Equity in Action:

Climate Resilience for Women+, Children, and Youth Experiencing Violence



Prepared by:
The BC Society of Transition Houses
SHIFT Collaborative
Justice Institute of BC

About this project

Equity in Action is led by the **BC Society of Transition Houses**, with **SHIFT Collaborative** and the **Justice Institute of British Columbia**. Drawing on research and frontline experience, the project identifies practical ways to improve safety for women+, children and youth experiencing or at risk of violence during climate-related emergencies.

About this guide

This guide is for **emergency managers, local and regional authorities, Indigenous governing bodies, Emergency Support Services, climate adaptation planners and community partners** to understand and address the risks facing women+, children and youth experiencing violence during and after climate-related events.

Key terms

Climate equity:
Addressing unequal climate risks and barriers to safety, directing support where it is needed and involving those most affected in decisions.

Coercive control:
A pattern of abusive behaviours used to control or dominate a family member or intimate partner. The pattern represents a range of behaviours including controlling proprietary acts, intimidation, isolation, emotional abuse, economic abuse, stalking and monitoring frequently but not always accompanied by physical and sexual violence.

Gender-based violence (GBV):
Violence connected to gender inequality and unequal power, directed at someone based on their gender, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender. It can include physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control.

Intersectionality:
How gender, race, disability, income and other factors interact with systems such as sexism, racism and colonialism to shape people's experiences and access to support.

Women's Transition Housing and Supports Program (WTHSP):
This program includes housing and supports for women, children and youth who have experienced violence or are at risk of violence. The program includes transition houses, safe homes, second and third stage housing and long-term housing. Houses are funded by the provincial government and administered by BC Housing.

Climate-related events can increase violence

Climate change is making disasters such as extreme heat, wildfires and flooding more frequent and severe in B.C.

Emergencies create a spike in violence

Globally, evidence shows that gender-based violence (GBV) increases during and after every type of emergency, including wildfires, floods and extreme heat. Displacement, lost income and housing instability can intensify the conditions in which abuse and coercive control escalate. These pressures can build over time and become more acute during an emergency, while disrupted services and support networks leave women with fewer options for safety.

Frontline service providers in B.C. describe similar experiences. Participants in the Equity in Action project reported violence escalating during evacuation alerts, barriers to leaving unsafe situations, and safety risks continuing after people return home. Transition housing programs and other anti-violence organizations may face rising demand while their own staff and facilities are affected by the climate-related emergency.



Planning can reduce the risk

Increased violence is not an inevitable outcome of climate-related emergencies. Reducing this risk requires integrating women's safety needs and the expertise of GBV organizations into climate adaptation and emergency management policy, planning and practice. B.C.'s existing commitments to equity provide a foundation for this work.

Existing commitments support this work:



B.C.'s Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy identifies an equity-informed approach as a guiding principle, recognizing that people face different climate risks and barriers to adapting.



The Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA) addresses intersectional disadvantage in risk assessments under section 51(3)(b), and measures to reduce adverse impacts and promote cultural safety in emergency plans under sections 52(2)(f–g). These provisions provide a basis for considering the overlapping barriers facing women experiencing violence.



Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is an approach adopted by the B.C. government to examine how gender and other intersecting factors shape people's experiences of policies, programs and services. Applied to emergency planning, it helps identify whose safety needs are being missed and what needs to change.

Women's safety needs to be part of planning for climate-related events in B.C.

Consultations with Women's Transition Housing and Support Programs in B.C. highlight GBV organizations are often left out of emergency planning, and plans do not consistently address the safety needs of women experiencing violence. As a result, emergency plans and decisions may not reflect the expertise of GBV organizations, including their knowledge of confidential shelter locations, residents' safety needs, and requirements for maintaining essential services during emergencies.

What B.C programs report[1]

31%
Only of Women's Transition Housing and Supports Programs have a relationship with their local or regional authority.

48%
are unaware of their community's emergency management plan.

42%
feel the needs of women experiencing violence are not reflected in their community's emergency management plan.



[1] Godard, L., & Ursuliak, D. (2025). Supporting Women Experiencing Violence During Emergencies: Challenges and Opportunities for Collaboration and Coordination Between the Women's Transition Housing and Supports Programs and Local Authorities in British Columbia [Unpublished Report]. Justice Institute of BC.

What these gaps can mean for safety



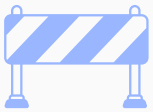
Essential services may lack evacuation support

Without advance coordination, transition housing programs may lack timely emergency information, access to safe transportation or safe destinations for residents.



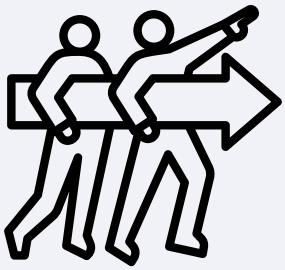
Evacuation arrangements and services can expose women to harm

Shared transportation, reception centres and group accommodation can expose women to the person causing harm or reveal a confidential location. Leaving the hazard does not always mean reaching safety.



Women in rural and remote locations face additional barriers

BCSTH reports that **30%** of Women's Transition Housing and Supports Program houses are in rural and remote locations. Long travel distances, limited transportation and few accommodation options can make reaching safety harder. Rural communities are also often more exposed to wildfires and flooding.



Limited data should not delay action

Canadian data on violence during emergencies is limited, and violence is often under-reported. This makes the scale of the problem harder to document and resources harder to secure. Gaps in data should not delay planning for known safety risks.

The Journey

A woman's journey through a climate-related emergency: risks, decisions, and needs when she is experiencing or at risk of gender-based violence

Drawing on experiences shared by frontline service providers in the Equity in Action workshop, this journey map illustrates the risks and barriers a woman experiencing violence may face during a wildfire evacuation, and the supports that can improve her safety before, during and after the event.

Note that this journey is grounded in experiences shared by frontline service providers

BEFORE THE EVENT

1. Receiving an evacuation alert

The alert increases tension at home. Violence, coercive control or substance use may escalate. Seeking information or contacting support could alert the person causing harm.



SYSTEM BARRIER OR GAP

Emergency information may rely on devices or channels that are monitored, inaccessible or unreliable. GBV organizations may not receive timely information from emergency authorities.

WHAT MUST BE AVAILABLE

Safe, accessible information through several channels, a discreet check-in from a trusted service and immediate safety planning.

2. Seeking safety and support during the alert

As tension or violence increases, she may contact a transition house or GBV service for safety planning, emotional support and help understanding her options.



SYSTEM BARRIER OR GAP

Demand for GBV services may increase while staffing and funding remain at normal levels. Organizations may lack the capacity or emergency information needed to respond.

WHAT MUST BE AVAILABLE

Additional funding and staffing, extended service capacity, timely emergency briefings, proactive outreach and established coordination with emergency management authorities.

DURING THE EVENT

3. Evacuation ordered: leaving and finding safety

She must arrange transportation and accommodation for herself, her children, and possibly a pet—while remaining safely separated from the person causing harm.



SYSTEM BARRIER OR GAP

Transportation and accommodation may be limited. Vouchers may not cross jurisdictions, and the general reception centre may be the only formal destination.

WHAT MUST BE AVAILABLE

Accessible transportation, flexible financial assistance and a confirmed confidential destination that accounts for children, pets, accessibility and safety.

EVERY WOMAN'S JOURNEY IS DIFFERENT. Rurality, Indigeneity, disability, poverty, housing insecurity, language, immigration or employment status, substance use, caregiving responsibilities, and access to transportation, technology, culture and community can intensify barriers at every stage.

The Journey

DURING THE EVENT (cont'd)

4. Registering and accessing shelter

At the reception centre, she may encounter her perpetrator or someone connected to them. She fears that registering will reveal her location.



SYSTEM BARRIER OR GAP

Registration may occur publicly, information-sharing practices may be unclear, and personnel may not recognize GBV-related safety risks. Alternative accommodation may not exist.

WHAT MUST BE AVAILABLE

Private registration, separation from the perpetrator, consent-based information sharing and confidential accommodation without requiring public disclosure of violence.

5. Staying safe and connected while displaced

She tries to remain connected to trusted support while power, cellular service or internet access is disrupted.



SYSTEM BARRIER OR GAP

The GBV organization may face increased demand while its staff are also evacuating, caring for family or navigating disrupted routes. Small organizations may have few backup options.

WHAT MUST BE AVAILABLE

A safe way to check in, non-digital communication options, continuity of GBV services and connection to cultural, community and emotional supports.

AFTER THE EVENT

6. Returning and recovering

Returning may mean going back to the person causing harm, unstable housing, surveillance or financial dependence. Trauma and safety risks continue after the evacuation ends.



SYSTEM BARRIER OR GAP

Formal supports may begin to end while recovery programs require identification, a fixed address, a private device or internet access. Demand for GBV services remains high.

WHAT MUST BE AVAILABLE

GBV support services, flexible recovery assistance and long-term housing, financial, cultural and emotional support.

Considerations for creating safe conditions

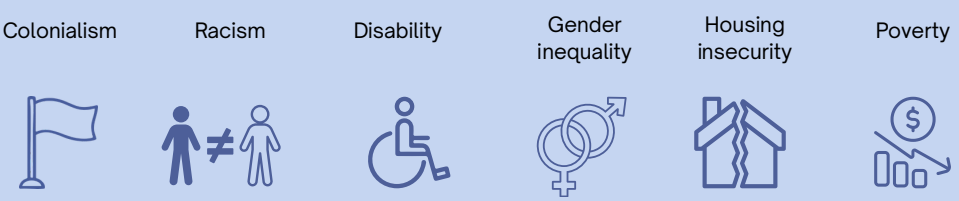
for Women at Risk of Gender-Based Violence During Climate-Related Emergencies

This framework identifies six interconnected conditions for supporting the safety of women+ experiencing or at risk of violence before, during and after climate-related emergencies. It helps emergency managers and community partners identify where planning, services and coordination can reduce risks and address barriers to safety.



Structural & social conditions create systemic inequities that shape vulnerability, access to support, and recovery during emergencies.

SOME EXAMPLES



Practical Actions to Strengthen Safety for Women

Emergency managers, local authorities and community partners are already navigating significant demands with limited resources. The actions below offer practical ways to strengthen what already exists and build collaboration across the emergency management and GBV sectors, before, during and after a climate-related emergency to increase safety for all.

The recommendations are organized by phase: establish arrangements **before** an emergency, activate them **during** the response, and sustain support and improve plans **afterward**. Adapt them with local GBV partners to your community's needs and resources.

Across all phases:



Protect confidentiality and provide accessible, culturally safe, trauma- and violence-informed assistance. Women should be able to access support during an emergency without publicly disclosing violence.



Apply Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) to identify and address barriers related to disability, poverty, racism, rural isolation and other intersecting factors.



Include both people living in transition housing programs and those experiencing violence elsewhere in the community.

Before a climate-related emergency

Prepare

Increased violence is not an inevitable outcome of climate-related emergencies. Reducing this risk requires integrating women's safety needs and the expertise of anti-violence organizations into climate adaptation and emergency management policy, planning and practice. B.C.'s existing commitments to equity provide a foundation for this work.

1. Build relationships & formalize partnerships



- Identify local GBV organizations, including transition housing programs (find a directory of B.C. transition houses here.)
- Invite GBV organizations to local emergency management planning meetings to build this partnership.
- Formalize roles, emergency contacts and information-sharing procedures through an MOU or other written agreement. Keep these arrangements current to address staff turnover.

2. Include women's safety needs in risk assessments and plans



- Review risk assessments and emergency plans with GBV partners to identify safety risks and barriers to assistance.
- Establish procedures for private registration, discreet referrals, consent and essential information sharing in reception centres. Protect information about women's locations, destinations and contact details.
- Prepare emergency information in accessible formats and multiple languages. Identify safe ways to reach women who cannot use a phone or the internet privately, including those whose devices may be monitored.
- Check that plans include women living in transition housing programs and those experiencing violence elsewhere in the community.

3. Arrange safe transportation and accommodation



- Plan ahead with transition housing programs on transportation, confidential destinations and support for women and children.
- Include transition housing programs on early evacuation lists to proactively support the safe movement of residents during an alert, before an order is issued, recognizing the unique complexity of relocating large numbers of vulnerable women, children and youth fleeing violence.
- Establish accommodation options that maintain confidentiality and separation from the person causing harm.

4. Train staff in Violence- and Trauma-Informed Response



- Provide joint training for emergency management, Emergency Support Services (ESS) and anti-violence staff on GBV, confidentiality, cultural safety, trauma- and violence-informed practice, and practical application of GBA+.
- Ensure Emergency Support Services (ESS) staff know how to connect someone with specialized support without requiring public disclosure of violence.
- Establish and resource a designated liaison between emergency operations and GBV services, with community navigator support to help women access assistance.

Before an emergency, confirm together:

- *Are roles and contacts current?*
- *Who will make contact, how will women reach safety, and what support will remain available?*
- *Is there a plan to maintain essential GBV services?*

During a climate-related emergency:

Activate

1. Activate coordination early



- Contact GBV organizations as risks emerge, including during evacuation alerts. Activate the designated liaison and agreed coordination arrangements.
- Share timely information so transition housing programs can support safety planning and prepare residents, clients and staff.
- Ensure Emergency Operations Centre staff know how to direct updates to GBV organizations.

2. Protect privacy and confidentiality



- Provide private registration and spaces for confidential conversations about safety needs in reception centres. Arrange referrals and assistance discreetly.
- Follow agreed procedures for consent and essential information sharing. Protect information about a woman's location, destination and contact details. Work with anti-violence partners to reach women who may be isolated, whose devices are monitored, or who cannot safely seek information themselves.

3. Coordinate safe transportation and accommodation



- Activate transportation arrangements for transition housing residents and respond to needs identified by GBV partners, including during the alert stage.
- Confirm that destinations maintain confidentiality and separation from the person(s) causing harm.
- Check that arrangements meet needs related to children, pets and accessibility when arranging evacuation and shelter.

During an emergency, confirm:

- *Are safe destinations and transportation confirmed?*
- *Can women access information and support confidentially?*
- *Are essential GBV services continuing?*

After a climate-related emergency

Sustain and Improve

The end of an evacuation order does not mean the end of violence or safety risks. Continue working with GBV organizations as women navigate their return, housing and recovery.

1. Keep safety central to recovery

- Include GBV organizations in recovery planning and coordination.
- Recognize that returning home may mean returning to the person causing harm or to unstable housing. Maintain confidential ways for women to reconnect with services and receive recovery information.

2. Support services through recovery

- Include service continuity and transition housing staff recovery needs in recovery discussions and funding requests.
- Maintain coordination between transition housing programs and emergency management organizations as emergency services wind down so women do not lose access to support.

3. Learn with partners and act on findings

- Debrief with GBV organizations to identify what supported safety, what created barriers and what needs to change.
- Work with partners to document service demand, access barriers and evacuation experiences, using data disaggregated by gender and other relevant factors where safe and appropriate. Protect confidentiality, particularly where small numbers could identify individuals.
- Agree on improvements, assign responsibility and set completion dates. Update plans, protocols and training, and share examples of effective collaboration without identifying survivors or confidential locations.

What can regional and provincial policymakers and Indigenous governing bodies do?



Policy

Explicitly include women's safety needs and GBV organizations in emergency management policy, planning standards and provincial guidance.



Funding

Provide dedicated, multi-year, flexible funding for GBV organizations to participate in emergency planning, maintain services during emergencies, and resource liaison and community navigator roles. Apply a gender and equity lens to budgets and resource allocation, including funding for GBV organizations to participate in planning, training and exercises.



Evidence

Invest in and strengthen B.C.-specific research and coordinated, confidential data collection on violence during and after emergencies, including analysis by gender and other relevant factors.

For more information, please contact the BC Society of Transition Houses
info@bcsth.ca

Key Resources

Canadian Women's Foundation (2024). A Toolkit for Equitable Emergency Management: Integrating Intersectional Gender Analysis into Hazard Risk and Vulnerability Assessments for Local Authorities
https://ccfsc-cccs.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/FINAL-Toolkit-for-Equitable-Emergency-Management.pdf

Gender and Disaster Pod. (2016). National gender and emergency management guidelines.
https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/5375/gender-and-emergency-guidelines.pdf

Huber, E., Muñoz Nieves, C., Poole, N., & Greaves, L. (2025). Gender and Emergency Management: A Framework for Action. Vancouver, BC Canada: Centre of Excellence for Women's Health.
https://cewh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Gender-Emergency-Management-Framework-FINAL.pdf

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2024). Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030: Gender action plan. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.
https://www.preventionweb.net/sendai-framework/sendai-framework-for-disaster-risk-reduction/SendaiGAP