



CASE STUDY

CONVERSO 2023

ALBERTA WILDFIRE EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS





Telephone Town Halls as a Tool to Inform, Support, and Engage During Crisis

At the peak of Alberta's 2023 wildfire crisis, more than 38,000 residents across 48 communities were under evacuation orders. Over 1,000 wildfires burned more than 2.2 million hectares—ten times the province's five-year average. In early May, shortly after a provincial state of emergency was declared (May 6), over 29,000 residents were evacuated. The situation demanded rapid, scalable, and trusted communication tools to deliver accurate information and calm public fears. Converso's Telephone Town Halls (TTHs) and SMS campaigns became critical instruments in the emergency response.



Converso's Emergency Response Communications Model

Why Telephone Town Halls Were Essential for Wildfire Response:

- **Reach residents fast—even without internet:** Particularly important for evacuees in hotels, on the road, or in rural areas.
- **Real-time public engagement during crisis:** Residents asked questions directly and received live answers.
- **Drives media messaging and fills info gaps:** Q&A segments highlighted top concerns, which shaped government and media briefings the following day.
- **Counters rumours and disinformation:** Authorities addressed and dispelled misinformation in real time.
- **Empowers affected communities:** Allowing evacuees to speak directly with officials enhanced trust, reduced anxiety, and fostered transparency.

"In 2023, Alberta media used citizen questions from TTHs to shape wildfire press briefings the next morning."



Readiness Town Halls – Pre-Evacuation Preparedness:

- 1 Province-wide Telephone Town Hall held for wildfire readiness
- Targeted at residents in high-risk zones prior to evacuation
- Delivered proactive messaging on evacuation preparation, emergency alerts, and available resources
- Included live Q&A to answer community concerns before evacuation orders were issued

Key Stakeholders Who Participated in TTHs:

- Premier or designate
- Ministers/Deputy Ministers of Public Safety, Forestry, and Health
- RCMP representative
- Director of Emergency Management
- Insurance Bureau of Canada spokesperson
- Provincial Wildfire Director

Key Features of Emergency Telephone Town Halls:

- Live, real-time access to government officials
- Two-way communication: residents engage directly with decision-makers
- No internet or app required: accessible via any phone line
- Recordings available: those who missed live events could still access information



Themes and Categories of Questions Asked

Telephone Town Halls enabled real-time dialogue with evacuees and at-risk residents. Analysis of 870+ questions revealed key themes, grouped below by topic and frequency:

- Financial Support (90 questions)
- Evacuation and Alerts (140 questions)
- Fire Status and Updates (40 questions)
- Aid Accessibility and ID (100 questions)
- Housing, Property Damage, and Insurance (80 questions)
- Education and Students (20 questions)
- Government Response and Communication (20 questions)
- Mental Health and Support Services (40 questions)
- Re-entry and Timing (40 questions)



Why The Government of Alberta Used Converso?

Telephone Town Halls are a proven model for provincial emergency communication. They:

1. Centralize and streamline real-time emergency updates
2. Offer direct access to leadership and frontline agencies
3. Reach vulnerable and remote populations
4. Facilitate multi-agency recovery coordination
5. Counter misinformation and stabilize public sentiment
6. Build confidence, connection, and resilience in affected communities

Converso's 2023 wildfire emergency communication campaign in Alberta demonstrates the power and flexibility of Telephone Town Halls and SMS campaigns during crises.

These tools not only informed and reassured the public but also strengthened coordination across government departments and supported more responsive, transparent emergency management.

The detailed analysis of public concern-ranging from evacuation procedures to insurance claims and government accountability-reveals just how critical a two-way communication tool is during emergencies.

The ability to classify and respond to hundreds of live questions in real time gave leadership unique insight into what Albertans needed most.

Telephone Town Halls are not just a communications tactic—they are a critical public safety tool.

Statistical Insights from the 2023 Campaign



21 X 90-minute Evacuee-Focused Telephone Town Halls held between May 9–June 3



1 X 90-Minute Province-Wide Readiness Telephone Town Hall held before evacuations



17,641 evacuees registered to receive notifications and access details



879 live questions asked and answered across all town halls



Over 15,903 SMS messages delivered to keep the evacuees informed



Audio recordings posted online for transparency and future reference