

Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program – British Columbia Wildfire Response:

Questions and Answers (QAs)

Communities, employers, and workers across the country are facing challenges due to wildfires, particularly in the Okanagan region of British Columbia (BC), where many people are currently significantly affected. We recognize the disruption and uncertainty these circumstances can create for businesses, their employees, and the communities they serve and are closely monitoring and working with local and regional emergency and community support teams on appropriate responses.

The Government of Canada also recognizes that temporary foreign workers may face unique challenges during emergencies.

Q1. What should employers and workers do if they are affected by a wildfire, evacuation order, or evacuation alert?

A: The safety and wellbeing of workers and employers should be the immediate priority.

Workers and employers should follow all instructions issued by local emergency authorities, including evacuation alerts and evacuation orders. Individuals requiring emergency assistance should contact local emergency management authorities or emergency response services.

To support affected workers, employers can:

- Maintain communication with affected workers;
- Assist workers in accessing safe accommodation, transportation, and support services where possible;
- Contact the TFW Program if wildfires may affect their ability to meet program requirements (including wages, working conditions, and employer-provided accommodations); and
- Work with local authorities, consulates, and support organizations to help workers access available services.

Workers who need assistance can also contact a migrant worker support organization (MWSO) in their region. They can also contact their consulate, Service Canada, or Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), depending on their circumstances. Contact details for relevant organizations and services can be found below.

Q2. Do we know how many temporary foreign workers may be affected in the Okanagan region?

A: The exact number of workers affected continues to evolve as wildfire conditions change.

Based on current program data, there are more than 6,800* temporary foreign workers employed through the TFW Program in the Okanagan region, with the majority in the Primary Agriculture Stream. Workers in the Summerland and Vernon areas are currently affected by evacuation orders.

*This estimate does **not** include individuals in the region who are working under open work permits, study permits with work authorization, or other temporary resident streams.

Q3. What are employers' responsibilities if worker housing has been damaged or destroyed by a wildfire?

A: Employers remain responsible for ensuring that temporary foreign workers have access to housing that meets applicable TFW Program requirements, even in emergency situations.

- Temporary accommodations, such as hotels, motels, or bed and breakfasts, may be used where appropriate.

For workers under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), employment contracts contain additional provisions related to emergencies and *force majeure* events (such as extreme weather), including employer obligations to assist workers in accessing housing and support services.

Employers are encouraged to contact the TFW Program as early as possible for guidance if wildfires may affect their ability to meet Program requirements.

Q4. Are there specific measures for SAWP workers affected by wildfires?

A: Both the Mexican and Caribbean SAWP contracts include protections when a wildfire or another emergency (known as a *force majeure* event) prevents workers from working or affects where they are living.

In these situations, employers must:

- Help workers access safe housing and support services at no cost to the worker until they can return to work.
- Work with the worker's government representative (government agent) to find another SAWP employer if work is no longer available.
- Assist workers in returning to their home country if another job cannot be found, at no additional cost to the worker (other than costs already covered under the contract).

In addition, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) works closely with consulates and government representatives to help transfer affected workers to another SAWP employer, where possible, to reduce disruptions to employment.

Q5. What should workers do if important documents such as passports, visas, work permits, Social Insurance Numbers (SINs), or other personal belongings have been lost?

A: Workers who lose important documents such as passports, visas, work permits, or SINs should seek assistance as soon as possible from the appropriate organization.

Several organizations can help:

- **Service Canada** can provide information and assistance related to replacing a SIN, as well as Employment Insurance (EI).
- **Consulates** and **MWSOs** can assist workers with replacing lost or destroyed passports and other identity documents.
- **IRCC** has [special measures for individuals affected by domestic natural disasters](#), allowing for additional time to restore temporary resident status, where eligible. Workers with questions regarding their immigration status or work authorization should [contact IRCC directly](#).

With regards to the loss of personal belongings, both the Mexican and Caribbean SAWP contracts also include provisions to help cover the cost of replacing personal belongings lost in a fire.

- For workers from Mexico: If a worker's personal property is lost in a fire, the employer must pay one-third of the replacement cost, up to a maximum of \$650.
- For workers from the Caribbean: If a worker's personal property is lost in a fire, the replacement cost is shared among the employer, the government agent, and the worker, with each contributing up to a maximum of \$650.

Q6. What options are available for workers who cannot return to their original farm or workplace?

A: Employers and workers have several options depending on the circumstances.

- Affected workers in the SAWP can work with their employer and their consular services to request a transfer to other SAWP employers, where possible.
- Affected workers in other TFW Program streams can remain in Canada as long as their current work permits are valid but will need to identify a new employment opportunity and apply for a new work permit with IRCC, as required.
 - More details on that process can be found at the following link: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/extend/change-jobs-employers.html>
- Employers seeking guidance on transfers can contact one of the following:
 - TFW Program regional office: ESDC.WT.TFWP-PTET.OT.EDSC@esdc-edsc.gc.ca
 - Employer Contact Centre: 1-800-367-5693
- MWSOs can assist workers in applying to IRCC's special measures for students, workers, and visitors affected by domestic natural disasters. They can also help workers transition to other employment opportunities and connect them with available supports and services.

Employers are encouraged to contact the TFW Program as early as possible for guidance if wildfires may affect their ability to meet Program requirements.

In the meantime, all affected workers, including temporary foreign workers, are encouraged to apply for EI benefits online, as soon as possible after they finish working.

Q7. Are temporary foreign workers eligible for Employment Insurance (EI)?

A: Temporary foreign workers in Canada have the same rights and protections as Canadian citizens and permanent residents. As such, temporary foreign workers who lose their job through no fault of their own may be eligible for EI benefits, provided they were employed in insurable employment and meet all qualifying and entitlement conditions.

Q8. Can temporary foreign workers receive EI if they are laid off because of a wildfire or natural disaster?

A: Temporary foreign workers who have been laid off due to hazardous weather or natural disaster may apply for EI. All affected workers, including temporary foreign workers, are encouraged to apply for EI benefits online, as soon as possible after they finish working, even without a Record of Employment (ROE).

Service Canada is prioritizing support for individuals affected by wildfires and can help with applications and access to available federal supports.

Temporary foreign workers must meet the same EI eligibility benefits as Canadians and permanent residents. EI eligibility is assessed based on the individual's circumstances and whether they meet all qualifying and entitlement conditions, including being available for work. Eligibility is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Please refer to [EI Regular Benefits - Canada.ca](#) for most up to date eligibility requirements and to [Hazardous weather: Important notices - Canada.ca](#) for EI guidance related to wildfires.

Q9. What support is available through the Migrant Worker Support (MWS) Program?

A: The MWS Program helps temporary foreign workers understand and exercise their rights while in Canada, and can help connect affected workers with practical support during emergencies.

During wildfire and other emergency events, migrant worker support organizations (MWSOs) funded by the MWS Program can assist workers by:

- Accessing emergency services and evacuation supports;
- Applying for Employment Insurance and other benefits;
- Replacing lost identification and immigration documents;
- Connecting with consulates and community services;
- Finding temporary housing and support resources; and
- Helping workers transition to other employment opportunities where available.

Q10. What MWSOs operate in British Columbia?

A: MOSAIC and DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society both operate in BC.

[MOSAIC](#) offers a variety of services and can connect workers with support organizations near them: 604-254-9626.

[DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society](#) doesn't provide direct services to temporary foreign workers but works through networks and partnerships: 604-547-1240.

Q11. Where can employers and workers affected by the BC wildfires obtain assistance?

A: Employers can access information, assistance and support through these resources:

Employer Resources	Responsible Entity	Contact Information
TFW Program requirements and worker transfers	TFW Program Regional Office or Employer Contact Centre	1-800-367-5693
Employment Insurance	Service Canada	Employment Insurance contact information for employers - Canada.ca

Workers can access information, assistance and support through these resources:

Worker Resources	Responsible Entity	Contact Information
Employment Insurance	Service Canada	Employment Insurance contact information for individuals - Canada.ca
Social Insurance Number (SIN)	Service Canada	Contact the Social Insurance Number (SIN) Program - Canada.ca
Work permits and immigration status	IRCC	IRCC crisis contact form
Passports and travel documents	Foreign Consulates	Foreign Representatives in Canada: Consular Offices' Addresses - Canada.ca
Worker support, navigation and referrals	Migrant Worker Support Organizations	MOSAIC (604-254-9626) and DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society (604-547-1240)

In addition, employers and workers seeking general information or assistance can access Service Canada support through the following channels:

- **Service Canada Centres:** Individuals can visit a local Service Canada Centre for in-person assistance and access to federal government services. A list of offices is available at: [British Columbia - Find a Service Canada Office](#).
- **Service Canada Community Outreach and Liaison Service:** Service Canada outreach teams work with community organizations and partners to help individuals access government programs, benefits, and services. Information is available at: [Service Canada Community Outreach and Liaison Service](#). Individuals who are unable to access services online can receive assistance from a Service Canada representative by calling **1-877-631-2657 (toll-free)**.

Reminder

The BC wildfire situation may change rapidly. Employers and workers should continue to monitor local emergency management authorities and follow all evacuation orders, alerts, and public safety instructions. Affected employers and workers are encouraged to seek assistance as early as possible so they can access available supports and services.