for floods, or risk another spring of sandbagging, generally at the last minute.

There is some positive news: Edmonton, Regina and Toronto improved their flood-preparedness scores, each achieving a B+, primarily for protecting health-care facilities such as hospitals, clinics and retirement homes. These cities also put in place measures to maintain continuity of electricity,

telecommunications, water and wastewater services during floods. Edmonton also provides free flood-risk assessments for homeowners through its municipally owned utility, EPCOR. It is the only city to do so.

“Flood-readiness is key to societal resilience,” said Veronica Scotti, Chairperson Public Sector Solutions, Swiss Re and Intact Centre Advisory Council member. “By learning from one another, these cities could make much-needed progress on climate resilience. This would include maintaining a city-level risk management framework and outcome-oriented adaptation plans.”

Last year, insurable losses in Canada reached \$2.5 billion, making 2020 the fourth-worst year for insurable claims since record keeping began in 1983. Climate change, aging municipal infrastructure and residential housing, and the accelerating loss of protective natural infrastructure such as wetlands contribute to flooding and the rising costs to governments, businesses and homeowners.

<b>Flood Grade of Sixteen Major Canadian Cities</b>		
<b>City</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2019/20</b>
Calgary, Alberta	B	B-
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island	C-	D+
Edmonton, Alberta	C	B+
Fredericton, New Brunswick	C	B-
Iqaluit, Nunavut	N/A	C+
Halifax, Nova Scotia	D	B-
Montreal, Quebec	B-	C
Ottawa, Ontario	A-	B-
Quebec City, Quebec	C-	C+
Regina, Saskatchewan	C-	B+
St. John’s, Newfoundland & Labrador	B	C+
Surrey, British Columbia	N/A	B-
Toronto, Ontario	B-	B+
Vancouver, British Columbia	C-	C
Winnipeg, Manitoba	B+	D
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories	NA	D
<b>Average National Score</b>	<b>C+</b>	<b>C+</b>

*N/A indicates cities that did not participate in the 2015 study*

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