

# Alberta On Scene

FOR PUBLIC SAFETY PARTNERS

VOLUME 32 | #01

FEBRUARY 2011

Alberta Environment update

## Alberta's Ice Monitoring Program

BY BERNARD TREVOR, P.Eng., River Hydraulics and Ice Engineer, Alberta Environment, Environmental Operations, Water Management Operations, River Forecast Section

**A**long with the potential for summer flooding along all rivers and streams in Alberta, the winter months bring an additional hazard – the risk of ice-related flooding. To assess and monitor for any winter flooding concerns, the role at Alberta Environment's River Forecast Centre (RFC) switches from the open water Forecaster-on-Duty (FOD) to the Ice Forecaster-on-Duty (IFOD). Our apologies to Apple Inc. for any trademark infringement.

Though water monitoring operations are normally scaled back in winter, the River Forecast Centre in Edmonton still monitors approximately 130 river level gauges across the province. The near real time water level data from

the gauges are checked on a daily basis to assess river conditions and to provide data for any forecasts or advisories. Unlike the open water season where river

flows are the main concern, river levels are the main concern in winter. An ice cover on a river will increase the water depth at the same flow depending on how rough and thick the ice cover is. As long as the river levels stay within the

banks, the actual flow rate is irrelevant with respect to flooding.

Weather and temperature forecasts are also monitored to assess how they may affect river ice covers. Periods of below

*Continued on page 18 ►►*

April 2010 – Part of the RFC ice forecasting team in front of one of the observation planes.



This is the last printed version of *Alberta On Scene*. Future issues will be produced in electronic format.

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## On Scene Editorial Board

*The composition of the Editorial Board is currently under review.*

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ISSN 0848-6794

# Common purpose

**F**OR MANY YEARS, On Scene has served a great purpose. It has connected fire services and emergency management professionals across the province, allowing us to share information on a quarterly basis. With change comes opportunity. As the Managing Director of the AEMA, my intent is to move the organization towards a common goal and purpose of public safety; thus, assisting in the coordination of a broader set of relevant stakeholders. All emergency responders in Alberta have a role in this shared responsibility.

On Scene will also transform to reflect this broader public safety perspective. This move reflects our commitment to working together with our partners to realize our vision. As such, On Scene will include more stories about our partners and how we are working together to fulfill our various roles. It will become a resource for you so you can identify ways to work effectively within the public safety community and with the various levels of government.

This section of the newsletter will also change. It won't be a regular feature from me; instead, it will become a shared message entitled Common Purpose that will rotate amongst Alberta's public safety partners. This will be your opportunity to highlight the contributions, successes and challenges you face on a daily basis.

*“...my intent is to move  
the organization towards  
a common goal and  
purpose of public safety...”*



*Dana Woodworth, AEMA's Managing Director.*

Managing emergencies is a collaborative effort that depends upon strong relationships built upon frequent communication and trust. The changes in this newsletter will assist by providing a forum to share varied perspectives on public safety in Alberta. In the near future, we will also expand opportunities to foster effective communication between our partners.

In my first couple of months as the Managing Director, I've had the opportunity to meet many of you. I'm committed to meeting more of you in the coming months. Throughout my travels I've heard a clear message: you believe in what you do and you are motivated to excel but you want the ability to link to one another, to share best practices, information and, if need be, resources. I believe we can get there but I acknowledge it will take a continued heavy effort by all parties, an effort that is worth pursuing since collectively we serve a noble cause - protecting Albertans.

**Dana Woodworth**  
*Managing Director, Alberta Emergency  
Management Agency*

## Working to effect greater efficiencies

In a broad sense, interoperability is simply the ability for diverse systems and organizations to inter-operate, and while interoperability is most commonly associated with communications, system interoperability must also be considered. For example, within the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, the Fire and Emergency Services Training Initiative (FESTI) is beginning to place more emphasis on the matter of system interoperability, especially in terms of recognizing the many social, political and organizational factors that can have an effect on system-to-system performance. Inter-system networks must be maintained so that emergency personnel can stay connected and mission operations can run as smoothly and effectively as possible.

The Government of Alberta is playing an important role in ensuring that the lessons learned from past emergencies, specifically recent past emergencies where responding agencies were unable to effectively communicate, can be incorporated into a provincial strategy that will then be

shared with The National Strategy for Communications Interoperability (NSCI). Taking into account all of the provincial strategies, a national strategy has been outlined, which focuses emphasis on enhancing governance, planning, technology, training and exercises. To create this national strategy, the NSCI received information from the federal, provincial and territorial senior officials responsible for emergency management.

In advance of this national strategy, Alberta is already establishing many interoperability connections. For example, the Alberta First Responder's Radio Communications System (AFRRCS) will play an important role in keeping emergency personnel connected. The AFRRCS will provide first responder agencies with a common radio network to communicate and improve coordination among agencies and systems across the nation will need to interoperate to create the most efficient emergency management possible. (For more information, see the *New system announced for first responder communications* article on page 7.)

Nationwide, work continues on maintaining and enhancing interoperability. AEMA is currently working with the Chemical, Biological, Radiological-Nuclear and Explosives Research and Technology Initiative (CRTI) and Geoconnections to create the Multi-Agency Situational Awareness System (MASAS). With MASAS, technology is developed that enables emergency management systems to effectively communicate. In a sense, MASAS is acting like a bridge between various systems. While each municipal and provincial partner will have their own emergency management system, MASAS will provide them with a connection to other emergency management systems to receive information such as situational awareness and other matters of emergency management.

The main goal of the NSCI is to create strong connections between emergency systems across Canada, which will result in safer operating environments for emergency personnel, improved service to the public and the most efficient use of all available resources.

### FireSmart update

## Community Series returns for 2011

As our population continues to grow, more people are choosing to live and work in Alberta's forests. For those communities located within forested areas, wildfire remains an ever-present threat. In 2010, more than 1,800 wildfires burned through the Forest Protection Area, some of which threatened homes and property. With predictions of longer and more severe fire seasons in the future, now is the time for communities to get prepared.

The *FireSmart* Community Series provides an opportunity for municipal councils, planners, emergency services staff and experts to discuss the *FireSmart* tools and tactics available to communities. With a wide range of roundtable discussions,

participants will gain valuable knowledge, contacts and advice to begin building a *FireSmart* community and combating the wildfire threat.

"We will have up to 15 topics for roundtable discussions, ranging from the benefits of prescribed fire to mountain pine beetle renewal," said Geoffrey Driscoll, community relations coordinator for Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. "Participants in the event will choose six of the discussion topics to attend over the two-day event."

Although the economy lacks the strength of previous years, there are still several tools and tactics available to municipalities to begin creating a *FireSmart* community.

One of the themes of this year's event is *FireSmart/BudgetWise*.

"Even a small, inexpensive effort by a community can greatly reduce the risk of loss from a wildfire," said Driscoll. "For example, engaging individual homeowners in easy tasks, like keeping their grass mowed and watered, can have a much greater effect overall in a community."

The 2011 *FireSmart* Community Series will take place at the Westin Hotel in downtown Edmonton on March 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>.

For more information or to reserve a spot in this interactive and engaging series, visit [www.regonline.com/firesmart](http://www.regonline.com/firesmart).

# Creating a collegial atmosphere for discussion

Photos from Tom Cox

**N**OW AN ANNUAL EVENT, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency's Stakeholders Summit has become an important, informative and well-attended meeting for people in



Chief Ron Robinson speaks about flooding in Medicine Hat.



Lazina Mckenzie from Sierra Systems speaking on FISTI.



The Honourable Hector Goudreau together with Alberta Fire Commissioner Trent West and AEMA Executive Director, Planning and Operations Colin Lloyd.



Alberta Fire Commissioner Trent West and Corporal Al Fraser, who served as Master of Ceremonies for the 2010 AEMA Summit.

*“...an atmosphere for collegiality, enabling people in various fields of emergency management to meet and discuss with colleagues and new acquaintances.”*

all walks of emergency management. The 2010 summit was held November 7 to 9, 2010 at the West Edmonton Convention Centre. Corporal Al Fraser, Emergency Operations Program Coordinator, Operational Emergency Readiness & Response Coordination with RCMP “K” Division Headquarters, in Edmonton, Alberta, served as the Master of Ceremonies for the summit. The Honourable Hector Goudreau, Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs, brought greetings from the province.

This year's summit included a wide range of topics presented by various organizations. This included Beaver Emergency Services Commission talking about their challenges, achievements and hopes for the future; Alberta Health Services discussing what they have been working on in the past year, and what they hope to work on in the future; details about the Fire and Emergency Services Initiative; and an overview about the floods in southern Alberta in summer 2010. As well, there was a presentation on the Incident Command



Summit delegates – Dave Bokovay and Dennis Brown, Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre.

System Canada Project and a presentation on Municipal Regionalization.

One of the most stirring, though, was the presentation by Sylvie Beaudoin, about the Dawson College shooting (see next article on this page).

In addition to the presentations, the stakeholder summit also created an atmosphere for collegiality, enabling people in various fields of emergency management to meet and discuss with colleagues and new acquaintances.

## Outcomes from Dawson College incident

# Lessons learned and improvements made

At the AEMA Stakeholder Summit held in November 2010, one of the most compelling presentations was the one given by Sylvie Beaudoin, Special Operations, Montreal EMS. In her presentation, Sylvie talked about the shooting incident at Dawson College in Montreal on September 13, 2006.

While the event itself was tragic, the many lessons learned from it are valuable, especially as they relate to a broad range of issues – intervention, command, specialty operations, interoperability and liaison.

Lessons learned ...

- All EMS, fire and police personnel need to be prepared to respond to an active shooter incident.
- Schools need to be prepared to make plans in case a situation like this happens.
- Children need to be prepared to REACT to this type of emergency.

Since that day in Montreal, more training has been provided for police and EMS, new intervention tactics have been implemented, tactics have been identified for new locations (e.g. hospitals) and a new law, the Anastasia law, which tightens Quebec legislation governing firearms, has been enacted.

Other lessons learned include lessons specific to training, medical support, intervention, command, specialized EMS teams, liaisons with police and health representatives, communication and the media, as indicated on the next page:



A sea of emergency vehicles responded to the Dawson College situation.

## The situation ...

On September 13, 2006, Montreal EMS received a call for "penetrating trauma by firearms, multiple victims." Several resources were dispatched to the scene. In the minutes that followed, paramedics treated multiple casualties.

Over the course of the event, a total of 24 ambulances and 80 police cars responded to the scene. A major incident response plan was activated and the Montreal General Trauma Centre, less than two minutes away from the scene, activated their Mass Casualty Response plan (code orange). In total, 19 victims were transported to four different hospitals, and one 18 year old student was found dead in the cafeteria. The incident was over by 17:30 p.m. after five SWAT teams (three from Montreal police and two from the provincial police) deployed inside the school searching for potential additional shooters.

Responders to the scene included Montreal EMS, Montreal Police, Quebec Provincial Police and the Montreal Fire Department.

Continued on next page ►►

## Command

- Initial chaos can be very long so it is imperative to get organized.
- Managers are responsible for the safety of their staff.
- Be prepared to deal with a lack of resources in the first few minutes.
- Be prepared for the arrival of a lot of resources thereafter.
- Make sure everyone knows their role in the Incident Command System structure.
- If several emergency operations centres are enacted, use partners to staff them.

## Training

Previously SWAT members were trained on rapid deployment-active shooter. Now there are annual training and exercises, with all police officers being trained. Previously EMS Special

Operations staff were involved with training. Now all EMS staff conduct regular training with police services.

## Medical support – triage

EMS includes triage, treatment and transport. In addition to EMS establishing a medical triage area in the cold zone, it is important to provide police officers with any medical evacuation equipment needed to evacuate the victims (stair-chairs/stretchers).

## Medical support – advanced triage

It is imperative to secure a location under police protection in the warm zone, with a tactic medic component only. Police will bring injured victims to this location when evacuation is not appropriate. The location should be in a room that provides

ballistic protection, near the entrance of the building.

## Medical support – evacuation corridor

**\*KEEP EVACUATION CORRIDOR CLEAR\***  
A planned and secured evacuation route should be established to bring patients outside to the triage area (cold zone). Time is very important for the injured victims. Victim evacuations should be planned ASAP to optimize survival of triage victims.

Police should support the protection of paramedics and assist with evacuations.

## Intervention

- There will be initial confusion on perimeters and zones (hot or kill zone) so it is important to coordinate with police ASAP.
- Beware of the “suction effect” (where paramedics are pulled into a situation with little regard for their own safety, because there are victims).
- Use START triage: if not for triage use, the tags will help with patient tracking.
- Use Casualty Collecting Points and advise police where they are.
- Refer emotional victims in the triage area to psychosocial services.
- Maintain a safe access and egress corridor.
- Make sure the first responders (fire) are aware of the situation.



Ambulances waiting to be put into service at Dawson College.

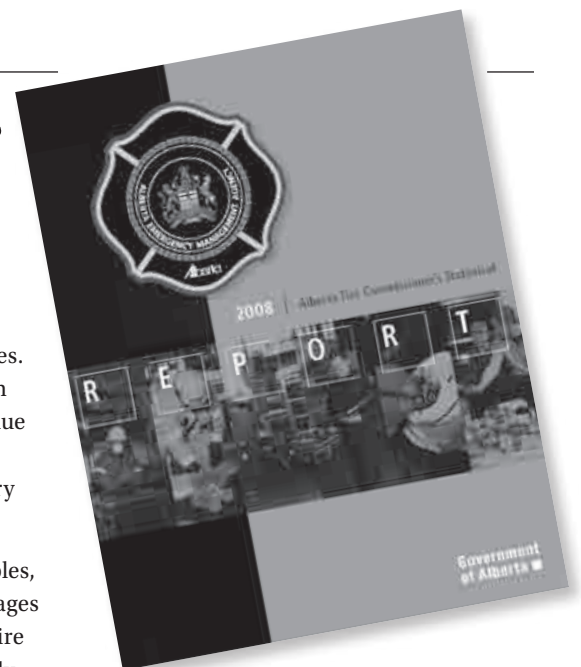
## 2008 Alberta Fire Commissioner's Statistical Report

# Latest Alberta Fire Statistics report now available

For the year 2008, 5,690 fires in Alberta reported to the Fire Commissioner. These fires resulted in 33 deaths, 243 injuries and \$390 million in direct property losses. On average, during the 10-year period 1999 to 2008, there were 1.1 fire deaths per 100,000 population in Alberta. Most fire deaths and injuries happened in places where Albertans feel the safest – their homes. Although only 31 per cent of all fires occurred in homes, 76 per cent of all fire deaths, 58 per cent of all fire injuries and 39 per cent of all property losses from fires occurred in this property class. Home fire safety continues to be a priority for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency and the fire and

emergency services in Alberta. Arson or set fires ranked number one in the list of “Acts or Omissions” at 24 per cent of all fires. These fires require broad-based reduction strategies. In addition, our seniors continue to have the highest risk for fire death in Alberta, with their numbers growing every year. Seniors deserve our close attention.

The Statistical Report containing data tables, charts and text is enhanced by digital images of fire incidents provided by the Alberta fire service. The report was distributed in early February 2011 and is available online at [http://www.aema.alberta.ca/se\\_statistics\\_reports.cfm](http://www.aema.alberta.ca/se_statistics_reports.cfm) Efforts are underway to publish the 2009 Statistical Report.



The Fire Commissioner encourages both the fire service and the insurance industry to practice accurate and timely fire reporting so fire loss stats can be compiled.

# Detailing Alberta's largest disaster recovery program

**A**S A FOLLOW UP to the flooding situation that took place in southern and southeastern Alberta last spring, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) put in place a disaster recovery program to help Albertans affected by the event. The 2010 \$200 million Southern Alberta Disaster Recovery Program was the largest ever issued by the province of Alberta.

The disaster recovery program provides financial assistance to help citizens recover from severe weather events. The program covers uninsurable losses and helps rebuild communities. The government's goal is to ensure people receive the full assistance they are eligible for under the program guidelines and to get assistance into the hands of the people impacted as quickly as possible.

Residential applications are sorted to identify high priority applicants (displaced residents) to ensure they are evaluated first. These applications are top-priority as citizens' homes are impacted and their living situation needs to be resolved quickly.

The government's initial focus is on residential applications followed by small business and farm applications. The larger provincial and municipal projects as well as administrative and emergency expenses are handled later.

As of February 16, \$31 million in disaster recovery assistance has been paid out.

The following are some of the details of the program.

## **Residential, small business and agriculture operations:**

- 2,996 applications received.\*
- 2,846 cheques issued.
- \$12.6 million disaster recovery assistance paid out.

## **Municipal**

- \$18.4 million disaster recovery assistance paid out.

*\*Approximately 578 applications have been withdrawn, are duplicates or are not eligible under program guidelines. The remaining applications are currently being evaluated, with many of them pending the receipt of additional paperwork or insurance documents from applicants*

## **Alberta First Responder Radio Communications System update**

# New system announced for first responder communications

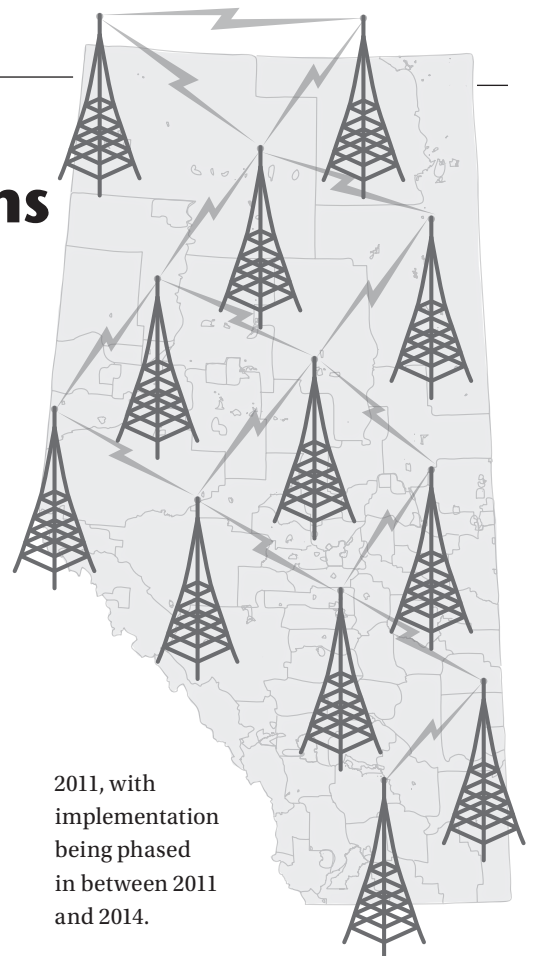
A new province-wide radio communications network has been established for Alberta. The new network, *Alberta First Responder Radio Communications System (AFRRCS)*, allows for better-coordinated and integrated responses among first responders, particularly during emergencies and natural disasters. AFRRCS will also be used for day-to-day operations of first responders such as the RCMP, municipal police, fire and emergency medical personnel as well as the Government of Alberta radio users, including sheriffs and fish and wildlife officers.

The stand-alone radio systems that have been used by many first responder agencies have been known to hamper

*...seamless communication among participating first responder agencies.*

inter-agency communication and cooperation. The new network, which is being implemented as part of Alberta's new law enforcement framework, will allow seamless communication among participating first responder agencies.

Construction on the \$370 million new radio network project begins in March



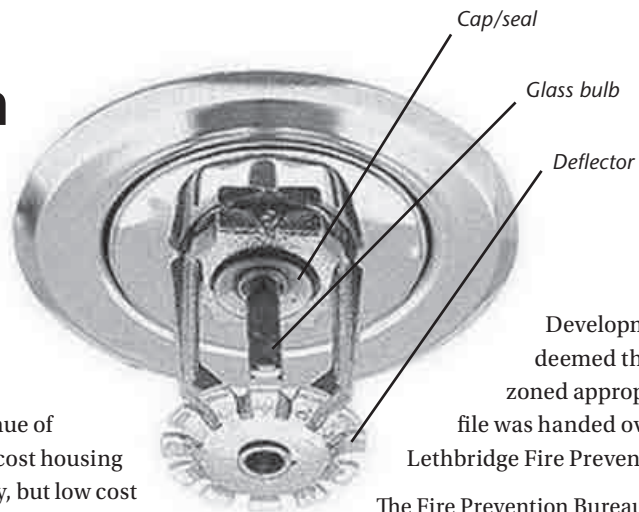
2011, with implementation being phased in between 2011 and 2014.

# Secondary suites – a teamwork solution in Lethbridge

BY GERRIT SINKE, Fire Prevention Officer, Lethbridge Fire Department

When the residents of a home on Lethbridge's south side awoke to the sound of someone pounding on the outside door, they were surprised to hear that there was a fire in the basement suite below them. After the residents, including a small child, quickly evacuated from their home, they stood outside watching many of their belongings go up in smoke. An investigation by the Lethbridge Fire and Emergency Services revealed that this fire started in the basement suite and was caused by the careless use of a candle. There were two smoke detectors in the home but these detectors were not interconnected and the batteries to them had been removed. If the tenant had not been quick enough to alert the upstairs residents, this story could have had a very tragic ending. These types of incidents have been too common throughout Alberta and Lethbridge City Council has not been blind to this.

Secondary suites are often a wonderful avenue of providing low-cost housing in a community, but low cost should never be at the expense of tenant safety. When the Alberta Fire Code 2006 included section 2.16 "Secondary Suites," an opportunity arose that resulted in a very successful program in the City of Lethbridge. What became known as the Secondary Suite Legalization program was the result of a teamwork approach by various committees and departments within the City of Lethbridge. Lethbridge City Council, in an attempt to stay within their broad mandate of providing a safe and viable community, set aside \$260,000 from the Provincial Affordable Housing Program to provide financial incentive for home owners. The program was set up in such a way that once the City of Lethbridge



Development Services deemed the suite to be zoned appropriately, the file was handed over to the Lethbridge Fire Prevention Bureau.

The Fire Prevention Bureau has done a substantial amount of work on this program. The media also played a big role in giving publicity to the program, resulting in almost 120 suites enrolled to date. The basement suites that qualify for the program must have been in existence prior to January 1, 2007. Once an applicant is deemed eligible for the program, a preliminary inspection by a Fire Prevention Officer is done and 16 items are inspected in the suite.

These items include things such as bedroom window sizes, hard-wired smoke detectors that are connected between the suites, proper separation between the suites using 12.7 millimetre drywall, protection of the exits using drywall and proper fire spread protection in the furnace room. The last item was the biggest challenge. Properly dry walling and sealing a furnace room can be an extremely difficult task given the amount of vents, pipes and water lines that run near the ceiling. It became evident early on that if section 16.2.13, furnace room separation, of the Fire Code was going to be adhered to, the legalization of pre-existing secondary suites would be reserved for only a select few suites. The breakthrough came from a solution that the Edmonton fire department implemented in their safe housing program, furnace room sprinkler systems. When installed by a certified sprinkler fitter, the Lethbridge Fire Prevention Bureau now deems a sprinkler to be an alternative solution to the dry walling of the furnace room. Once the home owner has completed all the upgrades, a re-inspection for compliance is done by a Fire Prevention Officer. Once the suite is deemed compliant,



Bedroom window sizes are inspected in suites.



the owner qualifies for a rebate, up to \$2,500, for expenses incurred relating to the upgrade. A compliant suite also results in a City of Lethbridge development permit.

The program has been received extremely well by home owners. Ensuring occupant safety has been the main reason why home owners have applied for the secondary suite legalization program. The protection of the

revenue stream from rental properties, the availability of grant funding to help with the cost of upgrades as well as favourable home resale values of a legalized property have also played a role.

With over \$100,000 left in the grant fund, the secondary suite program will continue to be a success as home owners take advantage of this teamwork solution to illegal basement suites in the City of Lethbridge.



### Alberta Weekly Newspaper Association contest

## Continuing a valued tradition and partnership

Every year, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) hosts a contest to recognize fire prevention and safety coverage provided by members of the Alberta Weekly Newspaper Association (AWNA) during Fire Prevention Week. All entries are judged by an independent panel for fun, innovative and informative fire prevention and safety messages, including local interest stories and pictures, editorials or the use of articles provided by the AEMA.

First place winners from each of the three circulation categories listed below received an iPod Touch and a wall plaque. All winners and Honourable Mentions also received framed certificates. One entry from all newspaper entries was also eligible to win the grand prize draw of \$1,000.

The winner of the \$1,000 prize, drawn from all entries received, was The Fairview Post. The awards and prizes were presented by

AEMA on January 28, 2011 at the annual AWNA symposium in Edmonton.

Congratulations to all of the winners and everyone who entered the contest. We appreciate your support for fire safety and look forward to continuing this valued tradition and partnership with AWNA.

The awards and prizes were presented by Alberta Fire Commissioner Trent West and his wife on January 28, 2011 at the annual AWNA symposium in Edmonton.

### Congratulations to 2010 AEMA Fire Prevention Week Contest winners:

#### Circulation under 2,500

**Winner: The Valleyview Valley Views**

**Honourable Mention:**

- Fox Creek Times



#### Circulation 2,501 to 5,000

**Winner: Bonnyville Nouvelle**

**Honourable Mentions:**

- The Flagstaff County Community Press
- The Three Hills Capital



#### Circulation 5,001 and higher

**Winner: Wainwright Star**

**Honourable Mentions:**

- The Airdrie Echo
- The Edson Leader



# Fire Prevention Week contest winner from Peace River

**E**ACH OCTOBER, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) hosts a special Fire Prevention Week contest for children across Alberta in partnership with local fire services and schools. In 2010, 361 fire departments participated in the Children's Fire Prevention Week Contest. Students were encouraged to do the fun and educational activities in the *Fire Safety Starts with You!* booklet at school or at home and enter the province-wide contest. The winning student, Brandon Still from Peace River, received a home computer system courtesy of ATCO Gas and ATCO Electric plus Brandon's school and homeroom teacher each received a \$200 cash prize from the AEMA.

Due to an overwhelming response to the contest, AEMA added three prizes in addition to the grand prize. Zone winners were drawn from the north, central and south areas of Alberta; each zone winner was awarded a Nintendo DSi XL. More than 12,000 children entered the contest from numerous communities across Alberta.

A huge thank you to all of the local fire services and schools for promoting the contest and distributing the safety booklet to help students learn how to prevent and stay safe from fire.

Congratulations again to all of the winners, too!



Children's 2010 FPW contest winner, Brandon Still with, from left to right behind him, Mike Shykora, AEMA; Albert Bouchard, ATCO Electric; Dan Brown, ATCO Gas; Peace River Fire Chief Lance Bushie; and Fire Prevention Officer Mike Frayne.

## *And the winners were ...*

Grand prize winner for the 2010 contest was:

**Brandon Still**, 7 years old, from Ecole Springfield School in Peace River

Zone winners were:

**Cooper Fadden**, 8 years old, Timberlea School, Fort McMurray

**Terry Tesolin**, 5 years old, Vanier Community Catholic School, Edson

**Paige Kobberstad**, 7 years old, Hanna Primary School, Hanna



From left to right - Edson Deputy Fire Chief Tyler Robinson, AEMA Fire Field Officer Jeremy Wagner, and ATCO's Hal Klee stand with prize winner Terry Tesolin (front).



From left to right - Glen Durand, Fire Chief for Special Areas; Cary Fecho, ATCO representative; Tom Harnos, AEMA; Paige Kobberstad, regional winner from Hanna; Dave Mohl, Fire Chief, Town of Hanna; Candice Gordon, volunteer firefighter, Town of Hanna.

# What the heck is a HIRF?!

BY KEVAN JESS, Chief Fire Administrator, Alberta Municipal Affairs

**H**IRF STANDS FOR High Intensity Residential Fire, which is generally where a fire rapidly develops within a single family dwelling or duplex and extends from the building of origin to an adjacent structure and often many more. Some large conflagrations (Erlton – Calgary 2002, McEwen Green – Edmonton 2007) also have been noted as HIRF fires in that they were the result of fires which began in combustible multi-family residential buildings under construction and spread to surrounding structures through a combination of high winds, unclad construction, high levels of radiant heat, proximity and/or combustible siding/ exterior wall systems on adjacent buildings.

In the late 1990s and into this century, this type of multi-structure fire became an apparent problem for Albertans and their fire services. These fires are not exclusive to the provinces two largest cities or to Alberta.

Two HIRF scenarios are common concerns.

1. Fire spreads from residential buildings under construction, with uncompleted exposed building faces, to adjacent structures. With exposed combustible materials and openings during construction, these buildings are especially susceptible to the creation of a situation where multiple buildings have been destroyed and entire blocks lost or threatened. Most of these fires are caused by either inadequate clearance to construction heaters, workers not adequately following the hot work and fire watch provisions of the Alberta Fire Code, and intentional human incendiary activity (arson).
2. Fire has spread from one residential building to one or more adjacent building where unprotected side walls, soffits and siding were in place on the exposed building(s). Combustible projections and unprotected openings (windows) also may play a role in fire spread.

## *A simplified method for tracking High Intensity Residential Fires (HIRF) in Alberta*

Two major recommendations – code amendments (Alberta Building and Fire Code) and a public fire safety education campaign – in the Working Group Report on HIRF to the Government of Alberta (GoA) in May 2008 have been addressed as of late 2009. There are a number of other recommendations in various stages of implementation.

One of the remaining recommendations accepted by the GoA and not yet fully implemented is:

### **Section 4: Fire investigation and reporting**

**Recommendation:** Improve fire monitoring in Alberta to address emerging fire problems before they have a significant impact.

**Accept:** In co-operation with municipalities, the government will develop a plan to implement proposed fire monitoring and analysis improvements.

The need to track HIRFs is obvious. Considerable effort has been expended through code amendments and public education/awareness campaigns to reduce the frequency and severity of HIRFs. Tracking of HIRFs will be a measure of the effectiveness of these measures and a source of data useful to further address HIRFs as required in the future.

### **Criteria to identify HIRFs**

A “yes” answer to the two criteria below indicates a HIRF fire:

- the fire involved more than one residential building, either under construction or occupied, and
- rapid fire spread occurred from the building of origin to adjacent homes prior to fire department response.

### **Method of tracking HIRFs in the Fire Incident Reporting System**

Starting in January 2011, the Fire Commissioner requests Fire Chiefs, Fire Investigators, Safety Codes Officers, Insurance Professionals and AEMA field officers who complete fire reports to write or enter the words “This is a HIRF Fire” in the description box.

### **Rationale**

- This simple method of tracking avoids the creation and use of another fire report especially for HIRFs. As it is, the fire service is overwhelmed by paperwork and an extra HIRF fire report will not be acceptable.
- When analyzing the data at AEMA, a criterion to select the proposed text “This is a HIRF Fire” in the description box can be used to identify HIRFs.

These scenarios have been exacerbated by a number of societal and technological changes over the past decades which may not have been completely understood for their impacts on exterior fire spread. There has been a synergy in many of these changes which has created a significant potential for

HIRFs. Some of these changes include:

- Increased density of housing. Smaller residential lot sizes and two storey houses with tight footprints have been a result

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of the urbanization of Alberta, desires for affordable housing lots and increased costs to provide serviced land. This trend seems to have begun in the late 1970s. Prior to that, minimum lot line setbacks and maximum percentages of structure allowed on a lot tended to keep these detached and semi-detached structures farther apart.

The economic activity during much of the last decade resulted in a high demand, high-price housing market in which buyers and developers were understandably looking for all reasonable methods to reduce costs.



In 2007, one of the city's most devastating fires hits the McEwen neighbourhood in Edmonton.

- Reduction in the use of both non-combustible cladding materials and materials which, while still combustible (wood and high-density fibreboard siding), provided some initial resistance to burn through. Siding materials, particularly for the side and rear walls, were previously most typically cementitious stucco. Other choices were often brick and solid siding.
- Development of siding materials which have limited or no resistance to the effects of the radiant heat generated by fire. Aluminum siding was popular in the 70's and acrylic-based stucco is now used in some instances but the most prevalent form of cladding for residential construction has become pre-formed vinyl strips or siding, usually designed to mimic the appearance of wood. Its ease of application and relatively low cost has given it a predominant place in the cladding of large and small residential structures.
- Sheathing under the cladding material has also changed over the years from shiplap lumber to plywood (and sometimes rigid fiberglass or foam board) to oriented strand board (OSB).

Made from wood chips and resins under heat and pressure, OSB makes use of otherwise under-utilized wood species such as aspen. When used and applied like plywood, it is less expensive. OSB does, however, have a much rougher surface than plywood, which gives it a greater propensity for flame and heat to “catch” on the surface and begin pyrolysis and support combustion.

*“...due to cost and ease of application, this pre-punched aluminum soffit material, along with corresponding fascia covers, creates an inexpensive no-maintenance surface...”*

- Roofs and soffits have also changed in both style and construction with multiple roof surfaces, styles and angles more often found in roofs built in the past 20 years. As well, continuously vented aluminum soffit panels, which may provide a path for vertical fire travel into the attic space, have become an industry standard. This fire spread was less prevalent when soffit materials were often plywood with specific-sized vent grates provided to ventilate the attic space. The ventilation of this space is still of major importance and concern but, due to cost and ease of application, this pre-punched aluminum soffit material, along with corresponding fascia covers, creates an inexpensive no-maintenance surface, even in places in the roof where venting is not needed nor effective.
- In efforts to maximize density and provide value, the width of streets in residential sub-divisions has decreased over time, too. This, along with reduced space for parking and the size of today's fire apparatus, may slow the response of fire suppression crews, which potentially creates a longer time before fire suppression intervention, allowing a fire to grow and potentially spread to adjacent structures.

- Another result of this trend has been the prevalence of attached garages in new construction over the past 30 years. This has increased the probability (in comparison to a detached garage) of a fire that begins in the garage spreading to the house that it is attached to as well as to adjacent properties.
- Lighter-weight construction within residential structures, particularly in flooring systems, can result in more rapid fire development, particularly in basements where these light-weight wooden trusses or OSB/wood I beams are exposed. Testing suggests that they burn and lose structural integrity much quicker than when they are protected or where dimensional lumber floor joists are used.
- Increased fire loading in today's residences may also have an impact on fire growth and spread. While the amount of furniture and other contents may not have changed significantly some sources suggest that due to the petroleum-based manufacturing of everything, from fabric and upholstery to foam cushioning and mattresses to the glues which are used in the creation of so many "wooden" furniture pieces and cabinets, the heat release under fire of these materials can be up to four times as much as the same items constructed out of natural products such as "real" wood, cotton, wool, etc.

These combined factors have created, over time and inadvertently, a greater likelihood for a HIRF to happen. It should be noted that a HIRF can occur in areas where none of the above factors apply; however, experience suggests that the frequency and size of HIRF fires increases where most or all of these factors are in place.

In 2006, Alberta Municipal Affairs – AEMA (Fire Commissioner's Office) and the Public Safety Division, began to study this recently recognized trend. As well, at their fall convention in 2006, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association called for changes in Alberta's Fire and Building Codes that would reduce the risks posed by the spread of residential structure fires.

After the fire at McEwen Green on July 21, 2007, the internal study was expanded and Alberta Municipal Affairs created the HIRF Working Group whose terms of reference were established on August 15, 2007. The final report of the HIRF Working Group was submitted on October 21, 2007 (full report available at [www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/documents/ss/HIRF\\_Final\\_Report\\_\\_web.pdf](http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/documents/ss/HIRF_Final_Report__web.pdf)).

Of the 22 recommendations in the report, the vast majority were accepted by the Government of Alberta.

Most of the accepted recommendations have been implemented as of this date and other work is ongoing. The Three Minute Drill video campaign has been well received across the province ([www.3minutedrill.alberta.ca](http://www.3minutedrill.alberta.ca)).

In addition, a number of amendments were made to the Alberta Fire Code 2006 (effective March 11, 2009) and the Alberta Building Code 2006 (effective May 3, 2009). A Code Change Summary is available at [www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/images/Summary\\_of\\_codes\\_\\_2\\_\(1\).pdf](http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/images/Summary_of_codes__2_(1).pdf).

*“There has been a synergy in many of these changes which has created a significant potential for HIRFs.”*

The amendments to the Fire Code were aimed at improving fire safety at construction/demolition sites including:

- the requirement for a Fire Safety Plan at each site. The HIRF report anticipated the submission/approval of this plan at the time of the building permit application;
- reduction in the accumulation of combustibles on sites;
- improvements in site security;
- increased awareness in ignition prevention and location of fire extinguishers;
- fire department access to construction sites;
- water supplies at construction sites for firefighting;
- protection of buildings from fires that originate in adjacent buildings under construction.

Building Code Amendments were aimed at improving the protection of a building from a fire occurring in an adjacent building after completion, including:

- clarification as to calculation of fire department response time (this time is used to determine the response area in a municipality within which additional measures such as spatial separation and/or fire resistance/protection are not required);
- requirements for fire resistance in construction of side walls, soffits and projections within 1.2 metres of property lines;
- reductions in window and door openings in sidewalls based on distance to property lines.

Further information can be found at: [www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/1147.cfm](http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/1147.cfm)

If you have any questions or inquiries, please contact Alberta Municipal Affairs – Safety Services at 1-866-421-6929.

# Planning underway for 2011 fire chiefs conference

BY BILL PURDY, Executive Director, Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, bpurdy@xplornet.com

The Alberta Fire Chiefs Association annual conference will be held May 29 to June 1, 2010 at the Capri Centre in Red Deer. The conference committee chairs are Al Schram, Fire Chief, Town of Edson, and Greg Van Tighem, Fire Chief, Town of Jasper. The conference coordinator is KEL Consulting Services.

The trade show starts after the opening ceremonies on May 29, 2011 and will close May 30 at 16:00. Trade show registration has been sent to 100 suppliers and already the response has been quite positive.

The conference registration for delegates was sent in early January. If you wish to participate, but have not received the application kit, please visit our website at [www.afca.ab.ca](http://www.afca.ab.ca)

*“Other events and educational sessions will be posted on the AFCA website at [www.afca.ab.ca](http://www.afca.ab.ca).”*

## Resolution submissions

Fire departments who wish to submit a resolution please contact your Regional Director. You must be a member of AFCA to submit resolutions. The directors of the seven regions are:

- **Region One** – Dan Lemieux, Grande Prairie Fire Department
- **Region Two** – Bill Graham
- **Region Three** – John Helton, Lamont Fire Department
- **Region Four** – David Zayonce, Beaver County Fire Services
- **Region Five** – Lorne Thompson, Olds Fire Department
- **Region Six** – Graham Clark, High River Fire Department
- **Region Seven** – Greg Erickson, Cardston Fire Department

Resolutions may also be sent to my office.

The Board includes three Directors at Large:

- **Greg Van Tighem**, Jasper Fire Department
- **Cory Chegwyn**, Yellowhead County
- **Randy Siemens**, Lamont County

For the Tuesday Breakfast, the conference committee has confirmation that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Employment and Immigration will be part of a panel discussion on related topics that affect the AFCA and how to interrelate with various government departments. The Minister of Health has not confirmed at this time. Other events and educational sessions will be posted on the AFCA website at [www.afca.ab.ca](http://www.afca.ab.ca).

## Retention and Recruitment

During 2008, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the AFCA reached an agreement on a study on Retention and Recruitment (R&R). The Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) and AFCA established a working group of fire chiefs across Alberta. In 2008, the seven regions were visited by the Fire Commissioner's Office and AFCA. The Minister of Municipal

Affairs approved an operating grant of \$50,000. Volunteer Alberta was engaged to interview and report by June 1, 2010. This was done in two phases and the final report was completed in May 2010. The report has many recommendations.



## Working group for 2011

As the original working group had a sunset date of November 30, 2010, a new working group has been formed, comprised of:

- **Trent West**, Fire Commissioner – Co-chair
- **Peter Krich**, Fire Chief Camrose – Co-chair
- **Bob Jones**, AAMD&C – Member
- **Lawrence Arnold**, Fire Chief Grimshaw – Member
- **Ted Dillion**, Fire Chief Ponoka – Member
- **Joan Meidinger**, County of Leduc – Member
- **Leon Cardinal**, Métis Settlements – Member
- **Leon Smallboy**, Alberta First Nations – Member
- **Bill Purdy**, AFCA – Advisor

The group is now proceeding with phase three of the report and the recommended working tools will be prioritize.

At the last meeting the following committees were established:

- Recognition
- Cadet Program
- Branding
- Protecting Investments (retention)

The committees are urging regional directors holding regional meetings to include in the agenda a report on R&R. Peter Krich or I will be available. The conference educational sessions will include an update and seek feedback from the membership.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the 2011 conference in Red Deer, May 29 to June 1, 2011.

# Injury Control Award helps promote fire safety

**T**HE ALBERTA CENTRE for Injury Control and Research (ACICR) created the biennial awards to recognize the innovative, high quality injury control work occurring in Alberta. Those involved in the field of injury control are asked to nominate individuals, organizations and community groups who have exemplified their commitment to addressing injury through programming, advocacy and action. The six award categories are:

## 1. Media Award for Excellence in Injury Reporting

The Media Award for Excellence was created to recognize excellence in the reporting of injury awareness and prevention programs and activities within the province of Alberta. This award also recognizes the way in which injury issues are reported, including avoiding the term 'accident', and including prevention information where appropriate. The award is open to all forms of media coverage.

## 2. Excellence in Injury Control Strategies

It is difficult to create true change in injury control without solid programming and strategies. Programs must be based on available research and conducted in a manner which evidence shows is likely to be successful. This award was created to recognize superb injury control programs and projects.

## 3. The Community Action for Safety Award

The Community Action for Safety Award recognizes a community's collective efforts and commitment to reduce the frequency and severity of injuries where its members live, learn, work and play. Nominations will be accepted for an Alberta community or community safety promotion coalition.

## 4. The Injury Control Champion Award

This award was created to recognize the action and excellence of individuals

## Media Award for Excellence in Injury Control Reporting

Public awareness is key to reducing and preventing injuries at home, work or play. Information can have a positive effect on attitudes and behaviours.

The Media Award for Excellence was created to recognize excellence in the reporting of injury awareness and control programs and activities within the province of Alberta. This award also recognizes the way in which injury issues are reported, avoiding the term "accident" and including prevention information where appropriate.

This year's winner is Dory Rossiter an anchor from CTV Lethbridge. Dory has a long history of reporting on safety issues in Alberta.

She produced a three-part series with Mothers Against Drunk Driving about a car crash that took the life of a small child. Her work with the police and the surviving family demonstrated the tremendous loss and devastation the incident caused – also documented were the actions people could take to prevent this from happening again. Other stories have focused on fire prevention in residential and commercial kitchens, fall prevention in the home, consumer product safety for children, teen driving and the use of helmets when cycling, skateboarding and roller-blading to name a few. In her work with the Lethbridge Fire Department, Dory discovered that firefighters have found that some seniors living in high rise apartments refuse to leave their suites when a fire alarm activates. This puts both the seniors and firefighters at risk as precious time is wasted convincing seniors of the need to leave. With input from the firefighters, Dory spent almost a year researching and shooting "No Time to Stay" a video that the fire department will use for awareness purposes.



*Dory Rossiter, winner of the Media Award for Excellence.*

and organizations in the area of injury control. It acknowledges a passion, dedication to quality and commitment to injury control demonstrated in everyday work. Individuals or organizations working in all aspects of injury control are eligible for this award (prevention, emergency medical services, acute care, rehabilitation).

## 5. The Joanne A. Vincenten Injury Control Student Scholarship

The field of injury prevention and control is very broad and offers opportunities for people involved in various disciplines. It is important, as the field evolves, to bring new people and fresh perspectives into the area. The Joanne A. Vincenten Injury Control Student Scholarship will provide financial support for aspiring students studying in the area of injury control. The Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research will award the \$1,000 scholarship to one student per year.

## 6. Dr. John H. Read Award

This high profile award is inspired by the work of Dr. Read, Past Director of the Calgary Research Unit and a professor of community health sciences at the University of Calgary, Alberta. The award was created to recognize Dr. Read for his outstanding achievement in the area of injury control. The award recognizes people who advanced injury control in Alberta through programs, research or the influence of policy, etc. It honours long-time proponents of injury control who have made a significant impact on injury efforts in Alberta.

Call for nominations for the Injury Control in Alberta Awards occurs in the spring of the calendar year. Presentation of the awards is usually held in conjunction with an injury control event scheduled during the fall. If you would like to be placed on a list to receive the call for nominations, please contact ACICR at 780.492.6019 or [acicr@ualberta.ca](mailto:acicr@ualberta.ca).



Houser

## More NIMS and Another Class: Why Me?

**M**ajor disasters are in the press all the time. Floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, even volcanoes cover the nightly news and the morning newspapers. Only rarely do we hear how water utilities and systems are affected or respond. Most times, water system operators are not even seen or recognized, yet we are often required to attend numerous training sessions with titles that include acronyms such as ICS (Incident Command System) and NIMS (National Incident Command System). Often we are placed in training exercise roles that leave us wondering why we are even there.

There is a reason we need to have all that training; a good reason. Unfortunately, it usually takes real events, drawn out over an extended period, to really teach us why we learn NIMS and why we need to be able to implement ICS. For the past six years I have worked for the city of Logan, Utah, and I have had the fortune, or misfortune, of learning these lessons.

### LESSON ONE

In the summer of 2005, our water department was supporting a contractor who was swapping over a 24-inch water main associated with a new storage tank. We had staff on site and were also monitoring system pressures and

wells. At 5:30 p.m., one of our operators noticed a pressure spike at a monitoring station. We later determined that we experienced a water hammer in the system. Within 15 minutes of the initial notification, phone calls started coming in from all over the city. Calls ranged from water bubbling in the street, to a geyser in a front yard, loss of pressure, and asphalt lifting. We immediately released two staff members from the 24-inch-main project to start assessing the magnitude of the problems and called all of our remaining staff members back to work. We quickly recognized that this was going to extend beyond just a couple of crews working late to fix a few emergency leaks.

Within 45 minutes, we had confirmed 25 leaks on broken water mains in addition to the tie-in being completed by the contractor. Water pressures in the system were not stable, and it became necessary to take immediate action to stabilize the situation. The damage assessment team was instructed to start turning down the leaks and start feeding information back to me. At this point, I notified our public works director of the magnitude of the event and requested a partial opening of the emergency operations center (EOC). I will never forget that night.

I had two mentors during this incident: Will Lusk, our safety director, and Mark Meeker, our fire chief. One of them was no more than 15 feet from me to give me guidance and suggestions all along the way. My experience at this point consisted of attending monthly coordination meetings and being told about a NIMS class we all were required to attend.

Our public works director (directly responsible for the water, wastewater, streets, stormwater, fleet, and facilities divisions in Logan) became the incident commander; he designated me as the EOC director and operations section chief. In less than an hour, my mentors recognized the need to break the 10 leak teams into two subgroups under the responsibility of two of our most senior crew chiefs and to organize a planning section and a logistics section. We used staff from our parks and recreation, light and power, public works, fire (technical rescue), police, and finance departments to fill the positions required to respond.

I assigned the planning section, led by the City Engineer Bill Young, to provide ongoing situation reports, monitor the progress and stability of the incident, and prioritize leak repairs to maintain service to critical facilities such as hospitals, clinics, and nursing



homes. He also brought in the geographic information systems department to provide mapping and information about pipe size and materials before our crews even began digging a leak. This allowed our logistics section chief to make sure we had the correct supplies and materials available to respond.

I assigned our safety director to act as logistics section chief. He quickly activated the purchasing department and one of our technicians to manage the materials and supplies. This included activating our mutual aid agreements with surrounding communities and contacting two local vendors to make sure we had the parts available to make the necessary repairs. This became one of the greatest success stories of the night.

With operations, planning, and logistics up and running, and situation reports coming in, we held a short meeting with the section chiefs, incident commander, public information officer, and a liaison to our local health department. It was agreed that experienced water department personnel would be distributed among crews of staff from other departments. This ensured that an experienced water system operator was directing the work at each site, while allowing us to integrate staff from the other departments into the emergency repair crews. By the end of the third hour, the planning section delivered our first incident action plan, and we briefed the EOC and operations teams via radios and cell phones.

The result was amazing: less than 18 hours after the first call was received, the system was back up throughout the city. In the end, we repaired 29 broken main lines and eight service laterals with 10 crews scabbed together from staff who had never worked as a team under this stressful of an environment. It worked!

Shortly after this event, the training flood gates opened wide. All of the ICS and NIMS requirements were met immediately, which meant hours in classes.

## LESSON TWO

In some ways I wish that my real-world experience had ended there, but subsequent events required me to step up and remember all I had been taught. As the planning section chief I had dealt with two flood events and as the resource unit leader I had dealt with a wildfire that had threatened Logan and two neighboring cities. These experiences reinforced for me that our responsibilities require everyone in the water department to be united in service with the rest of the city. In every one of these events, our water department staff members received assignments in which they were either the leader or a supervisor of teams or groups consisting of staff from multiple departments. During the flooding events, even our backhoe operators and truck drivers were leading task forces and strike teams to address key flooding areas and to supervise numerous groups of volunteers.

In October 2008, I transferred to the position of assistant city engineer and became directly responsible for the water system. Little did I know the effect this would have on my involvement in an emergency response.

In 2009, nature struck again. During the late morning of July 11, there was a landslide in a residential neighborhood. One house was totally destroyed and two homes were severely damaged by the slide, a canal was breached, and several more homes or properties were damaged by the resulting mud flow and water. Within 90 minutes, I was called in. My new role was planning section chief. My job was to prepare the incident action reports, assess damage, provide regular situation reports, manage resources, and develop a plan of action, particularly beyond the immediate landslide area.

Suddenly I was thrown into a role that is not normally related to the water industry. I found myself interacting with responders from all over Utah as well as a national urban search-and-rescue team. By the end of day one, we were noti-

fied that we could expect more than 1,000 volunteers to assist in cleaning up the effects of the mud and water. Now I had to apply every tool I had been given and every ounce of training I had received over the past six years. It was time to step up and fulfill that part of my job description that says "other duties as assigned."

## ONGOING LESSONS

As I look back at the landslide activity, I realize that the reason we succeed as a city is because we have learned to work together. Floods, water system disasters, earthquakes, hurricanes, or any other natural or humanmade disasters require us to work together and work hard. As individual utility operators, managers, and communities, we are the front line of any—and I mean *any*—disaster. In emergency response, the three priorities are life, property, and the environment—in that order. As water utilities, we are a large portion of "life" safety. Without our water, hospitals can't function, fires go uncontrolled, and communities die. Safe drinking water is the life blood of our communities. To restore them in a disaster requires us to take our daily skills and training to the next level. We need to understand NIMS, the ICS, and we need to be—as our city motto says—"United In Service."

*—Lance E. Houser holds BS and MS degrees from Utah State University. He has worked for 12 years in the private sector, four years as Logan, Utah's water department manager and two years as the assistant city engineer.*

*He is actively involved in AWWA's Intermountain Section, having served six years on the Section Conference Committee, is currently AWWA's representative on the UT-WARN Steering Committee, and is also serving on FEMA's Public Works Working Group.*

*He can be reached at lance.houser@loganutah.org.*

►► *Continued from cover.*

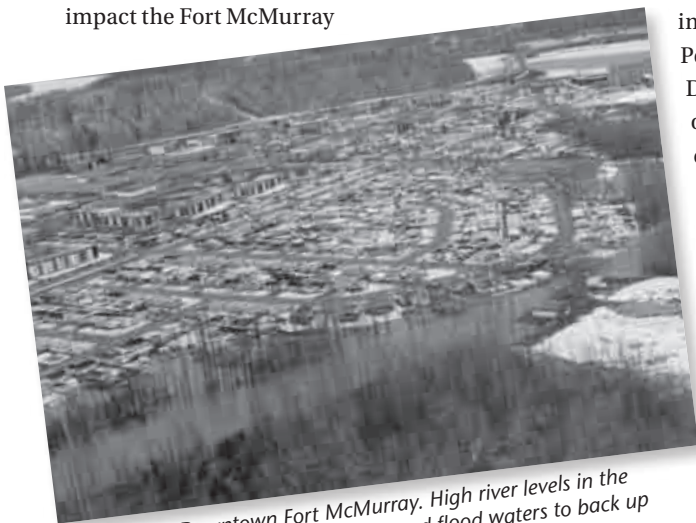
average temperatures will increase ice formation, causing river reaches that are normally problem-free to experience increased ice activity. On the other hand, above average temperatures can affect the strength of new river ice covers, which, in some cases, lead to river ice jams. This is especially true during spring melt when ice covers are continually deteriorating.

Though ice-related flooding can occur almost anywhere in the province, two areas are of special concern to the River Forecast Centre. The Athabasca River at Fort McMurray and the Peace River at Peace River are actively monitored because of their history of ice-related flooding. The Peace River is monitored from freeze-up to breakup due to the increased winter flows from British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority (BC Hydro) facilities upstream. Alberta Environment staff in Peace River observe the ice cover from its formation to

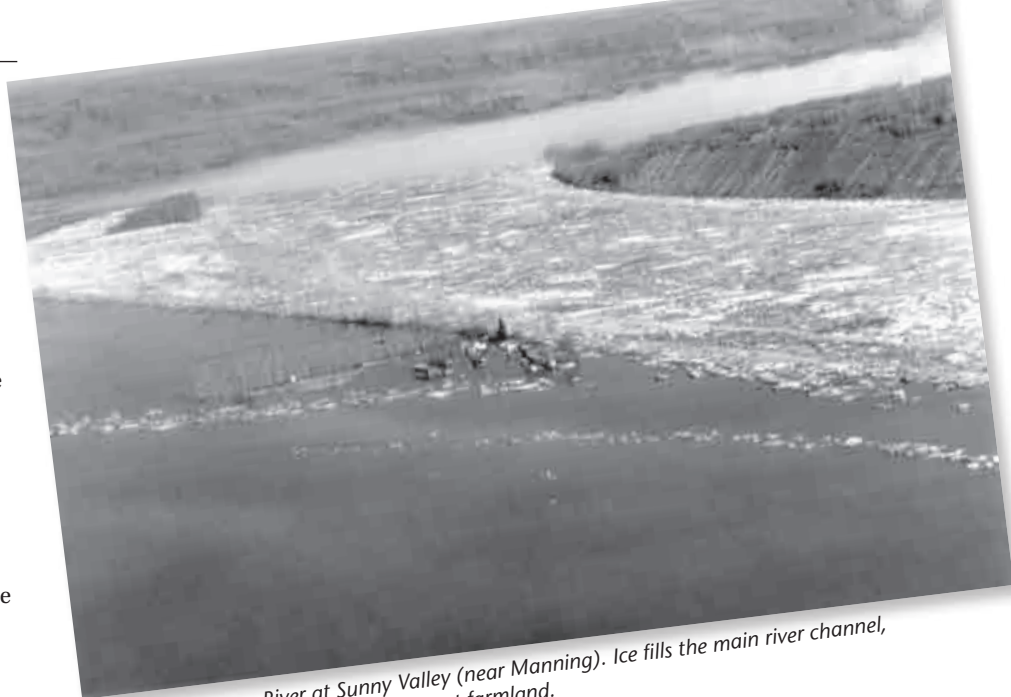
*“... the ground and aerial observations go into areas and provide an overall assessment of conditions that river level gauges or remote sensing can’t.”*

its decay in conjunction with BC Hydro.

Unlike the Peace River, the Athabasca River is not affected by hydropower production, however, spring melt or breakup from the southern part of the river basin can impact the Fort McMurray



April 1979 – Downtown Fort McMurray. High river levels in the Athabasca and Clearwater Rivers caused flood waters to back up into commercial and residential areas.



April 1996 – Peace River at Sunny Valley (near Manning). Ice fills the main river channel, while flood waters inundate the adjacent farmland.

area because of its geographical setting. Like many former fur trading posts, Fort McMurray is built at the juncture of two rivers, compounding the effort required for breakup forecasting. Despite having river level gauges and satellite observations, the best observations are made by eyes on the ground or in the air. Just prior to spring breakup, the RFC deploys observers to Fort McMurray to conduct those ground and aerial observations.

In both the Peace and Athabasca river basins, the ground and aerial observations go into areas and provide an overall assessment of conditions that river level gauges or remote sensing can't. Those observations are then assessed and relayed to emergency responders in either the municipalities of Peace River or Wood Buffalo. Depending on the severity of the ice conditions, more detailed briefings may take place in the local Emergency Operations Centre and the frequency of observations would then be increased.

While the observers are in the field, the IFOD coordinates observations and communications at the RFC in Edmonton. Assessments from staff in the field are often supplemented by

observations from other Government of Alberta staff, residents, municipalities and counties that are phoned or emailed to the RFC. The weather forecasts, gauge data and available satellite images are put into context with the observations and assessments, which are then made available to emergency personnel and the public. The main source of information is the River Ice webpage at: [www.environment.alberta.ca/forecasting/RiverIce](http://www.environment.alberta.ca/forecasting/RiverIce)

The webpage contains the River Ice Reports and Ice Observation maps that are updated and issued after most observation flights. Links are provided to the Forecaster's Comments, which covers the provincial situation, and to the weather forecasts and Water Supply reports. For provincial communication and emergency response groups such as Alberta Environment Support and Emergency Response Team, Alberta Emergency Management Agency and for local responders, special outlook briefings are held before freeze-up and breakup, or as events occur.

Alberta Environment's River Forecast Centre is in readiness throughout the year and maintains a 24/7 contact availability. The RFC has staff expertise in river ice and flood hydrology, and works in close connection with the River Hazard Management Team. Our mandate is to provide Albertans with information related to current and future river or river ice conditions, enabling Albertans to make decisions related to water supply, flood mitigation, urban development and emergency response planning.

# Digest

## 72-hour kit awarded at the AUMA conference

The Alberta Emergency Management Association (AEMA) set up a booth at the 2010 Alberta Urban Municipalities Association Convention, and ran a contest, raffling off a 72-hour kit as the prize. From all of the entries received over the course of the three-day convention, the lucky winner of the kit was Dell Wickstrom, Councillor from the Village of Alliance. Sealed with a smile and a handshake, Dell received his prize from Dieter Langer, Field Officer with the AEMA.



Dell Wickstrom receiving his prize from Dieter Langer.

## In Memoriam

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of **Allan Thomas**. Allan was an employee of the Fire Commissioner's Office from mid to the late 80's before he retired from government. In his previous positions, he was an instructor at the fire training school in Vermilion, a fire inspector and a fire fighter. Allan passed away on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011 after a lengthy battle with Alzheimer's disease.

## Did you know ... making it on the "Top 10" lists

Victor Fernandez, firefighter with the St. Albert Fire Service, was nominated as one of Canada's 10 top heroes for his efforts with the Canadian Association for Fire Services Abroad. Victor's most recent trip to Chile, along with Alberta Fire Commissioner Trent West, was featured in the November 2010 issue of *Alberta On Scene*. Congratulations Victor, and keep up the tremendous efforts! Alberta was also included in the top 10 list of Canada's weather stories for 2010. Listed as Canada's most expensive hailstorm was Calgary's 20-minute hailstorm on July 12, which resulted in \$400 million in damages after baseball-sized hailstones hit the pavement at 130 kilometres per hour. — Source: *Postmedia News*

## Comings and Goings

- **Shelley Miller** joined the agency as the new Data Analyst in Research & Analysis – Fire Statistics. This is the position held by the late Gloria Mercer who passed away in January 2010. Shelley joined the agency with several years of experience with other provincial government departments such as Solicitor General, Alberta Environment and Seniors and Community Support. She will be sharing the data analyst duties with Olivia Loo who is the agency's part-time Data Analyst. Shelley can be reached via phone: 780.415.9481 or email to: shelley.miller@gov.ab.ca. You can also contact the agency's main phone line at 780.422.9000 or email: aema@gov.ab.ca for any fire statistics-related queries.
- Warning Systems Coordinator **Joy Hawman** accepted a position in Fort McMurray, with the Oil Sands Safety Association. Five and a half years ago, Joy joined what was then called Emergency Management Alberta, initially as a receptionist then was recruited into the Consequence Management Program as Program Coordinator. She also filled several roles in the COMOC during activations, including that of Finance/ Administration Section Chief. Although she will be missed, we are happy for her and wish her well in Fort Mac.
- **Melissa Black** returned to school to further her education at the University of Alberta, Enterprise Square campus. She joined the then Emergency Management Alberta over eight years ago as an Administrative Assistant in the Business Continuity area. Through her continued dedication, hard work, positive attitude and aptitude she moved into the role of Coordinator, Recovery Programs. Melissa has been nationally recognized for her work within the Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP), where her knowledge and understanding of the program process and her improvements to the administration of the program has benefitted Alberta and the program nationally. Her dedication, contributions and efforts within Recovery Programs over the last four years have been exceptional and integral to the progress made in the delivery of Disaster Recovery Programs, Municipal Wildfire Assistance Programs and JEPP.

- **Scott Pepper** also left the AEMA to take up new employment in Calgary with the National Energy Board (NEB) as the Emergency Management Specialist on the Emergency Management and Security Team of the NEB. Scott joined the agency in April 2007, having previously worked with Emergency Management Ontario. During his time with us Scott worked in Consequence Management, Field Operations, the ARRC and Central Operations. He was actively involved in the response to both waves of the H1N1 Pandemic, the Lamont fires, the Camrose wind event and many other smaller incidents. Most recently, Scott worked on the MESA Concept of Operations, taking it from a draft to a more finished state.

## FireSmart Community Series – Register now!

The 2011 *FireSmart* Community Series takes place at the Westin Hotel in downtown Edmonton on March 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. For more information or to reserve a spot in this interactive and engaging series, visit [www.regonline.com/firesmart](http://www.regonline.com/firesmart).

Group photo of the  
*Alberta Emergency Management Agency*



Photo taken on December 16, 2010.

**Row 1, from left to right:** Rudy Parenteau, Delores Chirka, Jim Cornish, Len Hancock, Colin Lloyd, Dana Woodworth, Trent West, Mark Murphy, Dieter Langer, Tom Sand, Randy Tiller.

**Row 2, from left to right:** Tom Harnos, Jeremy Wagner, Judy Blakney, Rory Badger, Cecily Gauvreau, Crystal Clarke, Amanda Dalton, Melissa Black, Joy Hawman, Humyra Sabir, Doug Forge.

**Row 3, from left to right:** Frank Harris, Brice Daly, Shelley Miller, Val Carmody, Neelu Jairath, Lynnette Berscheid, Margie Nunweiler, Zefira Hedzic, Linda Fenerty, Jonathan Klein, Andrew Renfree.

**Row 4, from left to right:** Kevin McClement, Don Rosland, Barrie Brand, Chris Senaratne, Tom Cox, Ed Haines, Fran Byers, Pat Kennedy, Kelly Bokovay, Bruce Mackenzie.

**Row 5, from left to right:** Mike Shykora, Kylie Degeling, Ross Bennett, Jacen Abrey, Gord Beagle, Alena Sayer.

**Missing:** Tina Bak, April Diver, Lauren Harris, Pat Henneberry, Bonnie McLay, Birgit Reid, Spence Sample, Nurgul Sperle, Mahendra Wijayasinghe.

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