

Investigation Report
Worker Fatally Injured by Black Bear
May 7, 2014

The contents of this report

This document reports Occupational Health and Safety's (OHS') investigation of a fatal incident in May 2014. It begins with a short summary of what happened. The rest of the report covers this same information in greater detail.

Incident summary

On May 7, 2014 a cinnamon coloured black bear attacked an electrical and instrumentation (E&I) technician walking through the laydown yard near Fort McMurray Alberta. The bear dragged the worker into the nearby bush. Many workers attempted to scare the bear away. On site emergency services department (ESD) personnel and the RCMP were called. The RCMP euthanized the bear. The RCMP and ESD entered the wooded area and pronounced the worker deceased.

Background information

Suncor Energy Inc. (Suncor) focuses their business on oil sands. They were the first company to develop the oil sands and Suncor is the largest company in the oil sands. Oil sands is a mixture of bitumen, sand, fine clays, silts and water. As it does not flow like conventional crude oil, it must be mined or heated underground before it can be processed. About 20 per cent of Canada's oil sands is close enough to the surface to be mined. Suncor uses large trucks and shovels to extract the oil sands that are near the surface (approximately 40 – 60 metres (m) deep). The mining operation includes both the Millennium and North Steepbank sites.

The Base Plant is surrounded by boreal forest. The La Bodega site borders on a forested area next to the Athabasca River.

La Bodega (Figure 1) is a gravelled area that contains numerous shelving units that house electrical and instrumentation parts. There are two buildings located on site: one for electrical & instrumentation work shop and one for storage.

E&I technicians use the building on this site for cleaning and repairing equipment, the laydown yard (an area used for the storage of equipment and products), is used for receiving and storing electrical & instrumentation material.

The E&I technicians are responsible for the installation, modification, adjustment, maintenance, and repair of field electrical equipment and support instrumentation. At this facility, there are three E&I technicians that use the area on a rotating shift.

Sequence of events

On May 7, 2014 an E&I technician was working in the E&I shop located at La Bodega laydown yard at the Suncor Oil Sands Base Plant, 42 km north of Fort McMurray, Alberta. The laydown yard is divided into laneways by large steel pipe laying on the ground with pallets stacked on them for storage of materials (Figure 1).

An E&I technician had left the building to use the wash car (a washroom and personal hygiene facility) which was located approximately 100 m from the building. The E&I technician left the wash car to return to the E&I shop. About 50 m from the E&I shop, the E&I technician encountered a large male, cinnamon coloured, black bear.

Another worker (contract worker) came out of the wash car and observed the bear about 2 m from the victim. The bear attacked the E&I technician, who had dropped to the ground and covered up. The contract worker ran towards the attack and then ran back to get an air horn from a nearby building. The contract worker yelled for help and deployed the air horn close to the bear. Several other workers joined in the efforts to deter the bear and ESD was called.

The bear was struck with several items including: steel bars, poles, and rocks, but this had no effect. The bear then dragged the victim through the laneway into the adjacent wooded area.

Several co-workers followed the bear throwing more materials at it. Deterrents included air and vehicle horns, thrown objects, and the use of a fire extinguisher.

ESD supported the rescue efforts with the use of a water cannon which was successful in driving the bear off. The RCMP arrived on scene and a short time later the bear was observed to be returning to the victim. The bear was shot three times and killed by an RCMP Officer.

Once the bear was confirmed to be dead, the RCMP and ESD personnel went into the woods. The RCMP advised that the E&I technician was deceased.

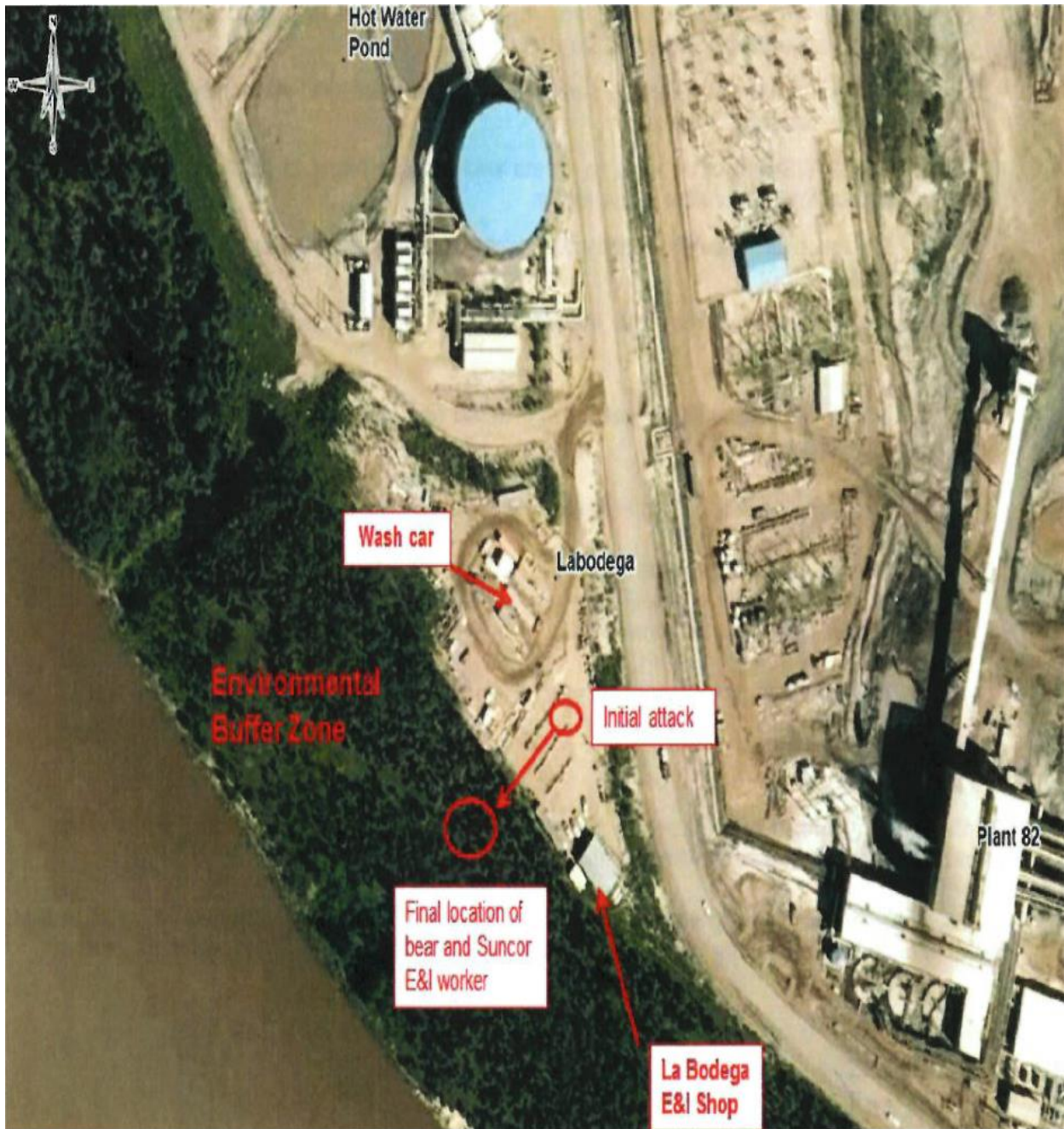


Figure 1. Aerial view of La Bodega laydown yard. Indicated in the image are the wash car, initial attack area, final location of bear and E&I worker, and the E&I building. Courtesy of Suncor Energy Inc.

Final Report

Completion

A preliminary review of the file was arranged with Alberta Justice on March 25, 2015. Alberta Justice reviewed the case and determined the case did not support any charges under the occupational health and safety legislation.

Final Report

Signatures

Original Report Signed _____

Lead Investigator

May 7, 2015 _____

Date

Original Report Signed _____

Manager

May 7, 2015 _____

Date

Original Report Signed _____

Director

May 7, 2015 _____

Date