

# Premier won't visit flood victims

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Premier Christy Clark said her government is working hard to help people dealing with flooding, but she won't go to the disaster areas unless her presence can help in a specific way.

The premier was speaking at the West Kelowna fire hall during the announcement that West Kelowna has joined a new fire alarm public awareness campaign.

But her speech quickly shifted to the torrents of water wrecking roads and homes throughout the province once reporters were given the chance to ask questions.

Clark said she was not planning to visit people dealing with floods in the North Okanagan. More than 350 people were evacuated from their homes in Sicamous as creeks burst their banks this past weekend.

"I will go if and when I can be helpful, but I'm not going to go if I'm getting in the way," said Clark.

Instead, her government is focusing on supporting the emergency workers already on the ground and in the water. "When a house is on fire you don't send politicians in there to go talk about it, you send the firefighters in to go save lives," said Clark. "There are some parallels when it comes to flooding as well."

The premier also commended members of the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union for saying workers serving the communities affected by flooding will keep working even if the union decides to go on strike. "It's a great sign of good faith in all the people that serve us in government," said Clark.

Wage negotiations between the government and the 65,000-member union broke down last week.

The majority of the event was devoted to its scripted purpose: fire alarms. Clark was in West Kelowna to announce the community had joined a provincewide campaign to get a working smoke alarm into every home.

Len Garis, president of the Fire Chiefs' Association of B.C., took the podium to explain the facts that drove the campaign forward. "If every home that had a fire in the last five years in British Columbia had a working smoke alarm, we would have seen 50 less deaths," said Garis. "That's 50 lives that would still be here today."

The physically and mentally ill, seniors, people with addictions and First Nations people are more likely to have fires and less likely to have smoke alarms, he said.

Kidde International, a fire safety company, donated 5,000 smoke alarms. They'll be distributed to vulnerable populations as part of the campaign. West Kelowna mayor Doug Findlater said West Kelowna Fire Rescue, led by Chief Wayne Schnitzler, has offered to do free inspections and fire alarm installations in any West Kelowna or Westbank First Nation home.



Premier Christy Clark speaks to kids in West Kelowna Tuesday about the importance of smoke detectors.