

Alberta

100 CELEBRATING ALBERTA'S CENTENNIAL

FIRE NEWS

September 2005

Vol. 26 Number 2





Reaching out to the fire service

Alberta Fire News – an effective approach to providing information

This special issue of *Alberta Fire News* celebrates Alberta's Centennial year.

Created as a way to communicate fire-related topics to the fire service across Alberta, *Alberta Fire News* debuted in 1949. Unfortunately, the oldest copy available is the June 1975 issue, which coincided with the 100th course at the Alberta Fire Training School in June 1975. Other topics covered in that issue included information about the Alberta Provincial Fire Chiefs Association Annual Meeting and Workshop (held in Lethbridge June 8-11), a fire prevention poster contest, information about a fire at Ardrossan Junior and Senior High School, a listing of new fire chiefs, information about the Government of Alberta's film library service and details about smoke detectors.

continued on next page >>

In this issue...

- 3 Alberta's first fire department
- 5 Fire Commissioner history
- 6 The Fire Commissioner's Office
- 8 Fire training school
- 10 Fire training in Alberta
- 12 Firefighting equipment
- 14 Fire prevention education
- 17 Saying thank you
- 18 Seeing is believing... showcasing fire departments across Alberta
- 20 Electronic data collection systems: FERS and AERIS
- 21 Legislation
- 22 Fire statistics from the past
- 26 Emergency Management Alberta
- 29 Aboriginal Fire Services
- 30 Fire Services Advisory Committee
- 31 Alberta Fire Chiefs Association
- 32 Calgary Fire Chief retires
- 33 Insurance focus
- 34 You were asking: Q&As
- 35 Digest and Calendar
- 36 Not forgotten - fallen firefighters

continued from previous page...

Over the years, the scope of information provided expanded and so did the publication itself. The first two years showcased covers illustrated by employee Donald M. Graham depicting an aspect of the Alberta Fire Training School, and much of the information in the publications reflected activities at the school. The June 1977 issue was the start of a more issues-oriented focus, as reflected in the use of the front cover for an article instead of an illustration (the June 1977 issue depicted Minister of Labour Neil Crawford's announcement about smoke detector legislation coming). With the addition of Mahendra Wijayasinghe to the Fire Commissioner's Office in 1986, the newsletter started to include more in-depth statistical articles in each issue.

To gauge the effectiveness of the newsletter over the years, the FCO has conducted three reader surveys. Results from all three surveys indicated that a high percentage of respondents found *Alberta Fire News* helpful in their work and that interpretations and changes to the *Fire Prevention Act* and regulations provide the most popular topic area. Other topics considered important included procedures for reporting fires and dangerous goods incident control. The most recent survey also indicated that Digest is the most popular page of the newsletter.

Fast forward...

Published three times a year, *Alberta Fire News* continues to include profiles of fire departments across the province and information about training opportunities from Lakeland College (the home of **fire etc.**). The newsletter also includes updates from affiliated organizations such as Emergency Management Alberta, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association and the Safety Codes Council. In addition to being distributed to fire departments across the province, the newsletter is also mailed out to insurance companies, safety organizations and national and international subscribers.

This special Centennial issue of *Alberta Fire News* aims to present historical developments in the Alberta fire service, as well as those in the Fire Commissioner's Office. 🔥

Who kept the 1949 Issue?

If any *Alberta Fire News* readers have a copy of one of the earlier publications (prior to June 1975), we'd love to see it, and preferably keep it in our files for posterity. If you know the whereabouts of one of the early issues, please contact Te-Jay Smart at the FCO at (780) 644-4692 (dial 310-0000 for toll free access outside of Edmonton) or via e-mail at te-jay.smart@gov.ab.ca.



1905

Alberta becomes a province



Fire Engine on main street, Innisfail, Alberta [1910]



Apparatus at Fire Hall No. 2, Edmonton, Alberta [1912]



From snowballs to red engines

Calgary has always been able to rise to a challenge, and one of the strongest indicators of this city's "can-do" spirit is shown in the history of its fire department.

This attitude became evident as early as January 1885 when the first recorded fire broke out in the new settlement. With less than 1,000 people, the little town had not organized a volunteer fire department, so men formed a bucket brigade from the town water tank to the site of the fire. Their efforts were augmented by onlookers who threw snowballs at the fire, apparently with as much effect as the bucket brigade.

The experience of this early fire prompted the community to form the first official fire department in August 1885. The new fire department took on the name the Calgary Hook, Ladder and Bucket Corps, with a complement of 22 volunteers. The department was equipped with a bucket brigade, a chemical fire engine and a hook-and-ladder.

Things were not always easy for the Calgary Hook, Ladder and Bucket Corps. The first Fire Captain, George Constantine, was elected on August 25, 1885 and resigned one week later. Steve Jarrett was then elected to the position, and in 1898, six more captains, or chiefs as they were called after November 1886, led the corps. Finally, in 1898, Cappy Smart took the head chief's position and held it until 1933. The City of Calgary also struggled with primitive technology for water delivery.

Glenbow Archives NA-2854-105



Horse-drawn ladder wagon outside Fire Hall No. 1, Calgary Alberta [ca. 1898-1911]

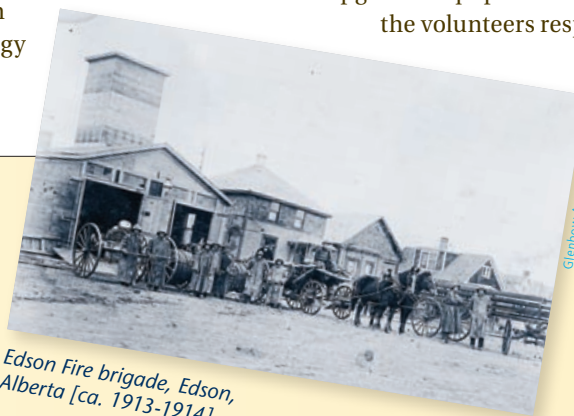
Fire hydrants and pumper trucks were non-existent, so city council installed wells at major intersections and firemen brought their own pails, filling them at the well pump. The equipment itself, such as the chemical fire engine, was pulled by hand, so its arrival time depended upon how fast those pulling it could run.

A huge fire on November 7, 1886, underscored the immediate need for upgraded equipment. Though the volunteers responded as quickly as

possible and tore apart and removed two buildings, 14 others burned to the ground. Over \$103,200 in damages were tabulated. Shocked at the damage, city council decided at the end of November to buy a horse-drawn Ronald steam fire engine, with two hose reels and 1,000 feet of hose. Further upgrading took place on May 24, 1887, when the city opened its first fire hall at 122 McIntyre Avenue, now 7th Avenue.

The horsepower to pull the Ronald engine was supplied by local team owners, and

continued on next page >>



Edson Fire brigade, Edson, Alberta [ca. 1913-1914]

Glenbow Archives NA-461-14

1913

Earliest annual fire loss report is recorded

1914-1918

First World War

1919

Fire Prevention Act proclaimed on July 19, 1919



their arrival at the fire hall was a major source of entertainment for the growing city. Initially, the town council stated that the first teamster to hitch his horses up to the Ronald steam engine and deliver it to the fire site would receive a cash payment of \$5. This arrangement led to races to be the first team to arrive at the fire hall and, in one instance, caused a brawl. Two teams arrived at the same time, causing the drivers to argue and fight over who had arrived first. While the dispute was going on, a third driver slipped in with his team, hitched up the Ronald and drove to the fire. After this debacle, the mayor and council decreed that the first team to arrive at the fire hall, haul the engine to the fire and return it, would receive \$10. The team that arrived second would receive \$5 and the third place finisher would be given \$3.

As Calgary entered the 20th century, increasing population and industry meant a greater need for faster response times and better deployment of firefighting equipment. The number of street alarm boxes was increased from four to 56, and 13 fire alarm bells were placed in strategic locations throughout the city. In 1910, the city also abandoned the volunteer firefighter system and instituted an organization of full-time, salaried firefighters.

During 1910 and 1911, Calgary took steps to motorize its engines, resulting in Canada's first totally mechanized fire department. On February 10, 1910, a motorized combination chemical and squad truck from Indiana was delivered, complete with a 50-gallon chemical tank,

and it was capable of running at 40 miles per hour. This new "buzz wagon," as it was nicknamed, enabled the fire crews to be at the fire scene long before any other vehicles. The Calgary Fire Department was so pleased with the performance of this engine that it ordered a motor hose wagon, a motor combination and a motorized 75-foot aerial ladder truck from the Indiana company.

The innovations begun by the department at the turn of the century continued over the next decades. In 1929, it purchased an array of equipment, including a Magirus Aerial, a ladder with an 85-foot reach that allowed "water tower" firefighting capabilities (one of the first three in Canada).

During the 1930s and 1940s, innovations came from a different direction. Labour negotiations and pension adjustments, along with financial and charity organizations, were priorities. After the war years, fire prevention became important, and on February 1, 1951, the Fire Prevention Bureau was established. Employment equity also gained prominence when the department hired its first female employee in 1961 to work as a receptionist and secretary for the Fire Prevention Bureau.

Upgrades and changes have continued to the present day. In January 1971, the Calgary Fire Department Ambulance Division was inaugurated, and in 1978, the Calgary Firefighters Burn Treatment Society was formed. In 1974, the colour of Calgary's fire trucks was changed from red to yellow, but this decision was reversed in 1998 when the colour was changed back to fire-engine red.

Fast forward...

Over 1,000 men and women in Calgary provide both emergency and non-emergency response teams. There are approximately 34 fire halls in Calgary. The Fire Training Academy provides ongoing training to firefighters in such areas as new equipment and processes, aquatic rescue, high-angle rescue, heavy rescue and air rescue. Sixty members of the Calgary Fire Department comprise the Hazardous Materials Division. These members are specially trained to deal with a wide variety of regulated materials that are spilled, leaked or released into the environment. This unit works closely with both provincial and municipal regulatory agencies. The Community Services Division is composed of four areas: community safety, fire investigations, fire inspections (Fire Prevention Bureau), and hazardous materials. The Calgary Fire Department is also responsible for disaster reporting. Yearly reports are presented to Calgary city council on the status of emergency preparedness in the city. The Calgary Fire Department is also an integral part of Calgary's Emergency Operations Centre and the Mobile Command Centre.

This special Centennial issue of *Alberta Fire News* aims to present historical developments in the Alberta fire service, as well as those in the Fire Commissioner's Office. 🔥

1922

First Fire Commissioner. The *Fire Prevention Act* officially establishes the position of Alberta Fire Commissioner, to be held by the Superintendent of Insurance. The new Fire Prevention Branch is also established as part of the Office of the Provincial Secretary.



Fire Department inspection, Edmonton, Alberta [1922]

Glenbow Archives ND-371628



Alberta's Fire Commissioners – creating significant improvements over the years

From 1919 to 1939, the position of the Insurance Superintendent and the Fire Commissioner were one and the same. However, with the appointment of Ralph Moore as Fire Commissioner in 1939, the position of Fire Commissioner was separated from the Superintendent of Insurance position, and the organization was called the Office of the Fire Commissioner (later called the Fire Prevention Branch, then the Fire Commissioner's Office). Moore's tenure was followed by the appointment of E.R. Hughes as Fire Commissioner in 1947. In 1950, Austin Bridges was appointed Fire Commissioner of Alberta, a position he held for 23 years. During Bridge's tenure, the Fire Prevention Branch began to focus its approach on fire prevention and safety, as well as on implementing significant training services for fire departments.



Austin Bridges

Photo courtesy Lakeland College



Bill MacKay and Tom Makey

Photo courtesy fire etc.



Pat Graham

Austin Bridge's successor, William (Bill) MacKay, served as Alberta's fire commissioner for 14 years. He also created significant improvements in the branch, in particular he emphasized compiling and analyzing fire statistics. Through MacKay's efforts, municipalities were provided with comprehensive reports about fire activities in their communities as well as recommendations of areas that needed to be strengthened.

Tom Makey's tenure, starting with his appointment in 1987, resulted in more in-depth fire education programs for the

public, including videos, displays and a diverse array of promotional materials. Public safety education programs, particularly efforts with the *Learn Not to Burn* program in schools, won the branch recognition in the form of a Bronze Premier's Award of Excellence in 2001. Tom was also instrumental in enhancing computer technology in the branch, despite a time of incredible changes and downsizing in government. He also oversaw the development of a significant increase in training opportunities for fire personnel.

The FCO's newest fire commissioner, Pat Graham, appointed in 2001, has also successfully put his mark on the organization. Recognizing the need to make the branch more visible in Alberta's fire community, one of his first priorities was establishing a clear identity for the FCO (including a new logo, effective branding and the introduction of uniforms). Pat has also delved into greater involvement with various organizations and working with stakeholders to develop a vision for firefighting in the future. 🔥

Fire Commissioner appointments at a glance

- 1914 – Report of the Office of the Superintendent of Insurance (W.V. Newson, followed by W.M. Seller) includes reference to fire insurance companies
- 1920 – a separate report from the Fire Commissioner is included in the Report of the Office of the Superintendent
- 1923 – Henry Brace appointed as Superintendent of Insurance and Fire Commissioner
- 1936 – E. Trowbridge, Deputy Provincial Secretary (Fire Commissioner)
- 1939 – Ralph Moore appointed Fire Commissioner (no longer a dual responsibility of the Superintendent of Insurance)
- 1947 – E.R. Hughes appointed as Fire Commissioner
- 1950 – Austin Bridges appointed as Fire Commissioner
- 1973 – Bill MacKay appointed as Fire Commissioner
- 1987 – Tom Makey appointed as Fire Commissioner (also change of organization to the Fire Commissioner's Office)
- 2001 – Pat Graham appointed as Fire Commissioner

1922

Superintendent of Insurance, W.M. Seller becomes the first person to formally hold the office of Alberta Fire Commissioner. After taking the position, he outlines his areas of responsibility as:

- compiling fire loss statistics;
- recording fire deaths;

- inspecting municipalities for unsafe conditions and remedying them;
- investigating fires of unknown origin; and
- distributing educational literature to the public and promoting fire safety.



Burning of Banff Springs Hotel, Banff, Alberta [April 7, 1926]

Gleadow Archives MA-717-13



The journey from Superintendent to the Fire Commissioner's Office

2005 in Alberta is a showcase of the province's achievements over the past 100 years. It seems fitting, then, to also celebrate significant events achieved by the Fire Commissioner's Office over the years.

The origins of the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) can be traced to the Office of the Superintendent of Insurance, who reported to the Provincial Treasurer of Alberta. The proclamation of the *Fire Prevention Act* on July 1, 1919, established the Fire Commissioner position, which was held by Superintendent of Insurance W. E. Seller. The Department of the Fire Commissioner had two primary focuses: education/prevention and inspections/investigations.

In addition to fire prevention education activities (see article on page 14), the FCO focused on fire cause and origin determination as well as conducting town fire inspections. Fires were reported by building owners and insurance companies to the FCO.



Fire Commissioners booth, Edmonton, Alberta [1929]

During 1921, the department had one travelling inspector, who inspected 227 towns and villages, issued 173 orders for the correction of defects of various kinds and conducted 31 investigations into the causes of fires. The opening of an additional office in Calgary in 1930 assisted with inspection duties.

The appointment in 1939 of Ralph Moore as the new Fire Commissioner coincided with the separation of the position from that of the Superintendent of Insurance and the establishment of the Office of the Fire Commissioner.

In the early 1940s, the Office of the Fire Commissioner expanded its approach to include more regular inspections of theatres, halls and hotels. This approach developed partly in response to the devastating Coconut Grove fire in Boston, Massachusetts on November 28, 1942. However, to conserve gasoline and rubber during the Second World War, fewer investigations were conducted, although each request for investigation was examined very carefully at head office.

The introduction of the *Self Liquidating Projects Act* in the mid-1940s brought water to smaller communities for fighting fires. This created dependable water sources in rural communities, which led to enhanced fire protection and the creation of rural fire departments.

By 1945, the Office of the Fire Commissioner was making plans to enlarge the fire investigation and fire inspection staff to cover a wider field of services, including hiring an inspector for the south and an additional official at head office to "constantly supervise inspection of risks throughout the Province and remedy of fire hazards and enforcement of Orders to Remedy Conditions as issued by the field staff."

In 1946-47, machine shops were hired to standardize the development, implementation and re-cutting of fire hose threads across the province. The thread standard established continues to be used today. The appointment of an inspector qualified to recommend



Firemans Convention, Edmonton, Alberta [1928]

1929

The Fire Prevention Branch holds its first fire prevention exhibit at a summer festival in Edmonton. The Fire Commissioner is pleased with the success of the first display, and plans are immediately made to offer a similar display in Calgary for 1930.



suitable fire protection equipment and give instruction in firefighting techniques to cities, towns, villages and hamlets was the precursor to the establishment of training provided to fire departments.

The appointment of Austin Bridges as the Fire Commissioner in 1950 was the start of a more comprehensive approach to fire prevention and education. By 1951, civil defence work was added to the Fire Commissioner's responsibilities with Deputy Fire Commissioner M.J. Bedard acting as an instructor at Provincial Civil Defence Schools for approximately two months during the year. The Fire Commissioner, Deputy Fire Commissioner and two other inspectors of the Edmonton office staff were also engaged part-time in civil defence training. In addition to attending a Civil Defence Fire Forum in Vancouver, the Fire Commissioner also served as Chairman of the Fire and Flood Committee, Provincial Civil Defence Headquarters.

In the postwar years, volunteer departments throughout Alberta became more closely tied to what was then referred to as the Fire Prevention Branch because of its involvement in widespread purchases and demonstration of equipment, as well as the expanded training programs in the province. Local fire departments assumed some of the responsibility for fire drills and fire prevention displays and activities, as well as inspections in the communities. Fire Prevention Week became the focus of these endeavours.

The *School Consolidation Act* of the early 1950s resulted in a decrease in small rural schools and the development of centralized schools in larger centres, which created a need for improved roads in rural Alberta. This led to better access to rural fires by urban fire departments and an increased expectation from residents of fire protection services.

The necessity to train fire department leaders led to the development of

central training facilities for senior personnel.

In 1959, the Fire Prevention Branch spearheaded the implementation of training sessions in conjunction with the agricultural

colleges in Fairview, Olds and Vermilion, selected due to the availability of their campuses through spring and summer while the students were away.

Although Vermilion was not prosperous at the time, it had a good water supply and the town was very supportive of establishing a permanent firefighting college. The field across

from Lakeland College was given to the Department of Labour for construction of a Fire Training School. The Alberta Fire Training School was established in Vermilion in 1959.

In 1972, fire protection on highways was given special attention, with the Alberta Department of Highways offering to guarantee payments for firefighting services as a result of emergency calls from the RCMP. This co-operation led to the establishment of better rural fire protection coverage and more mutual aid services for fire emergency situations across Alberta.

Shortly after Bill McKay became the Fire Commissioner in 1973, government reorganization saw the Fire Prevention Branch moved to Alberta Labour in 1974.

The *Alberta Fire Code* was adopted on May 2, 1984, and became effective August 1984. A first for the province, the *Alberta Fire Code* provided uniform fire safety regulations for all municipalities.

Approval from the National Professional Board of the Joint Council of National Fire Service Organizations in 1986 authorized the Branch to certify firefighters, fire service instructors and fire officers from Alberta who met the National Fire Protection Association standards.

A year later, Tom Makey became Fire Commissioner. By 1987, the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) had 65 staff, including 12 at the Fire School, as this was still part of the FCO's operations. Field offices were located in Peace River, St. Paul, Red Deer, Calgary, Lethbridge and Drumheller. However, the "routine" inspection program was eliminated April 1, 1988, and Fire Service Advisers started the transition from a primarily inspection/enforcement function to an advisory role

continued on next page >>



1929-1939

The Great Depression

1933

The first weeklong fire prevention exhibit is set up in the Manufacturer's Building in co-operation with the Edmonton Fire Department. The Fire Prevention Branch distributes educational literature and broadcasts fire prevention lectures over two radio stations.



involving seminars, meetings, course instruction and up-to-date training for instructors.

In addition to the change in duties, the branch was also renamed in 1991 to the Fire Commissioner's Office, with the functions of the Fire Commissioner's Office of Alberta Labour within the scope of the "Safety Philosophy of Alberta Labour."

In 1994, FCO field staff were moved to Safety Services with the advent of the *Safety Codes Act*. Four years later, in 1998, the fire school was removed from the FCO and privatized.

In 1997, Alberta fire loss statistics were placed for the first time on the Internet at the Alberta Labour website. The

statistics provided an overview of fire losses and fire trends in the province in the preceding 10-year period.

The year 2001 was another pivotal time for the FCO. In addition to the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, which sparked renewed interest in the fire service, the office also experienced administrative changes, starting with Pat Graham's appointment as Fire Commissioner. There was also a need for the FCO to be more visible in the field, resulting in the reorganization and refinement of duties and priorities, uniforms for staff and creation of a new logo. It also reflected first steps in establishing more effective ways to provide the resources and services needed by our colleagues in the fire service across Alberta.

The establishment of the Fire Services Advisory Committee in 2002 was the first step in developing a unifying framework for the fire service in Alberta, including universal standards for equipment and training, and exploring models for regional co-operation. This same year, the FCO implemented a number of programs such as the Alberta Emergency Response Inventory System (AERIS), the Fire Electronic Reporting System (FERS) and a revised Municipal Grants Program. The FCO also started developing closer ties with Alberta's Métis and First Nation communities.

While much has changed over the past nine decades, the initial commitment to fire prevention and education and the desire to lessen the number of fires, injuries and deaths has never waned. 🔥

Pictorial essay

The evolution of Alberta's fire training school

History

- **Post WW II:** Mobile fire training unit is created by the Alberta Fire Commissioner's Office to help train the province's volunteer fire departments
- **1959:** Permanent training facility for a Fire Officers Training School is established at Vermilion; first course delivered is Fire Officer Part I
- **1960-65:** Courses in Fire Officer Part II and Part III, Pump Operator, and Inspection Practices are added
- **1966:** Construction of a three-storey burn tower

Staff of 2005

- Approximately 40 full-time and part-time
- Five full-time temporary associate instructors
- Numerous part-time associate instructors



The provincial Fire Officers Training School was launched in August 1959 with a one-week course at the Vermilion School of Agriculture. The *Vermilion Standard* newspaper heralded the next training season, in June 1960, with a prominent front page headline and also observed, "It has been found that the only place offering living accommodation, lecturing rooms, outside areas for demonstrations, and water supply such as the lake close by, is Vermilion and the Vermilion School of Agriculture."



The original structures at the Alberta Fire Training School.





Drafting on the banks of the Vermilion River, using borrowed pumpers, was a common exercise. A headline in the Vermilion Standard, June 1960, noted, "Great Waterworks Display At Bridge Next Wednesday: Five New Fire Engines To Throw 34 Streams of Water; Demonstration for Alberta Firemen To Be Televised."



September 4, 1980, marked the official opening of a \$1.4 million AFTS expansion. The development included a new main building with six pumper bays, two classrooms, library, administrative offices, and other specialized training areas. The site base grew from three acres to 25, and it included a self-contained water system with a pumphouse and three reservoirs.



A celebration in November 1999 marked the 40th anniversary of AFTS. Alberta's past and then-current fire commissioners were among those attending. L-R: Austin Bridges, Bill MacKay, Tom Makey.

- **1968:** Institution is renamed Alberta Fire Training School (AFTS); construction of first administration building (today's Bridges Building)
- **1969:** Classroom and apparatus bay construction
- **1971:** First international student trains at AFTS
- **Late 1970s:** National Fire Protection Association standards are adopted in course development
- **1980:** Addition of main training building and training field
- **1989:** Major expansion with technical laboratories and multi-media command simulation theatre
- **1993:** Seven-storey training tower
- **1996:** Remote training site opens southeast of Vermilion
- **1998:** AFTS moves from Alberta Labour to become a subsidiary corporation of Lakeland College
- **1999:** AFTS is awarded a 10-year contract to provide fire training in the Northwest Territories
- **2001:** AFTS enters into a long term contract to provide on-site emergency services training for Syncrude Canada Ltd. at Fort McMurray

- **2002:** The new corporate identity, **fire etc.**, (fire emergency training centre) is officially launched July 1
- **2004:** **fire etc.** becomes a division of Lakeland College

Statistics

For the year ended June 30, 2004, there were 10,639 total registrations; 383,011 total student hours; and 4,089 IFSAC/ProBoard certifications issued. Of the total registrations, 3,868 were Alberta municipal fire departments, for a total of 139,265 municipal hours.

By the end of the third quarter (April 2005), Alberta municipal registrations were already at 4,313, well above last year's total. 🔥

Visual identity



The **fire etc.** identity is a powerful representation of what they do as an organization. The icon itself is derived from the infinity symbol, reflecting the eternal struggle of man's battle with fire and other disasters. It is a graphic representation of how vigilant they must be as an organization and as a profession, lest fire become the dominant element.

1939-1945

Second World War

1942

The Coconut Grove nightclub fire in Boston on November 28 claims the lives of 492 people and injures 166, making it the worst nightclub fire disaster in history. This disaster prompts jurisdictions throughout North America to require many new safety features such as exit lights. In Alberta, the fire is a factor in the new approach to fire inspections adopted in the early 1940s, including more regular inspections of theatres, halls and hotels.



Changes in fire training

When the predecessor to today's Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) was created in 1919, training was not a part of the organization's mandate. Three years later, when W.M. Seller became the first person to formally hold the office of Alberta Fire Commissioner, he outlined his areas of responsibility as compiling fire loss statistics, recording fire deaths, inspecting municipalities for unsafe conditions and remedying them, investigating fires of unknown origin, and distributing education literature to the public and promoting fire safety. However, over the years, the need for training of fire service personnel was recognized and training became a significant part of the responsibilities of the FCO, then the Fire Prevention Branch.

The hiring of an inspector in 1947 who was "qualified to recommend suitable fire protection equipment and to give instruction in firefighting techniques" was the start of providing training assistance to cities, towns and villages.

In 1951, Civil Defence & Disaster Services began training local fire departments, which raised the issues of competency and training levels of fire departments. Due to the extensive use of volunteer firefighters, it was determined that local training was necessary. Using federal funding, the Emergency Measures Office purchased five trucks and employed five men to staff them. Travelling around the province, the men provided basic pump and firefighting training to municipal fire departments. While this program created an internal battle between the Fire Commissioner and the Head of Civil Defence, the trucks were eventually turned over to the Fire Commissioner, which later led to the development of the fire training school.

The Fire Prevention Branch continued a mobile training program, using the mobile fire protection instruction unit of the FCO and the supervision of Civil Defence Auxiliary Firemen Training, as well as the use of five Civil Defence fire pumpers. As stated by the Fire Commissioner in his 1956 report, "there is a growing demand for fire officer training that is not being met under our present mobile training program."

By 1959, a provincial firefighting training program was offered through the government's three schools of agriculture, with training conducted by the Fire Prevention Branch. Later that same year, the Vermilion location was established as a permanent training facility for a Fire Officers Training School. By 1966, the annual report of the Fire Commissioner reflected, "the three specific services offered ... are fire inspection services, fire investigation services and fire fighting instruction services." Two years later, in 1968, the Fire Officers Training School was renamed the Alberta Fire Training School (AFTS).

By 1981, a new emphasis was placed on the utilization of AFTS firefighter training courses by municipal fire departments. The course material and necessary training aids were provided by AFTS; however, the training courses were conducted by fire department staff in the communities. This decreased travel expenses and made it easier for firefighters to receive training locally.

However, not all training efforts were focused on fire service personnel. In 1982, a special training guide called Fire Safety Planning for Health Care Facilities in Alberta was developed and presented to a number of hospitals and nursing homes, which began using it as their training manual.

In 1986, the Fire Prevention Branch reached a significant achievement by receiving accreditation from the National Professional Qualifications Board of the Joint Council of National Fire Service Organizations. This accreditation



Glendon Archives NC-6-931

Hook and ladder raised, Edmonton, Alberta [1914]

Mid-1940s

The *Self Liquidating Projects Act* brings water to small Alberta communities. Although the act is not originally intended to deal with fire protection, it has a profound impact on the fire service by providing dependable water sources in small-town Alberta.



Glendon Archives NA-3240-145

Fire at Imperial Oil bulk station, Edson, Alberta [1947]





Glenbow Archives NA-937.9

*Burning of Chateau Lake Louise, Alberta
[July 3, 1924]*

authorized the Fire Commissioner to certify firefighters, fire service instructors and fire officers from Alberta who met the training standards established in accordance with the professional qualification standards for fire department personnel published by the National Fire Protection Association.

The branch was renamed the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) in 1991, and the changes in training in the branch continued, including a transition from an inspection/enforcement role to an advisory service role for Fire Service Advisers. In addition to continuing to play an important role in encouraging fire departments to participate in formal training programs, they also regularly served as instructors and evaluators.

The Alberta Fire Training School in Vermilion, which formed an important part of the FCO, was separated in 1991 and run by a manager reporting to the Issues Management Division of Alberta Labour. The school continued to provide training in all fire service career paths, including fire prevention. In 1998, the Alberta Fire Training School moved from provincial government jurisdiction to a subsidiary of Lakeland College. The name of the school was changed in July 2002 to **fire etc.**, which became a division of Lakeland College in June 2004. 🔥

Edmonton Fire Department's growth in training

A review of training initiatives implemented by the Edmonton Fire Department provides an indication of the improvements made in firefighter training over the years.

Since its earliest days, the Edmonton Fire Department has been committed to protecting lives and property within the city's boundaries. The training used to accomplish this mission has evolved over the years and has adapted to meet increasing and changing needs. Nevertheless, the concepts of thorough planning, careful prevention and prompt response have remained constant.

The 1930s ushered in a period of static population growth and stagnant economic growth. There was little money for elaborate facilities, so training took place in a specially constructed room in the basement of Number 2 fire hall. Smoke was created from a lethal mixture of sulphur, rubber and oily waste. Trainees were instructed on the "All Service" breathing mask and how to use inhalators for artificial respiration.

The fears provoked by the Second World War prompted the fire department to expand its training mandate. In case of enemy attack, instructions were given to volunteers, reserve personnel and the general public on special firefighting techniques.

By the end of the war, the population was booming in Edmonton and across Alberta. Infrastructure and technology were developing and the department hurried to keep up. In 1950, two extinguishing materials had been purchased: "UNOX" wetting agent and Rockwood foam, and a site north of the Dawson Bridge near the riverbank was constructed as a training area. The ground was levelled, an underground concrete tank could be built and a hydrant was installed for instruction on pumper operation from drafts. The hydrant was also used for hose drills and pump operations. In addition, the department also dug a pit to use as a venue for instructing trainees in the use of fog nozzles and foam as fire extinguishers. Training was given on the operation of aerial ladders and their use as water towers. Trainees carried out drills using ropes, life nets, air masks, first aid and acetylene cutting torches. These drills were accompanied by classroom instruction in the old fire station on the Exhibition Grounds. At first, the department trained only recruits, but as time went on, regular staff and officers were included in the courses.

In 1952 the Edmonton Fire Department opened a new fire training school at 9315-101 Street. This new location came equipped with a five-storey tower incorporating fire escape stairs, a non-combustible two-storey house, a lecture area, classrooms and an underground drafting tank. The facility was integrated into the Fire Officers Training School in Vermilion in 1959 and came under the jurisdiction of the Alberta Fire Commissioner. Further improvements to the training curriculum were adapted in the 1960s and 1970s. The department revised its recruitment policy – the training curriculum was lengthened to eight weeks and included the University of Alberta's Physical Education Department conducting a physical exam of applicants.

1947

Leduc Oil Discovery

1949

The Fire Prevention Branch establishes *Alberta Fire News*, a newsletter circulated to all fire departments in Alberta. The newsletter continues to be published today.



Making progress

Equipment used to fight fires has improved dramatically over the years, especially when you consider that the first efforts involved men forming a bucket brigade from a town water tank to the site of a fire. The installation of wells at major intersections provided an improvement, as did the purchase of a chemical fire engine that was pulled by hand (although its arrival at a fire scene was dependent on the strength of those pulling it). A summary of some of the equipment purchased over the years by Alberta's two largest fire departments provides a glimpse into the evolution of fire equipment in our province.

The Calgary fire department's purchase of a horse-drawn Ronald steam fire engine, with two hose reels and 1,000 feet of hose, represented one of the first "modern" pieces of firefighting equipment. Further north, in Edmonton, the first electronic alarm system was installed in spring 1907, consisting of 44 non-interfering Gamewell alarm boxes. On August 23, the inaugural call was sent

over the wires. Two new fire halls were built in Edmonton in 1907 and 1908, and two chemical engines, together with three horse wagons, were added to Edmonton's firefighting arsenal. By 1910, the inventory of equipment stood at three chemical engines, one steam fire engine, three horse wagons, one hook and ladder truck, three fire halls, 31 men and 16 horses.

While firefighting equipment has changed significantly over the years, there are still many examples of some of the older equipment in communities across Alberta. Some are even still in use. Readers interested in seeing antique firefighting equipment are encouraged to contact local fire departments across Alberta.

During 1910 and 1911, Calgary took steps to motorize its engines, resulting in Canada's first totally mechanized fire department. On February 10, 1910, a motorized combination chemical and squad truck, complete with a 50-gallon chemical tank, and capable of running at 40 miles per hour, was delivered. This new "buzz wagon," as it was nicknamed, enabled fire crews to be at the fire scene long before any other vehicles.

A slowing economy in 1915 and the advent of war in 1918 meant that equipment purchases and construction of new fire halls were stopped. With the economic stagnation continuing in the 1920s, Edmonton bought only seven new rigs. However, the department maintained its commitment to supply the best equipment possible by replacing horse-drawn ladder units with motorized trucks. At this time, solid rubber tires were found unsafe in icy or wet conditions, and pumpers began to be equipped with pneumatic tires.



High River Fire Department, horse drawn pumper, High River, Alberta [1907]

Meanwhile, the innovations begun by the Edmonton Fire Department at the turn of the century continued over the next decades. The need for faster response times prompted Edmonton to begin replacing its horse-drawn rigs with motorized vehicles, although horse-drawn rigs remained on the inventory until 1921.

Between 1923 and 1929, the department continued to upgrade its equipment. During those years, a Triple Combination Pumper, Hose and Chemical truck, a new Studebaker Combination Chemical Car and Hose Wagon, and an 85-foot Magirus Aerial Ladder truck, with a water tower, were added to the fleet. With static population growth from 1930 to 1939, hardly any fire equipment was purchased. In fact, the Edmonton Fire Department only purchased two new fire trucks then: a Lafrance Ladder chassis in 1931 and a Bickle Ladder in 1939. The department carpenter installed wooden ladders on the Lafrance Ladder chassis, but in 1939, the department decided to switch to aluminum ones.



Station Communication Electronic Device, fire department, Claresholm, Alberta [January 1924]

1950

Alberta's post-war Civil Defence Department is established. The major emphasis at this time is on planning and preparing for wartime emergencies.



Austin Bridges appointed as Fire Commissioner

Austin Bridges and the St. Paul fire department



The department concentrated on improving firefighting techniques and introducing fire prevention methodology to the public. In 1930, the concept of using smaller water streams on small fires was developed, and salvage sheets were used to reduce water damage to property. Sprinkler systems became more common, and the phone number for alarms was changed from 966 to 100 in accordance with the Canadian Standard. The Fire Prevention Section began to carry out inspections in the schools and to hold fire drills for both children and teachers, and in 1935, improvements in the distribution of city water enabled the department to increase the number of fire hydrants to 102.



Fire department personnel with motor chemical squad car, Calgary, Alberta [ca. 1905-1910]

With the growth in population in the 1940s, it was vital that fire departments have appropriate equipment to respond in those areas without hydrants. One key piece of equipment was the Lafrance Metropolitan 500 Series Triple Combination Pumper, nicknamed "The Queen Mary" because of its large size, which was fitted with a 1921 Republic Ladder chassis with a 250-gallon tank and pump. Pump testing now became imperative to maintain accurate apparatus performance records.

The 1940s also saw improvements in technology, including an upgrade in breathing apparatus used at fire sites from the Puretha type of canister and oxygen cylinder mask to new combinations of air hoses and masks for use in smoke-filled and vaporous gas situations.

At the end of the Second World War, older, smaller trucks with solid rubber tires, chain drives and spring-assisted aerial ladders were replaced by larger, faster rigs. Aerial ladder technology now incorporated aluminum alloy ladders, pneumatic tires and fully hydraulic systems. Two-way radios were placed in the chief's car and in three trucks.

New apparatus bought in the 1950s emphasized reliable engines, greater water tank capacities and larger hose beds. Prominence was given to faster response times and safer trips to fires.

Other improvements reflected the expanding needs of fire departments. Extinguishing agents such as "UNOX" wetting agent and Rockwood foam were now used at fire sites, and mobile radio units, with channels separate from the police band, were put into service.

In 1952, fire departments began replacing the triple combination pumpers with two-stage centrifugal pumps. A dramatic improvement in the Edmonton Fire Department was the opening of a new mechanical shop in March 1954, which enabled the Department to centralize all repairs, rebuilds and modifications.

Outstanding population growth during the 1960s paralleled fire departments obtaining a wider range of equipment to cope with changing needs. Different types of equipment began to come online to meet different emergencies, such as jet boats for river rescue and

a Snorkel, a 3-boom, 90-foot aerial platform mounted on an International tandem chassis for rescue work as well as to fight fires. Diesel trucks were also purchased as they were faster, could carry heavier loads of hose and water and were equipped with larger pump capacities. These pumpers were the first to carry stainless steel booster tanks.

Equipment purchased in the 1970s included four-door sedan cabs and 1050 IGPM Triple Combinations, which remain the current standard. By the late 1970s, rescue boats were replaced with aluminum boats and rubber inflatable boats. As well, self-contained breathing apparatus was updated with high-pressure equipment developed by NASA.

Technical developments and ongoing recession were the themes of the 1980s. In Edmonton, the Planning and Research section developed a Computer Aided Dispatch System (CAD), which was augmented in 1981 with the addition of a new radio system. In addition, two new fire stations were built to house speciality equipment for special assignments. The acquisition of a new 30 CRM Compressor ensured that the Edmonton Fire Department's breathing air facility was one of the most advanced in North America.

Despite a recession in 1983, firefighter safety remained a concern and traditional turnout coats and helmets were replaced with Bunker Suits, which provided greater protection.

Alberta's earliest fire departments fought fires with a commitment to protecting life and property, using hand-drawn equipment and rudimentary alarm systems. Despite the dramatic improvement in equipment, apparatus and facilities, the commitment to protecting life and property has always continued. 🔥

1951

The province determines that fire departments need local training. In response, the head of Civil Defence purchases five fire trucks with federal money and employs five men to operate them and provide basic pump and fire fighting training to municipal fire departments across the province. These trucks are eventually turned over to the Fire Prevention Branch, which later leads to the development of the Alberta Fire Training School.

Fire prevention education

Did you know that Alberta's fire prevention activities originated more than 85 years ago? As stated in the first report of the Department of the Fire Commission in 1920, "Since commencing operations, special efforts have been made to induce the people of Alberta to be more careful in the handling of those commodities that involve a fire hazard, and to remedy such physical conditions as appear to be absolutely essential for the better protection of their own and their neighbours' property."

In fact, 1920 was a pivotal year in fire prevention education, starting with "Clean-Up Week," where, according to the 1920 Report of the Fire Commissioner, "Communications were sent to the secretary-treasurers of towns and villages throughout the province, requesting them to observe at least one day during

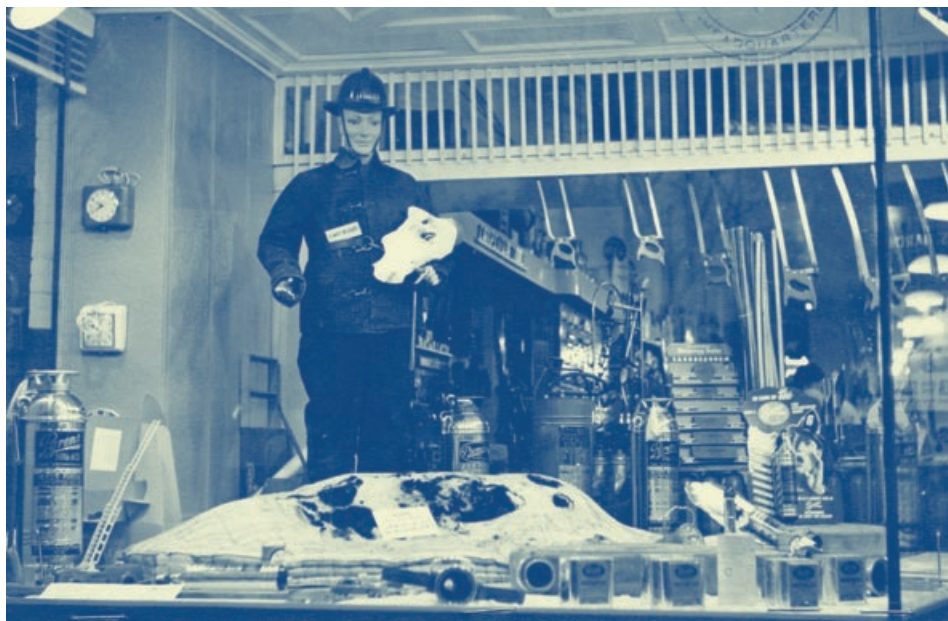
this week to gather up and destroy all rubbish from streets, lanes, or backyards. The local fire chiefs were also specially requested to visit all places in their locality and satisfy themselves that everything possible had been done to eliminate the danger of fires occurring from such causes."

1920 was also the year of the first "Fire Prevention Day," designated as October 9 by the office of the Dominion Fire Commissioner. As part of this campaign, the Dominion office distributed 1,000 copies of a proclamation calling on citizens to "Set aside this day to take stock of the conditions of their property and remedy such as were regarded dangerous." The Alberta department "supplemented the proclamation by a message requesting the heartiest co-operation of all classes

in the proper observance of this day." The message was printed in 28 of the province's newspapers and arrangements were made with "teachers of town and rural schools to set aside a portion of the day and devote the time to a brief talk upon the necessity of greater care in eliminating the causes of fire."

This was also the year that the department began educating school children about fire prevention. Activities included printing a series of cards for distribution throughout homes and to the mailing list of the United Grain Growers Securities and the Western Canada Mutual Insurance Co. The cards were also published in newspapers across Alberta, followed by articles on the card topics. Photographs of the cards were made into slides and exhibited on theatre screens, and an essay competition was held to encourage students to think about fire prevention (see sidebar on the following page for details about fire prevention activities in 1920).

Nine years later, in addition to radio broadcasts and posters and literature distributed throughout Alberta, an exhibit was displayed at the Edmonton exhibition in July 1929. As stated in the 1929 Report of the Fire Commissioner, the display included a "practical demonstration of lightning rod proficiency, given by means of a machine generating electricity to produce a lightning spark and models of farm buildings both rodded and unrodded and of wire fences. The demonstrations created considerable interest, as did the several fire hazards."



Fire Prevention display in the window of an unidentified store in Lethbridge (1952)

1952

Work begins on a special Civil Defence Headquarters building in Edmonton. The basement and ground floor are of thick reinforced concrete, designed to withstand the blast effects of an atomic bomb dropped at the city's centre.

At the request of civil defence authorities, Alberta hose lines are standardized to 2 1/2 inches. This "Alberta Mutual Aid Thread" is a specification that remains in effect to this day. Machine shops are hired to develop, implement and recut threads on fire hoses across the province.



First fire prevention campaign efforts – 1920

In collaboration with prominent insurance men of Alberta, a series of six cards was prepared. Each card contained two methods of fire prevention, and the department arranged the printing of 50,000 of each set of this series for distribution. Commencing in September 1920, 25,000 of these cards were sent monthly to the secretary-treasurers of school districts for distribution throughout the homes and the balance distributed through the mailing list of the United Grain Growers Securities and the Western Canada Mutual Insurance Co., to whom the thanks of this department are due for their kindly assistance.

Photographs were taken of these cards and 50 sets of slides produced. The department forwarded a set of these slides to the secretary-treasurers of 50 towns in Alberta where moving picture theatres are in regular operation and solicited the co-operation of the manager of the theatres in regularly exhibiting

these slides upon the screen. This request was fully complied with and splendid results have followed.

The department also solicited the support of the news press of the province. The cards of this series were published each month in 33 of the most widely circulated papers in Alberta. These insertions were followed up by news articles dealing with the topic suggested by the card published during the month. These articles were granted free space by the newspapers, which indicates the deep interest they manifested in bringing this important subject to the attention of their readers.

One of the big factors of this education campaign was to focus the attention of the public upon the work of conserving the lives and property of our citizens from loss by fire. The department too was convinced that the most effective work could be accomplished

with the coming generation and our efforts were particularly directed to bringing before the pupils of our schools the need for greater care and thought than has been manifested by the present generation in such every day conditions as make for an excessive fire hazard, especially with respect to matches, volatile oils, and other material of an inflammable character.

An essay competition has been arranged for, with both graded and ungraded schools within the province. Printed instructions governing this contest have been forwarded to a large number of the teachers and the department is anticipating a hearty response in the form of essays on fire prevention work from both of the above classes of schools. The essays submitted by each of these classes will be judged separately and suitable awards given. The contest closes on the first day of March, 1921.

Excerpted from the 1920 Report of the Department of the Fire Commissioner

By 1931, the display was exhibited for the entire week of the exhibition (which expanded Fire Prevention Day to a week-long event), operated jointly by the City of Edmonton Fire Department and the Office of the Fire Commissioner. Two years later, an exhibit was also displayed in Calgary. Requests made for similar displays by Lethbridge and Medicine Hat fire chiefs were unable to be accomplished “for reasons of economy.”

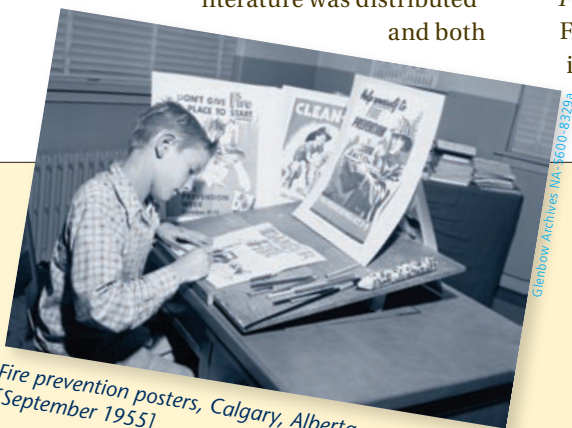
The First World War severely curtailed fire prevention activities, although some literature was distributed and both

Clean-up Week and Fire Prevention Week (FPW) were observed. After the war, fire prevention activities resumed, and by 1952, the fire commissioner included in his report that “The new medium of TV [was] being used to further public information on the dangers of fire. A supply of new fire prevention films will add to the value of this means of fire prevention education.”

By 1972, public education was largely provided through meetings, a fire prevention film library and *Alberta Fire News* releases, together with a yearly Fire Prevention Week program arranged in co-operation with the Government of Alberta’s Bureau of Public Affairs.

Through the late 1970s and beyond, fire prevention became a major activity of the Fire Prevention Branch, with the launch of several public education programs dealing with the hazards of fire, sources of ignition and methods of preparing for fire. By the early 1980s, there was also recognition of the need for fire safety education to occur more than once a year during Fire Prevention Week. With this recognition came the increased importance of the fire safety and fire prevention educator.

Over the years, increasing efforts were made to promote fire prevention and safety, including a four-month fire safety/prevention education program directed



Fire prevention posters, Calgary, Alberta [September 1955]

Glenbow Archives NA 1600-8329a

1950s

This period sees the beginning of increased province-wide development of fire departments, as Fire Prevention Branch inspection personnel begin encouraging communities in this area during their travels across the province. The development of centralized schools in larger communities brought about by the *School Consolidation Act* of the early 1950s also creates a need to improve roads in rural Alberta. This leads to better access to rural fires by the urban fire departments and an increased expectation from rural residents of fire protection services.

at school children in grades 1-6 and the general public in 1986. The program was continued in selected locations that had high fire death rates.

Computer enhancements for collecting statistics enabled better analysis of the information too, resulting in targeted educational materials and campaigns. For example, a 1987 report titled "Residential Fires: Places and Causes of Danger" revealed that most home fires started in the kitchen and that cooking oil igniting in pots or pans heated on stoves accounted for 60 per cent of kitchen fires. An in-depth analysis of these fires formed the basis for the development of a pamphlet and a video program on cooking safely with fats and oils. The pamphlet and the video were part of a public information package distributed by the branch during the FPW campaign in October.

A major undertaking in 1993 was the development of the Alberta Juvenile Firesetter Handbook and Directory, which was distributed a year later to all

fire departments as well as mental health and social workers in Alberta. Another initiative was the development of teacher and parent modules to educate preschool children in fire safety. The initiative was part of the Forum for Action on Childhood Safety and Wellbeing.

The branch's efforts in promoting fire prevention education as part of the Health program in elementary grades was rewarded with Alberta Education's authorization of the Learn Not To Burn Curriculum Level One as a teaching resource in Health for elementary grades 1 and 2. Subsequent training sessions were held across the province for both fire department personnel and elementary school teachers. In 1996, the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) expanded its connection with educators by attending 10 annual teachers' conventions, an activity that continues today. In 2001, the fire safety initiatives directed at Alberta children by the FCO won a Bronze Premier's Award of Excellence.

Fast forward...

The FCO continues to promote and enhance fire prevention education and safety. The FCO is now working with a great number of like-minded organizations to continue its long history of providing information and materials to help Albertans understand the importance of fire prevention and fire safety. Efforts are underway to create a network of fire and injury prevention educators throughout the province.

Fire Prevention Week 2005

Fire Prevention Week is from October 9-15, and its theme is: "Use Candles with Care: When you go out, blow out!!"

Three resources are available from the FCO to assist your Fire Prevention Week activities and events:

1. Children's program

- Fire safety activity booklets and Fire Chief for a Day contest materials, courtesy of ATCO Gas and ATCO Electric.
- An order form for these materials was sent out to fire departments in June 2005.

2. Fire Commissioner's Office campaign kit

- NFPA theme, Alberta statistics, children's activity worksheets, graphics, event planning guide, public service announcements, advertisements.
- The FCO's Fire Prevention Week Campaign kit was mailed to fire departments in mid-August and is also posted on the FCO website at www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco under "Campaigns."

3. Media events

- Media kick-off event, Alberta-wide radio public service announcement, Alberta weekly newspaper advertisement and promotion contest. 🔥



Lethbridge Fire Chief William Short delivers a fire safety demonstration (1959)

For more information regarding Fire Prevention Week or Fire Prevention Week activities, contact Te-Jay Smart at the Fire Commissioner's Office at (780) 644-4692 or e-mail te-jay.smart@gov.ab.ca.

1953

In February, a civil defence training school is established in Edmonton. By the end of 1955, thousands of volunteers have been trained, and 167 municipalities have established Civil Defence Organizations and emergency plans.

1954

The National Fire Protection Association recognizes the Fire Prevention Branch for its work promoting Fire Prevention Week.



Saying thank you with a variety of medals

People involved in the fire service are a unique group of dedicated individuals who are ready to serve and help their communities through almost any emergency. In recognition of this commitment and passion, acknowledgement, in the form of medals, has been provided to many individuals. In Alberta, three different medals have been distributed for outstanding service.



The 2003 inaugural ceremony for the Alberta Emergency Services Medal



The 2004 Fire Services Exemplary Service Medal ceremony in Edmonton



Alberta Emergency Services Medal

The provincial Alberta Emergency Services Medal, launched in December 2002, is available to any firefighter, ambulance responder, search and rescue worker, forestry

officer, disaster services and Emergency Management Alberta (EMA) personnel or fire/emergency medical services (EMS) dispatcher who has served Alberta for a minimum of 12 years.

The inaugural ceremony for the Alberta Emergency Services Medal took place on May 15, 2003, at the Alberta Legislature Building. Approximately 600 guests attended the ceremony, including Alberta Premier Ralph Klein and more than 300 medal recipients. Due to the large number of recipients, the Alberta Emergency Services Medal was presented to one representative from each of eight disciplines being honoured. All other recipients were asked to stand and be formally

recognized by attaching their medals at the same time as their discipline representative received his/her medal. The eight disciplines represented were: Alberta Fire Service, Search and Rescue, Emergency Medical Services, EMA, Fire Service Dispatch, Certified Emergency Medical Dispatch, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and the Alberta FCO.

Fire Service Medal

The federal Fire Services Exemplary Service Medal was inaugurated on August 29, 1985. The medal is awarded to full-time members of the fire service upon completion of 20 years of exemplary service. The medal is signed by the Governor General of Canada and is administered in Alberta by Municipal Affairs.

Those eligible for the medal include:

- Members of fire departments
- Fire marshal office personnel
- Fire Commissioner's Office personnel

Since its inauguration, the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) has organized celebrations to present recipients with their Fire Services Exemplary Service Medals.

Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Commemorative Medal

Four staff from the FCO have been awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Commemorative Medal. The medal was created to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty's reign as Queen of Canada. The medal was awarded to Canadians who made a significant contribution to their fellow citizens, their community or to Canada. The four staff are: Mahendra Wijayasinghe, Assistant Fire Commissioner; George Hands, former Fire Safety Officer, Calgary area; Ed Pomerleau, retired Fire Safety officer, Edmonton area; and Pat Graham, Fire Commissioner. 🔥



Strathcona County fire truck – 1956 Chevy

Seeing is believing... showcasing fire departments across Alberta



Photo courtesy of the Alexander Galt Museum and Archives

Members of the Lethbridge Fire Brigade and their horse-drawn equipment in front of the No. 1 Fire Hall – 1890



1948 GMC American LaFrance triple combination pumper (still owned by Jasper Fire Department) and 1953 VW Ambulance in front of Jasper Fire Hall – approximately 1954



Red Deer Fair parade – 1956



Nisku Industrial Park's new fire station – 1976



Mobile fire prevention display for Fire Prevention Week in Lethbridge – 1952. The shack, which depicts an occupant who died, was moved on a trailer with appropriate signs, and it was drawn around the city all week.

Photo courtesy of the Alexander Galt Museum and Archives



Fire at St. Paul Town Hall – 1965

Unidentified volunteer firefighter standing in front of Jasper's first motorized fire truck, a 1922 REO, with a 195 gpm Bickle Rotary Gear Pump – approx. 1926



Strathcona County volunteer firefighters [1959]

1959

The Alberta Fire Training School is established in Vermilion, and the need to train senior fire department personnel leads to the development of central training facilities for senior personnel. The Fire Prevention Branch spearheads the implementation of training sessions in conjunction with the agricultural colleges in Fairview, Olds and Vermilion.





Photo courtesy of the Alberta Civil Museum and Archives

Alfred E. Humphries, who served as Volunteer Fire Chief in Lethbridge from April 1902 to December 1906. He also served as the Canadian Immigration Officer and the Chief Magistrate of the city police.



Parks Canada fire hall attendant Steve Bordinik at work at the fire hall dispatch room – 1958



Red Deer's Station No. 1 in 1961



Red Deer's Station No. 1 in 1991



Strathcona County volunteer firefighters – 1959

1960

Alberta Civil Defence realizes that the principles of organization and operation for a wartime disaster are similar to those required for peacetime emergencies. Alberta Civil Defence changes its name to the Alberta Emergency Measures Organization and places increasing emphasis on planning and training for response to natural and manmade emergencies arising more and more frequently.

1962

Amendments to the Fire Prevention Act grant new powers to the Fire Prevention Branch, such as the formal authority to establish training assistance to fire departments, advise municipalities on matters related to fire protection, and deal with emergency situations involving a fire hazard.

Creating effective electronic data systems

The expanding use of computer technology and the Internet has created dramatic improvements in the collection and analysis of statistical information related to fires. Over the years, enhanced computer programs have enabled the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) to not only realize efficiencies but to also improve capabilities and services related to fire statistics and fire service inventory. Below are two innovative computer programs used by the FCO to capture critical information.

Fire Statistics Information System (FSIS) and Fire Electronic Reporting System (FERS)

FSIS is a system that provides for the collection, quality control, processing, analysis and dissemination of fire statistics in a variety of formats to serve both internal and external client needs. This system began informally in 1919 when insurance companies provided details of fire incidents to the Superintendent of Insurance. This practice continued with some small improvements over the years, such as the creation of a fire report form to gather more detail and the development of a mainstream dataset to collect and analyze statistics. Until 1990, this entire process was completed manually. Between 1991 and 1993, the FCO replaced an aging mainframe fire incident data entry system with a PC-based system using Statistical Analysis System (SAS) software, based on a review and recommendation by then Fire Prevention Officer Mahendra Wijayasinghe. This

improved system, officially called the Fire Statistics Information System (FSIS), enabled coding validation and rapid analysis of fire data compared to the previous manual methods. While FSIS had advanced features, a major drawback was that data entry personnel still had to manually input about 20,000 reports each year, which resulted in a lag period of at least two years in data availability for the most recent year.

In an effort to produce more current statistics and enable use of the Internet for reporting agencies, the FCO contracted with Fujitsu Consulting in 2000 to build a new fire incident reporting system. This resulted in the launch of the Fire Electronic Reporting System (FERS) in October 2002. FERS enables fire departments to submit their fire incident reports electronically in a more effective and efficient manner. The new system also has a built-in validation capability that automatically notifies the fire departments of coding errors on submitted reports, which allows departments to correct their own coding errors before their final reports are accepted into FERS.

FERS allows fire departments to electronically submit, view, edit and print their fire incident reports online. The electronic fire reporting system will increase the FCO's ability to offer current, accurate and meaningful statistics for use in developing corresponding fire prevention and safety materials, and to help municipalities develop fire protection master plans.

Continual FERS enhancements are being implemented to meet the requests and needs of the fire departments using FERS.

Alberta Emergency Resources Inventory System (AERIS)

In 2003, the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) introduced AERIS, a new initiative to streamline and assist the efforts of fire department personnel across Alberta. Through feedback from a survey distributed to all fire departments in the province, the FCO established an electronic database inventory to capture resources available for disaster management and mutual aid planning on both provincial and local levels. The FCO collected the data in whatever form was easiest for the fire departments, and did all of the initial data entry. However, fire departments have been encouraged to maintain their own data as changes occur.

The inventory will assist with the co-ordination of specialized services with the needs of end users. The database will also serve as a comparative analysis tool for municipalities to aid in determining where they stand in relation to other communities. After the database is developed, the FCO will contact fire departments on an annual basis to ensure the data in the system remains current.

The system was designed to satisfy a wide range of informational and statistical needs, including the ability to furnish answers to requests for the location of a multitude of specific pieces of equipment or trained personnel, including access to telephone numbers. Users can view their

1973

Bill Mackay appointed as Fire Commissioner

1974

The establishment of the *Disaster Services Act* brings the Emergency Measures Organization to a turning point. As part of the new act, a disaster financial assistance program ("Operation Wetfoot") is implemented and more than \$8,958,472 is paid out to the victims of the many disasters that affect Alberta that year.

Alberta becomes the first province in Canada to require all buildings over four storeys and all residential buildings over three storeys or over 600 square metres in building area to have sprinklers.



own local or regional response capacity for planning purposes and emergency planning. AERIS is also a comparative analysis tool, allowing users to compare their capacity, operations and training levels with other similar jurisdictions in Alberta. As well, in the event of a large-scale provincial or national emergency, such as the British Columbia fires, the system will furnish provincial emergency resource capacities and the contact methodologies to request.

As the system was being developed, updates on the status of the initiative were reported in each issue of *Alberta Fire News*.

Fast forward...

Fire Electronic Reporting Update

As of May 26, 2005:

- 345 of 346 municipalities had signed the *milenet* agreement (*milenet* is the online gateway to services within Municipal Affairs).
- 138 of 345 municipalities with *milenet* access had signed up their fire departments to report fires via the FERS application within *milenet*.

FERS is continually streamlined to make electronic fire reporting an easy and convenient task for the fire service. 🔥

Decoding the acronyms

- FSIS – Fire Statistics Information System
- FERS – Fire Electronic Reporting System (a component of FSIS)
- milenet* – Alberta Municipal Affairs' online gateway to services
- AERIS – Alberta Emergency Resources Inventory System

For more information about FERS, contact Te-Jay Smart, Fire Commissioner's Office, at (780) 644-4692 or te-jay.smart@gov.ab.ca

Legislation over the century

Legislative changes and the Fire Service

Provided below is a brief rundown of legislation that has impacted the Fire Service since the Fire Commissioner's Office's inception in 1919.

- 1919** – The *Fire Prevention Act* was proclaimed.
- 1925** – The new *Fire Prevention Act, Chapter 34* was assented to on April 8th.
- 1928** – On March 21, 1928, An *Act to Regulate the Sale and Installation of Lightning Rods* was assented to by the Legislature of the Province of Alberta, the purpose of which was to "correct practices of faulty installation and so control all those engaged in the business of selling and erecting lightning rods, and also to supervise the methods of erection."
- 1933** – Certain amendments were made to the *Fire Prevention Act Amendment Act*, being chapter 59 of the Statutes of Alberta.
- 1936** – Office of the Fire Commissioner moved under the Department of the Provincial Secretary (formerly was with the Provincial Treasurer).
- 1954** – Chapter 29 of the Statutes of Alberta 1954 amends the *Fire Prevention Act*. Changes affected the collection of the Fire Prevention Tax and fire safety in public assembly buildings.
- 1961** – Alberta Regulation 375/61 under the *Civil Defence and Disaster Act* assigned new responsibilities to the Fire Commissioner pertaining to the co-ordination of all municipal fire departments and the appointment of chief fire officers under the fire emergency plan and general command firefighters and equipment where a state of emergency exists.
- 1962** – Amendments to the *Fire Prevention Act* by Chapter 20 of the 1962 Statutes provided for posting buildings to prohibit entry when damaged by fire, requiring adjusters to report suspicious fires and providing for adoption of codes of fire safety rules as regulations.
- 1977** – The Province of Alberta provided leadership by establishing mandatory requirements for the installation of smoke alarms in all new buildings containing sleeping accommodations.
- The legislation also requires that all existing buildings containing sleeping accommodations, except one- and two-family dwellings, install the alarms by January 1, 1979.
- 1982** – The *Fire Prevention Act* was substantially revised to more clearly delineate investigation responsibilities. As well, some provisions were changed to encompass the scope of expanded branch activities, and appeal and enforcement provisions were improved. The *Lightning Rod Act* was repealed and the requirements of that act were incorporated into the *Fire Prevention Act*.
- 1984** – The first *Alberta Fire Code* was adopted on May 2 and became effective August 1.
- 1995** – The *Safety Codes Act* and the regulations under the act formed the legal framework for fire prevention.
- 2004** – Section 9 of the Administrative items Regulation AR 16/204 under the *Safety Codes Act*, which came into force on April 1, 2004, required that fires must be reported to the Fire Commissioner's Office within 30 days. 🔥

1975

Proposals are made for a cost-shared emergency equipment program. This enables municipalities to purchase equipment needed for emergencies, with part of the cost paid by the province. The program starts in 1979 and ends in 1986, by which time the province has invested \$800,000 in the program.

With smoke detectors hitting the market in the mid-1970s, the Fire Prevention Branch runs an article in *Alberta Fire News* promoting their use and providing details on the various models available. The average cost for a battery-operated detector is around \$75.



Fire statistics provide a window into the past

The first statistical report of the Fire Commissioner was published in 1921, covering the period from July 1, 1919, to October 31, 1920. This report met a requirement under the newly proclaimed *Fire Prevention Act*. Since then, the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) has published an annual statistical report covering the calendar year from January 1 to December 31. Below is an overview of fire trends outlined in the annual statistical reports, which are housed at the FCO.

Highlights:

- Figure 1 shows the number of fires from 1920 to 2003, with population figures from 1960 to 2003 (see pages 24-25). Accurate population figures were not available for years prior to 1960.
- In 1920, fire reports were received from fire insurance companies, adjustment agencies, secretaries of municipal districts, local assistants to the Fire Commissioner, fire chiefs, etc. Today, the main sources of fire reports are safety codes officers, insurance companies/insurance adjusters and the RCMP.
- In 1940, to provide uniformity in fire reporting, a form to record fire incident information was developed by the Canadian Fire Marshals and Fire Commissioners Association in conformity with insurance companies. The next documented attempt

at a systematic collection of fire incident data occurred in 1971 when Fire Commissioner Austin Bridges introduced a fire statistics reporting system using standard forms and a reporting manual. This reporting system, based on a study and report of the Association of Canadian Fire Marshals and Fire Commissioners, represented Alberta participation in a Canada-wide system of fire incident data collection. This same system has been updated and improved over the years to the currently used versions of the manual and forms, which have also been incorporated into an electronic version posted on the FCO website.

- Prior to 1971, fire incidents were recorded on 3 x 5 inch index cards maintained in a filing system. Manual counting followed by a punch card system was used to count fire incidents and categorize them by key variables to assist data analysis and interpretation. The first computerized fire incident database was created on a mainframe computer in 1971. Data analysts generated hard copies from which required aggregate figures were extracted and manipulated for reporting purposes. In 1991, an IBM PC-based fire data analysis system using Statistical Analysis System software was introduced to streamline and speed up the analytical and reporting functions.

Members of the Lesser Slave Regional Fire Service in action



Late 1970s

The Fire Prevention Branch launches an educational campaign specifically aimed at teaching children in rural Alberta about fire safety. Children will continue to be a central focus for the branch in future campaigns.



Olds elevator fire, late '70s



- The number of fires recorded for the province started with 870 fires in 1920, climbed to a peak of 12,659 fires in 1982 and declined to below 6,000 in 2003 (Figure 1). The increase in fire incidence seen during the 1950s was probably a result of an increase in the number of fire departments in the province and the promotion of fire reporting. The sharp increase beginning in 1971 was probably the result of the introduction of a new fire statistics reporting system in Alberta during that year. An unusually high incidence of reported fires occurred between 1979 and 1982. This was due to an increase in the reporting of grass and rubbish fires. This anomaly was corrected by redefining reportable fires in the 1983 version of the Fire Statistics Reporting Manual. This discouraged the reporting of grass and rubbish fires with no associated dollar loss, injury, death or suspicious origin, which resulted in the observable reduction in the number of reported fires. After the introduction of the formal fire reporting system in 1971, the fire incidence in Alberta has changed in three progressively declining plateaus: on average, 8,374 fires (1971-78); 8,150 fires (1983-91); and 6,645 fires (1992-01). 2002 marked a dip in the fire incidence (5,985) below the 6,000 mark, and this decline was sustained in 2003, with 5,626 fires. The number of fires in Alberta has declined steadily, with an overall reduction of 34 per cent during the last 21 years under review from 1983-2003, while the population during the same period increased by 32 per cent.

- The data table on page 25 shows the fire deaths recorded since 1921. These have fluctuated randomly over the years within a range of 11 in 1925 to 93 deaths in 1977. Fire death rates (deaths per 100,000 population) are also shown in the data table. Reliable population



A grain elevator fire lights up the night

data were available only from 1960. Population data for years 1930 to 1950 were compiled at five-year intervals from Alberta Municipal Affairs sources. Fire death rates were high prior to the late 1970s and reached an all time high of 5.5 in 1974. Since then, the fire death rates have shown a fairly consistent decline, especially from 1977 onwards. During the 30-year span between 1974 and 2003, fire death rates in Alberta decreased by 85 per cent. Since the majority of fire deaths occur in homes, this decrease in fire death rates may be partly due to the introduction in 1977 of the residential smoke alarm requirement under the *Fire Prevention Act*. Although no mandatory requirements were applied to existing one- and two-family dwellings at that time, many public promotional efforts were conducted to convince home owners to install smoke alarms on a voluntary basis in addition to informing building contractors and owners of the regulations.

- Where data are available, the most remarkable finding with respect to fire deaths is the significant proportion of child deaths (12 years and under in most years) as a percentage of all fire deaths during a 50-year span from 1920 until 1970. Children

accounted for 51 per cent of all fire deaths from 1921 to 1930; 46 per cent from 1931 to 1937; 47 per cent from 1940 to 1944; 46 per cent from 1951 to 1960; 33 per cent from 1961 to 1970; 16 per cent from 1971 to 1980; 14 per cent from 1981 to 1990; and 13 per cent from 1992 to 2003. The high incidence of childhood fire deaths in the early years can be related in many instances

(where information can be extracted) to the hazards involved in the use of coal oil (the most common household fuel) in lamps for lighting and for cooking purposes.

- From the initiation of the computerized fire database in 1971 until 2003, there were 1,836 fire fatalities in Alberta. There were 255 multiple fire fatalities (three or more deaths in a single fire) in 73 fire incidents. The largest life loss fires involved six fatalities per incident occurring in 1975 in Calgary due to an explosion in a hazardous chemical factory where six men perished; in 1976 on an Indian reserve in a fire caused by a candle igniting upholstered furniture in a one/two family dwelling where three children, two men and one woman died; and in 1984 in Medicine Hat in a fire of undetermined causes in a mobile home where three children and three adults perished. Twelve firefighters have died in the line of duty in Alberta during the period 1971 to 2003.
- Although fire deaths have been reported since 1921, fire related injuries do not appear to have been reported consistently until 1971. Assuming that the recorded number of fire deaths

continued on next page >>

1971

Introduction of the residential smoke alarm installation requirement under the *Fire Prevention Act*.

1984

An amendment to the *Fire Prevention Act* provides for the adoption of the *Alberta Fire Code*. This new comprehensive code replaces the variety of municipal bylaws and provincial regulations that had been in force up to this time.

is fairly accurate, it appears that fire injuries before 1971 were under reported based on the ratio of deaths to injuries, which does not conform to the generally accepted ratio between deaths and injuries (at least 1:10) when the concept of the injury triangle is applied to fires.

- Property damage from fires has been recorded since 1920. Prior to 1920, a partial accounting of property losses due to fire can be found in the Annual Reports of the Superintendent of Insurance, which listed fire insurance companies, the premiums collected and the losses paid. Beginning with \$1.1 million in 1920, reported property losses fluctuated over the years until 1962, when the losses registered \$10.8 million. Since then, these figures have climbed somewhat steadily, although with some variations, to reach the highest recorded value in 2003 of \$346.2 million. An industrial fire in January 2003 in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo that resulted in a property loss of \$150 million was the major

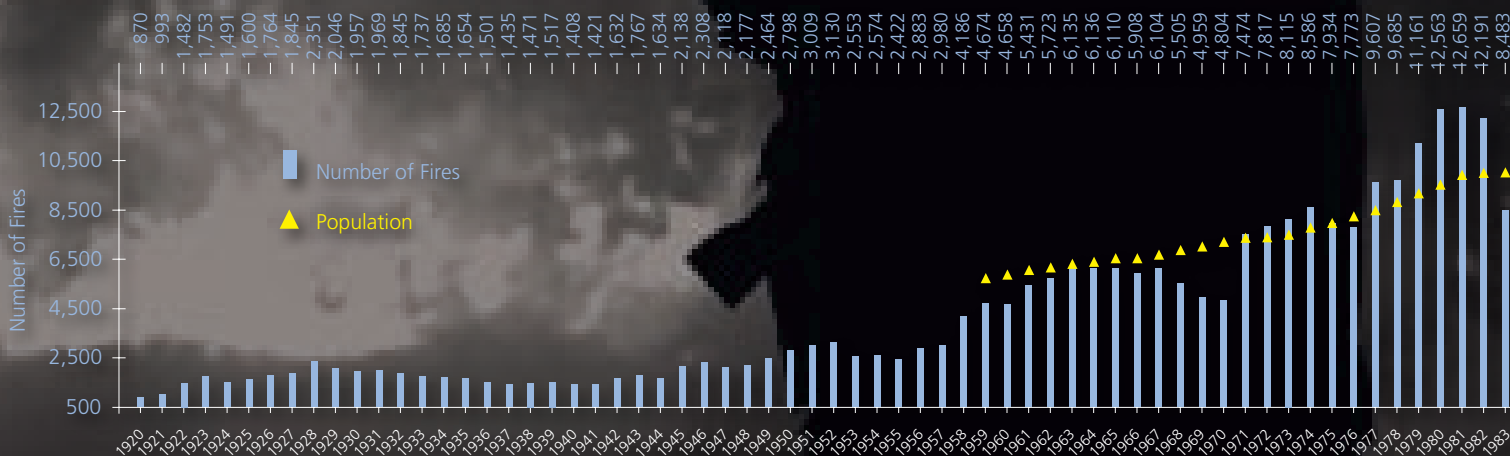
contributor to the fire losses during this year.

- The major causes of fires have also varied over the years. In 1920, major fire causes were listed as overheated ranges and stove-pipes; fireplaces; defective chimneys; exposures; lightning; careless smoking; flammable/combustible liquids; and child play. These fires were frequent in dwellings, barns, stores, offices and hotels/rooming houses. In 1931, the fire causes were similar to those in 1920, except for electrical fires, which emerged as another major cause. This obviously points to the increased use of electrical power in the province for lighting and running equipment and appliances. By 1941, prairie/bush fires were added to the list of major fire causes listed before. By 1951, careless smoking was ranked high as a fire cause, followed by the causes listed for previous years. In 1961, careless smoking followed by stoves, furnaces, boilers and their pipes were identified as major ignition sources in fires. In addition, petroleum products and electricity

were also ranked high in relation to fire losses. In 1971, smokers' materials, cooking equipment, electricity, heating equipment and exposures were major causes of fires and these causes did not change in the 1981 and 1991 reports. In 2001, a new, shorter version of the annual statistical report was published to create a "user-friendly" report for fire prevention personnel. The report, however, still contained the key analyses and interpretations contained in its predecessors. Major causes in 2001 were again similar to those in 1991. Although the common causes of fires have not changed drastically, especially since the 1970s, specific and emerging fire cause trends have been identified and brought to light through statistical analysis and published in *Alberta Fire News* and in other publications to alert the fire service and inform the public.

- Incendiary fires have been specifically noted throughout the early history of annual fire reports. Fire Commissioner W.M. Seller in his annual report of 1921 quotes from a News Bulletin from the

Figure 2 Fires and Population Growth in Alberta, 1920 - 2003



1984 - 85

Alberta Disaster Services is renamed Alberta Public Safety Services to more accurately reflect its new responsibilities for both disaster services and the transportation of dangerous goods.

1987

A tornado strikes the City of Edmonton and Strathcona County on July 31, killing 27 people and injuring more than 350, making it the largest sudden disaster in terms of loss of life in the history of Alberta. The funnel cloud wreaks havoc along a 42 km track and is reported



State of Louisiana, “The incendiarist works principally at night: The stealth of the tiger marks his every movement. Little he cares for the devastation which may follow on his wake, just so his aim may be accomplished. Unfortunately, juries are too prone to deal lightly with such demons. Of all criminals they are the hardest to convict...” Along the same theme, Fire Commissioner Seller emphasized the difficulties encountered in the investigation of the crime of arson and even suggested that fire investigators be vested with the power of peace officers.

- The collection, analysis and publication of fire statistics in Alberta has served not only to document the changing provincial picture but also guide various fire prevention initiatives by the Fire Commissioner. A few examples include an Arson Prevention program in the early 1980s, a Cooking Oil Fire Safety video and pamphlet in 1987 and the publication of a number of research articles that have appeared in *Alberta Fire News* as well as in other publications.

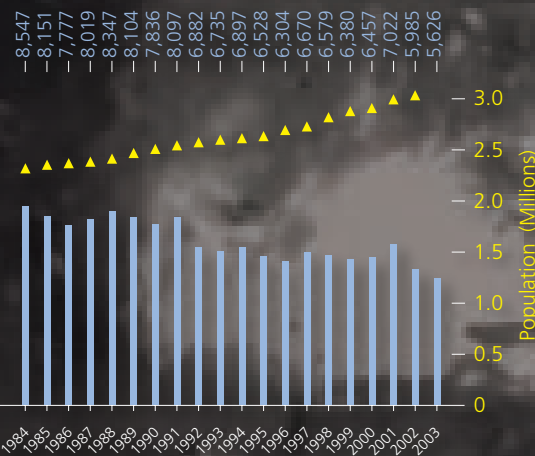


June 18, 2003 fire at Michener Service building in Red Deer

Fast forward...

Statistics continue to be an important part of the FCO. Enhanced computer software and hardware resulted in the Alberta Fire Statistics Information System, part of a Canada-wide fire reporting system, as an important function of the FCO. Analysis of the information in this extremely important database provides information to identify major fire problems in the province and guide relevant fire prevention and safety strategies. It also guides code development and evaluation of a wide variety of fire protection programs/initiatives at both the provincial and municipal level. More recent enhancements have resulted in the creation of the Fire Electronic Reporting System (FERS) and the Alberta Emergency Resource Inventory System (AERIS). (see page 20 for information about these computer systems). 🔥

YEAR	DEATHS	Rt*	POPULATION
1921	23		
1922	38		
1923	27		
1924	23		
1925	11		
1926	27		
1927	33		
1928	25		
1929	26		
1930	27	4.1	663872
1931	26		
1932	15		
1933	30		
1934	35		
1935	31	4.7	660775
1936	15		
1937	18		
1938	16		
1939	18		
1940	25	3.8	661790
1941	19		
1942	24		
1943	38		
1944	37		
1945	38	4.7	804257
1946	45		
1947	31		
1948	49		
1949	37		
1950	37	4.0	916225
1951	28		
1952	36		
1953	54		
1954	35		
1955	46	4.2	1088922
1956	35		
1957	39		
1958	38		
1959	46		
1960	41	3.2	1,265,572
1961	52	4.0	1,302,279
1962	49	3.6	1,343,808
1963	42	3.1	1,370,240
1964	71	5.1	1,402,664
1965	36	2.5	1,425,543
1966	39	2.7	1,459,746
1967	60	4.1	1,457,924
1968	54	3.6	1,497,369
1969	24	1.6	1,537,850
1970	52	3.3	1,576,549
1971	59	3.6	1,619,305
1972	64	3.9	1,658,231
1973	65	3.9	1,664,366
1974	92	5.5	1,687,530
1975	74	4.2	1,758,260
1976	78	4.3	1,806,955
1977	93	5.0	1,868,427
1978	91	4.7	1,928,579
1979	72	3.6	2,010,591
1980	76	3.6	2,094,212
1981	83	3.8	2,181,374
1982	83	3.7	2,273,955
1983	60	2.6	2,293,144
1984	61	2.6	2,301,888
1985	55	2.4	2,318,408
1986	65	2.8	2,354,299
1987	65	2.7	2,368,634
1988	59	2.5	2,383,984
1989	46	1.9	2,415,756
1990	48	1.9	2,469,069
1991	51	2.0	2,510,001
1992	25	1.0	2,543,033
1993	36	1.4	2,574,890
1994	25	1.0	2,601,282
1995	36	1.4	2,615,873
1996	41	1.6	2,636,489
1997	37	1.4	2,695,474
1998	20	0.7	2,730,818
1999	51	1.8	2,819,423
2000	27	0.9	2,879,743
2001	43	1.5	2,907,882
2002	31	1.0	2,994,387
2003	24	0.8	3,034,362



to be in contact with the ground for more than 35 minutes. This disaster represented an important test for Alberta Public Safety Services and the municipalities' emergency plans and led to increased innovation in the area of disaster preparation and planning.

This period also saw significant developments in the areas of fire prevention and safety services, and the three areas – Disaster Services, the Fire Commissioner's Office and Safety Services – would soon come together under one organization: the Public Safety Division of Alberta Municipal Affairs.

Tom Makey appointed as Fire Commissioner

Rt* = Fire deaths per 100,000 population

Growing an emergency management organization

Alberta's provincial emergency management organization got its start shortly after the Second World War, with the establishment of a provincial post-war Civil Defence Department, which placed major emphasis on planning and preparing for wartime emergencies.

The outcome of the war and concerns about potential nuclear attacks had a profound impact on Alberta's emergency services. In 1952, work began on a special Civil Defence Headquarters building in Edmonton that included a basement and ground floor of thick reinforced concrete designed to withstand the blast effects of an atomic bomb dropped at the city's centre. One year later, in February 1953, a civil defence training school was established in Edmonton. By the end of 1955, thousands of volunteers were trained, and 167 municipalities established Civil Defence Organizations and emergency plans.

However, by the 1960s, Alberta Civil Defence realized that the principles of organization and operation for a wartime disaster are similar to those required for peacetime emergencies. As

a result, Alberta Civil Defence changed its name to the Alberta Emergency Measures Organization. Emphasis was placed on planning and training for response to natural and man-made emergencies which began to occur more frequently.

A major turning point for the organization was the establishment of the *Disaster Services Act* in 1974. As part of the new act, a disaster financial assistance program ("Operation Wetfoot") was implemented, and nearly \$9 million was paid out to the victims of the many disasters that affected Alberta that year.

Over the years, a diversity of incidents led to the growth of the organization, including a propane gas pipeline that ruptured in 1979 in the Millwoods area of Edmonton causing an explosion and fire. This resulted in the activation of Edmonton's "red book" Peacetime Emergency Operations Plan, as set out in the *Disaster Services Act*. The area's 19,000 residents were evacuated. Some of the evacuees were accommodated in city schools and were provided with catering services by the Canadian Forces.

Similarly, a major emission of sour gas from a well near the Village of Lodgepole in 1982 resulted in the preparation of a comprehensive plan to deal with any future sour gas leak in the province. By 2005, this plan, known as the Upstream Petroleum Incident Support Plan, was in its fourth version. The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board now administers this plan.

What's in a name?

- 1950s – Alberta Civil Defence
- 1960s – Alberta Emergency Measures Organization
- 1984 – Alberta Public Safety Services
- 1995 – Alberta Disaster Services
- 2003 – Emergency Management Alberta



EMA logo 2003 to today



Alberta Civil Defence logo 1950-1960

Despite a name change to Alberta Public Safety Services in 1984 to more accurately reflect responsibilities for both disaster services and the transportation of dangerous goods, response to emergency situations continued with major floods in north central Alberta in 1986, which resulted in \$18 million being paid out in disaster assistance. At the time, this flood recovery program was the largest disaster assistance program ever initiated in Canada and was cost-shared by the Federal Government under the guidelines of the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements.

1986 was also the official opening of the new Alberta Public Safety Services Training School in Edmonton. Jointly funded by the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada, the building, with its lecture rooms, classrooms, amphitheatre and all-weather rescue training facilities, enabled Alberta Public Safety Services to take a giant stride in improving and rejuvenating training courses offered to Albertans.



2005 flood in High River

1988

The General Safety Services Division of Alberta Labour defines its mission to "promote public safety through programs that encourage and facilitate the acceptance of safety standards and responsibilities by industry and the general public respecting fuel gas, plumbing, buildings, elevators and fixed conveyances, fire prevention, electrical protection and fire equipment."

The activities of the Fire Prevention Branch move away from inspections and investigations to focus more on its information and education responsibilities.

1991

The Fire Prevention Branch is officially renamed the Fire Commissioner's Office.



A year later, a tornado struck the City of Edmonton and Strathcona County on July 31, 1987, killing 27 people and injuring more than 350. This was the worst disaster in Alberta's history in terms of loss of life. The funnel cloud wreaked havoc along a 42-kilometre path, and it was reported to be in contact with the ground for more than 35 minutes. An important test for Alberta Public Safety Services and the municipalities' emergency plan, this disaster also led to increased innovation in the area of disaster preparation and planning.

As a result of the Edmonton tornado, the disaster assistance program was modified to permit people who suffered catastrophic losses to receive immediate financial assistance. A new program called the Industrial Recovery Assistance Program helped businesses devastated by the tornado to resume their operations quickly and without having to lay off workers. Over \$35 million was paid out to farmers, businesses and individuals as a result of this catastrophe.

Another outcome of the tornado was the collaboration in 1988-89 between Alberta Public Safety Services and Alberta Health in developing Critical Incident Stress Debriefing resources to help emergency service workers and the victims of

emergencies and disasters to deal with stress trauma.

By 1990-91, Alberta Public Safety Services was also working with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to initiate the delivery of an emergency preparedness program to First Nations.

Another significant development was the launching of the Alberta Emergency Public Warning System (EPWS) in 1992.

Launched as a pilot project in the Edmonton area as a result of the 1987 tornado, the EPWS was designed to provide warnings of imminent danger when disaster threatens Albertans living within range of any radio or television station in the province.

Another name change occurred in 1992-93, when the disaster assistance program was renamed the disaster recovery program.

1995 was a significant year for Alberta Public Safety Services, starting with the restructuring of the organization as a branch



2003 official opening of the EMA Operation Centre

of Alberta Transportation and Utilities, the closing of the Training School and renaming to Alberta Disaster Services. In early June, the Government Emergency Operations Centre (GEOC) was activated to support the City of Fort McMurray because a wildfire had cut off the only highway into the community. One week later, a massive flood of the river basins in southern Alberta prompted reactivation of the GEOC. As well, the EPWS was expanded to cover all of Edmonton and was extended into the Calgary area.

continued on next page >>

Grand opening

Municipal Affairs Minister Rob Renner and Fire Commissioner Pat Graham were on hand at the grand opening of Calgary's new Multi-Agency Training Centre on May 6, 2005. As part of Emergency Preparedness Week, the facility was showcased for the media with equipment and training demonstrations. The facility will be used for urban search and rescue mobilization and training.

Minister Renner (right) takes part in the chain-ribbon cutting marking the opening of Calgary's new Multi-Agency Training Centre



Equipment demonstration at the Multi-Agency Training Centre

1992

The Alberta Emergency Public Warning System (EPWS) is launched as a pilot project in the Edmonton area as a result of the 1987 Edmonton and Area Tornado.

Assistance wasn't confined to Alberta, as demonstrated by the activation of the GEOC at the request of Emergency Preparedness Canada in support of areas in Ontario and Quebec that were coated by freezing rain for six days in January 1998. According to Environment Canada, this ice storm directly affected more people than any other previous weather event in Canadian history.



1987 Edmonton tornado

In July 2000, an F3 tornado tore through the Green Acres Campground at Pine Lake, causing 12 fatalities and more than 60 injuries. The County of Red Deer managed recovery efforts according to its Municipal Emergency Plan, and thousands of volunteers responded to help the county. A disaster recovery program that provided over \$6.8 million was quickly approved to assist people and municipalities who suffered catastrophic loss.

Although the events of September 11, 2001, did not reinvent the emergency management process in Alberta, they significantly raised the branch's profile in the public consciousness. Immediately after the terrorist attacks in the United States, Premier Ralph Klein formed a Government of Alberta Task Force on Security to address the impact of the attacks on the safety and security of Albertans. The Task Force directed that

a plan to address the threat of terrorism be developed, and the Alberta Counter-Terrorism Crisis Management Plan was finalized on February 5, 2002. The post-9/11 era also saw major changes in the business side of emergency management, including leading the development of Business Resumption Planning to ensure that all government department business resumption plans are developed, tested and co-ordinated to work effectively if needed.

The official launch of Emergency Management Alberta (formerly Alberta Disaster Services) was announced at the *Crisis Management: An Alberta Perspective* conference in Calgary in November 2002. The conference was jointly sponsored by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Solicitor General and provided partners in municipal government, first response organizations and the private sector with the latest information on initiatives and activities.

A month later, the AMBER Alert program was launched to allow major police forces to use the EPWS to request public assistance in finding lost and abducted children.

Then, in 2003, EMA moved its branch operations to a new state-of-the-art Operations Centre located in the west end of Edmonton. The official opening of the Emergency Management Alberta Operations Centre (EMAOC) took place on December 18 with the Honourable Anne McLellan, Minister responsible for Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, present. One week earlier, United States Ambassador Paul Cellucci toured the EMAOC.

Throughout 2003 and 2004, EMA continued to respond to a number of severe weather events across the province, providing support, resources and compensation for Albertans affected by the events.

Fast forward...

In 2005, the Executive Director of Emergency Management Alberta briefed the United States Government at the opening of the 109th Congress on emergency management in Alberta and provincial security practices.

EMA received \$12 million in funding from the Innovation Program and TELUS Communications to roll out the Emergency Management Operating System (EMOS) over the next two years, making it available to municipalities, industry, and government. EMOS uses wireless and web-based technologies to bring together eight separate emergency management systems into one comprehensive, easy-to-use system that will enhance the ability of municipalities, industry and government to prepare for and respond to emergencies and disasters.

From June 7-22, the EMA Operations Centre activated in support of municipalities in southern and central Alberta. With representation from the Alberta provincial government departments of Environment, Sustainable Resource Development, Infrastructure and Transportation, Energy, Health and Wellness, Solicitor General, Restructuring and Government Efficiency; and representation from Federal departments and the Non-Government Organization Council, the operations centre co-ordinated provincial support to affected municipalities and First Nations impacted by flooding in the Oldman, Bow, Red Deer, and North Saskatchewan river basins. 🔥

1992-93

The Disaster Assistance Program is renamed the Disaster Recovery Program.

1994

The *Alberta Safety Codes Act* consolidates and replaces a number of pieces of legislation governing safety in the nine disciplines covered by Safety Services.



Aboriginal involvement in the fire service

Across many parts of Canada, Aboriginal communities have had a long-standing tradition of fire service. However, many Aboriginal firefighters were never formally trained or educated to the extent possible today. While service records and rescue documents often cease to exist, each community has their own tale of the history of their people in the fire service.

In many Aboriginal customs, rituals and beliefs, fire plays an important role – so too with firefighting. From campfires and cooking fires to forest fires, there has always been a dependence on the various uses of this natural element while protecting the environment from out of control fires.

In addition to natural fires, Aboriginal people traditionally ignited fires to increase prairie grasslands for bison and other game or to clear travel corridors. This eventually helped pave the way for Aboriginal involvement in such initiatives as prescribed burning.

There are many approaches to fire service within Aboriginal communities. Some rely on neighbouring counties that have a fire department while others have established departments within their own communities. For example, the Driftpile First Nation, situated between Slave Lake and High Prairie, decided to take a unique approach to economic development and capitalize on this destructive aspect of nature by establishing the Driftpile Wildland Fire Fighting Unit. "Although the First Nation has been fighting fires since the late 1970s, it didn't become Driftpile Wildland Fire Fighting Unit until 1997 when it was taken over by Driftpile Band Enterprises," said Peter Freeman, Driftpile's Chief Executive Officer.



Aboriginal Fire Chiefs attended the May 1-4, 2005 Alberta Fire Chiefs Conference in Jasper, Alberta and assisted Judy Harvie, Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Alberta Fire Commissioner's Office, with a presentation

Another example is the North Peace Tribal Council, which covers five First Nations communities in northern Alberta. The Council's fire service includes a full-time Fire Safety Officer for the North Peace Tribal Council and eight fire departments, each of which has a part-time paid fire chief. The Council is working on fire service agreements and training venues as well as special training requests.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) was involved in an educational project to teach fire safety to northern First Nations reserves. Education binders were created using a team of experts and using native illustrations and stories to suit cultural needs. Copies of these binders are housed at the FCO. More recently, Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development co-ordinated

with Alberta Municipal Affairs to develop and deliver the Aboriginal-specific Fire-Safe campaign, which included hiring Aboriginal Liaison Officers to promote the principles of FireSmart and undertake fuel hazard assessment and reduction projects in 15 Aboriginal communities in 2004.

A landmark paper, titled "Fire losses on Alberta First Nations", was published in 1999 in *Alberta Fire News*. This paper pointed to the high fire death rates in First Nations communities, which were 4 to 11 times higher than in rural and urban municipalities. The paper also stated the unique pattern of fire causes on reserves – arson and child fire play being the number one and two causes. The creation of the Aboriginal Liaison position in 2005 at the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) was partly a result of these findings.

continued on next page >>

1995

Significant restructuring of Alberta Public Safety Services and closure of the training school. Alberta Public Safety Services becomes a branch of Alberta Transportation and Utilities.

With the support of Fire Prevention Canada, the *Learn Not To Burn* fire safety education program is launched in Canadian elementary schools. In Alberta, the Fire Commissioner's Office co-ordinates the delivery of materials to schools and assists fire departments with conducting training programs for teachers.

The Emergency Public Warning System (EPWS) expands to cover all of Edmonton and is extended into the Calgary area.



Fast forward...

With the assistance of the FCO's Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Alberta's aboriginal communities have made significant progress in the area of fire prevention. Some of the more recent successes include:

- The first Alberta Annual Indigenous Fire Service Conference was held July 10-11, 2003, in Edmonton, and it was an overwhelming success.
- The Métis Nations of Alberta hosted Fire Prevention Week kick-off events in Calgary and Edmonton on October 4 and 6, 2004.
- A comic book created by Chris Big Plume provides an entertaining and educational approach to fire safety.
- In March 2005, **fire etc.** (now a division

of Lakeland College) began delivering an Emergency Services Technology (EST) program exclusively for the Métis Nation of Alberta. The first of its kind in Canada, the 46-week program provides preparation for entry-level career positions in municipal and industrial firefighting and pre-hospital medical services. Calgary and Edmonton fire chiefs visited the training program to encourage students to apply to city fire departments.

- The Association of Métis Settlement Fire Chiefs was created in spring 2005. The association is encouraging all settlements to participate in establishing agreements and strengthening their fire departments.
- An Aboriginal article is now a regular feature of each issue of *Alberta Fire News*.

Other recent achievements include:

- An invitation to the Aboriginal Fire Chiefs to make a presentation at the Canadian Fire Chiefs Conference in Richmond, British Columbia, in September 2005.
- The Fishing Lake Fire Department is working with the oil and gas industry by providing a standby emergency medical responder. In conjunction with Elizabeth Settlements, it is also running an Emergency Medical Responder program in fall 2005.
- Eight bands or First Nation fire departments and the Métis Settlement fire department members are working to schedule fire training together. 🔥

Fire Services Advisory Committee

An effective voice for Alberta's fire service

Developing a vision for the fire services in Alberta and forging stronger partnerships with fire departments, industry and government was the thrust behind the creation of the Fire Services Advisory Committee (FSAC). Established by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in 2003, the committee is charged with providing advice to the minister on fire-related issues across Alberta. Alberta Fire Commissioner Pat Graham chairs the FSAC.

The committee's aim includes:

- establishing a clear vision for the fire service;
- providing leadership to facilitate co-operation and efficiency; and
- addressing the challenges facing every community in the delivery of fire and emergency services as well as the demands for new capabilities for emergency management and disaster response.

Two of the committee's top priorities are communication and accessibility to ensure that the entire Alberta fire service is an active player in FSAC activities.

Another key priority is looking at the changing role of the fire service, both in terms of activities and personnel. Changes in society also reflect changes in the fire service. Through FSAC, fire personnel from across the province have a voice to ensure the province's fire services receive support that will enable them to respond to developing needs across Alberta. 🔥

1999

With injuries being identified as the number one killer of children over one year of age in Alberta, the Fire Commissioner's Office moves from specializing in fire safety to focusing on education in the more comprehensive area of injury prevention. The office begins promoting *Risk Watch*, a new program that combines fire and burn material from the *Learn Not To Burn* program with lessons in seven other injury areas that account for childhood mortality.

Disaster Services, The Fire Commissioner's Office and Safety Services are moved into Alberta Municipal Affairs as part of a government reorganization.



Alberta Fire Chiefs Association

Conversation among Alberta fire chiefs attending the 1948 meeting of the Dominion Fire Prevention Association (now known as the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs) was the impetus behind the creation of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association (AFCA). At the meeting held in Medicine Hat, several Alberta fire chiefs began discussing the need to create their own provincial association. A year later, the first Alberta Fire Chiefs Association meeting was held in Calgary, with Calgary Fire Chief John Shelley serving as the meeting host.

According to Bill Mackay, current Executive Director of the AFCA and former Alberta Fire Commissioner, activities and initiatives in Alberta pushed the AFCA to meet growing demands. For example, after the Second World War, the province created the *Civil Defence and Disaster Act*. One of the directions taken by the Civil Defence department was to promote fire protection because of the concern about a possible enemy air attack on Canada or the United States. The experiences in the British Isles with aerial bomb attacks led to the decision to develop fire protection in Alberta's communities, and five fire training pumpers were purchased. Staff of the Fire Prevention Branch supervised the fire instructors who travelled the province with the pumpers, promoting fire protection and helping local fire departments train their members. This

effort led to the establishment of the Alberta Fire Training School under the direction of the Fire Commissioner.

Another provincial initiative that assisted the development of fire departments was when Premier Ernest Manning's Social Credit government proclaimed the *Self Liquidating Act*. Although the act was not originally intended to deal with fire protection, it had a profound impact on the fire service by providing dependable water sources in small-town Alberta. This started a move to create fire departments across the province, which, in turn, increased the number of fire chiefs in Alberta. Another major provincial initiative that impacted the growth of the AFCA was the *School Consolidation Act* of the early 1950s. In addition to creating centralized schools in larger communities, the act also created a need to improve roads in rural Alberta. This generated interest from councillors and fire chiefs to promote fire protection either on their own for their communities or as a co-operative effort with nearby communities.

As a result of the aforementioned efforts, fire protection was being expanded into many rural communities. The growth of these rural fire departments resulted in the establishment of the Alberta Rural Fire Protection Association (ARFPA). Years later, the AFCA and the ARFPA began holding joint meetings. Eventually, the bylaws of the AFCA were amended to include elected officials as active members. By 1970, councillors who were

members of the ARFPA were elected to the AFCA board of directors. A year later, in 1971, the ARFPA amalgamated into the AFCA.

During its 58-year history, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association has continued to fulfill its mission to promote, support and facilitate fire protection and related emergency services. In the process, the AFCA has played an important role in the continuous improvement in fire protection across Alberta.

Fast forward...

The AFCA continues to hold a yearly meeting for members and has expanded the conference to include a trade show of products and services of interest to the fire services community. Input from the AFCA has helped to maintain high training standards at fire etc. and other educational institutions. The association has also played a role in the implementation of the *Learn Not To Burn* and *Risk Watch* programs for children, the Juvenile Fire Setters Intervention programs, smoke detector campaigns across the province and residential sprinkler campaigns. Through various committees, the AFCA is also involved with a number of provincial and national organizations on a variety of issues related to the fire service.

In 1993, the AFCA established a bookstore as a way to generate needed funds. Soon to be an online electronic bookstore, it produces and distributes a wide variety of materials related to emergency, fire and EMS services in Western Canada, including training, codes, resources and regulatory documents. 🔥



2001

The 2001 North-Central Alberta Forest Fire Disaster Recovery Program is implemented as a result of several large forest fires from May through July. This is considered the worst fire season in recent history. A total of \$356,000 is approved for nine rural municipalities to assist with their emergency operations costs. This includes costs associated with the evacuation of residences and municipal infrastructure repairs such as road work.



Pat Graham appointed as Fire Commissioner



Calgary Fire Chief retires

After 39 years of rising through the ranks of the Calgary Fire Department, Fire Chief Wayne Morris has hung up his helmet. He's come a long way since the start of his career, where he and his fellow firefighters responded to calls in open-top fire trucks, sliding around on vinyl seats without seat belts and getting doused with water in the dead of winter. These formative experiences helped guide him through a diverse career that culminated with his succession to fire chief for the last six years.

His professional achievements are numerous. Most recently, the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs acknowledged his outstanding work in community

safety and service, presenting him with its Award of Excellence. Throughout his career, he has travelled extensively to see how other fire departments operate, taking great pride in saying he worked with the Calgary Fire Department.

"The sense of belonging to a team of proud, committed, dedicated, customer-centred men and



Photos by Orlo Tveiter

Fire Commissioner Pat Graham congratulates retiring Calgary Fire Chief Wayne Morris

women is something I will miss very much as my role changes from fire chief to citizen," said Morris. "I can't say enough about the support they have shown to me and their willingness to take on any challenge. Maybe it comes naturally in the raw recruits we hire, or perhaps it's the atmosphere the Calgary Fire Department cultivates, but any time our folks put their hands on something they just take it to another level."

While Wayne is looking forward to having more time with his family and pursuing other interests, he says he will never be too far away given he's joined the growing ranks of retired firefighters. 🔥



Chief Operations Coordinator Gord Sweetnam and Deputy Chief of Community Safety Len MacCharles present Morris with a speaking trumpet. Speaking trumpets were both functional (to shout orders at an incident scene) as well as ceremonial (for parades and gifts of esteem to retiring members of the fire service). The earliest mention of speaking trumpets was in New York in 1792. This speaking trumpet is estimated to be 115-120 years old.

2002

The official launch of Emergency Management Alberta (EMA) is announced at the *Crisis Management: An Alberta Perspective* conference in Calgary, November 2002. The conference is jointly sponsored by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Solicitor General and provides partners in municipal government, first response organizations and the private sector with the latest information on initiatives and activities.



EMA grand opening

Renewed interest in the emergency services sparked by 9/11 is one factor in the establishment of the Alberta Emergency Services Medal. The medal is introduced to pay tribute to outstanding full-time, part-time and volunteer members who have committed 12 or more years of their careers to emergency service in Alberta.



Insurance and the fire service: An effective partnership

From the beginning, there has been a strong link between the Fire Commissioner and insurance companies.

In 1914, there were 130 insurance companies (Dominion Licensees) registered under the *Alberta Insurance Act*, which included 73 fire insurance companies and two fire and life insurance companies. There were also six fire insurance companies and three mutual fire insurance companies among the 22 provincial and foreign companies licensed under the act.

The establishment of the Fire Commissioner and the Fire Prevention Branch resulted in a travelling inspector “attending to the duties of inspection.” By 1921, the inspector’s responsibilities also included investigations into the causes of fires. As stated in the annual report of the Superintendent of Insurance, “In nearly every case of suspected arson, the motive has been to defraud the insurance companies.”

By 1924, investigation of fires of suspicious origin became the responsibility of the Fire Prevention Branch, a move well received by insurance companies and municipality staff. “This portion of the work of the Department would appear to be giving satisfaction to the interests concerned, as all fires of suspicious origin are immediately reported to the

Fire Commissioner by the companies or their adjusters asking for an investigation, upon receipt of which an investigator is immediately assigned to the case and progress reports submitted to the Department within every seven days until the investigation is finally completed. The number of convictions indicates a marked improvement considering the difficulties experienced investigating crimes of this nature,” stated the Fire Commissioner in his annual report. “In general, co-operation has been freely rendered to the Fire Commissioner by the Fire Companies, Fire Adjusters and Fire Chiefs in immediately reporting fires of suspicious origin, in supplying all the information in their possession, and by the local assistants and Secretary-Treasurers in reporting the compliance or non-compliance of orders, used to remedy conditions.”

During 1928, the Loss Information and Investigation Bureau of Canada, an organization maintained by the insurance companies assisting in the investigation and prosecution of incendiary fires, opened an office in Edmonton.

On April 2, 1929, legislation recommended by the Fire Prevention Branch to lessen the incidence of arson fires was assented to. “It cannot be denied that over-insurance is a menace. ... To overcome this evil the Department [Branch] recommended for enactment ... legislation ... making it an offence against the *Alberta Insurance Act* for an agent

to knowingly issue any contract of fire insurance for an amount which with any existing contracts exceeds the fair value of the property or of the interest of the insured therein, or as against the insured person to knowingly procure insurance in such a manner.”

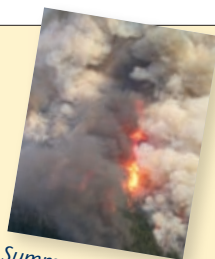
However, a similar situation arose in 1956, with a recurring incidence of fire insurance coverage exceeding the adjusted value of buildings and contents. This trend was commented on in the Fire Commissioner’s 1956 annual report: “these facts are discovered following investigation of fires. ... When a fair portion of the risk from fire remains with the property owners, there will be a greater interest in, and attention to, fire safety measures.”

Fast forward...

The insurance industry is an important stakeholder for the Fire Commissioner’s Office (FCO). In addition to distributing copies of *Alberta Fire News* and other material from the FCO to insurance companies, the insurance industry also has a representative on the editorial board of *Alberta Fire News*.

The insurance companies and insurance adjusters still perform a vital task in reporting fire incidents that are handled due to insurance claims. This practice has continued since the 1920s, beginning with the insurance industry origins. 🔥

The Municipal Wildfire Assistance Program is developed in partnership with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. The program assists municipal governments with the cost of fighting wildfires and limits the financial burden on local taxpayers when wildfires affect their communities.



Summer 2003
Lost Creek fire

Introduction of the Fire Electronic Reporting System (FERS).



Qs & As about Alberta's fire history

As part of this centennial issue of *Alberta Fire News*, we've put the focus on historical questions related to the fire service in Alberta.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST DEVASTATING FIRE IN ALBERTA?

The severity of a fire may be judged by the number of fatalities and by property loss as determined from the fire data. The following is based on fire data from 1971 to 2003 (1971 was the beginning of computerized fire data):

In terms of fatalities – the largest life-loss fires involved six fatalities per incident and occurred in 1975 in Calgary due to an explosion in a hazardous chemical factory where six men perished; in 1976 on an Indian reserve in a fire caused by a candle igniting upholstered furniture in a one/two family dwelling where three children, two men and one woman died; and, in Medicine Hat in 1984, a fire of undetermined causes in a mobile home where three children and three adults perished.

In terms of property loss – an industrial fire in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo in January 2003 resulted in a property loss of \$150 million.

WHO WAS THE FIRST FIRE CHIEF?

The title “fire chief” wasn’t used until November 1886. Instead, the title “fire captain” was used, and Alberta’s first fire captain, George Constantine, was elected on August 25, 1885 to head up the Calgary Hook, Ladder and Bucket Corps (he resigned one week later). Steve Jarrett was then elected to the position, and in 1898, six more captains, or chiefs as they were called after November 1886, led the corps.

WHERE WAS THE FIRST FIRE DEPARTMENT IN ALBERTA?

The first official fire department was formed in Calgary in August 1885. The new fire department took on the name the Calgary Hook, Ladder and Bucket Corps, had a complement of 22 volunteers and was equipped with a bucket brigade, a chemical fire engine and a hook-and-ladder. Volunteers who staffed the corps worked on a part-time basis, leaving their regular jobs whenever the fire bell rang and hurrying to the scene of the fire. The men worked under Fire Captain Steve Jarrett, and were paid 75 cents for each fire they attended. See the article on page 3 for more details.

WHO WAS ALBERTA'S FIRST FIRE COMMISSIONER?

In 1919, the responsibility of the Fire Commissioner was added to the duties of the Superintendent of Insurance. It wasn’t until 1939 that the position became independent, when Roger Moore was appointed as Fire Commissioner. For more information about Alberta’s fire commissioners, see the article on page 5.

WHEN WAS THE FIRST RECORDED FIRE?

Based on the first available copy of the Annual Report of the Superintendent of Insurance, Alberta Treasury Department, published in 1914, it appears that fire losses were first recorded in 1913. The fire-related information in this report and subsequent reports were limited to a list of fire insurance companies, fire premiums collected and claims paid. The formal reporting of fires, causes and related losses started with the first Annual Report of the Fire Commissioner in 1921, which covered the period July 1, 1919, to October 31, 1920. 🔥

2003

The *Safety System Review Final Report* is released to the public, and includes recommendations regarding the development of a vision for the fire service, as well as greater co-ordination among fire departments.

The new state-of-the-art Emergency Management Alberta Operations Centre (EMAOC) is officially opened on December 18.

The inaugural presentation of the Alberta Emergency Services Medal is held on the steps of the Alberta Legislature. The ceremony is attended by approximately 600 guests, including MLAs, more than 300 medal recipients and Premier Ralph Klein.



Digest

FCO website

Now considered an integral part of the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO), the FCO website was created in 1999.

Over the years it has expanded to include an ever-growing list of information that is beneficial to fire departments and Albertans. In addition to fire safety tips and fact sheets, the website also includes information about upcoming fire prevention campaigns, current and past issues of FCO publications, and updates from the Fire Services Advisory Committee as well as statistical information included in the annual report and a more detailed breakdown of yearly fire statistics. It also includes videos and employment opportunities. Make this website your first source for fire-related information by bookmarking the URL: www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco

Thanks for the memories

In order to create this special edition of *Alberta Fire News*, the Fire Commissioner's Office sent a request to all fire departments across the province for photos of their departments. Thanks to those departments who shared their information and photographs with us. This issue's photo centre spread couldn't have been accomplished without their assistance and co-operation.

Alberta fire service activities calendar (Sep. - Nov. 30, 2005)

Alberta Regional Scott Firefit Championships	September 10	Strathcona
Canadian National Scott Firefit Championships	September 15-18	Edmonton
Fire Prevention Week	October 9-15 (FCO campaign kit available August 15)	Province wide
Fall back to Standard time (end of Daylight Saving Time)	October 31	Province wide
Fire Service Advisory Committee Meetings	October 17 October 19 October 24 October 25 October 26 October 28	Lac La Biche Grande Prairie Lethbridge Calgary Red Deer Edmonton
Southern Alberta Fire Departments Conference	November 18-19	Lethbridge

Saying goodbye

James Straty, former Fire Chief with the Myrnam Fire Department, passed away on May 3, 2005. James completed 35 years of service, the last 10 as fire chief. As a maintenance man for the Village of Myrnam, he was expected to also work with the fire department. Despite a job change to grader operator for the County of Two Hills, James continued with the Myrnam Fire Department. According to his son Brad, he loved being a firefighter. Both of his sons are also firefighters: Brad is the deputy fire chief with the Myrnam Fire Department and Shane is with the St. Paul Fire Department. In addition to being an outdoorsman, particularly enjoying camping and fishing, James also loved children, especially his grandchildren.

Contributions welcome

We're always looking for articles, ideas and information about the fire service in Alberta that we can share with others through *Alberta Fire News*. We encourage our readers to provide us with information about activities and events. We'd also love to hear from you about articles you'd like to see included. Please contact Te-Jay Smart with your information – by e-mail to te-jay.smart@gov.ab.ca or by phone at (780) 644-4692 (dial 310-0000 for toll free access outside of Edmonton).

Badge request continues

The FCO is still in need of badges to complete their badge display. Designed to include a badge/crest from every fire department across Alberta, the finished display will showcase the diversity of fire communities across our province. Please remember to send your department's contribution to the Fire Commissioner's Office. Either drop it off in person or mail it to: Alberta Fire Commissioner's Office 16th Floor, Commerce Place 10155 - 102 Street Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4L4 🔥

The Minister of Municipal Affairs establishes the Alberta Fire Services Advisory Committee to represent the entire Alberta fire service and provide a unifying framework to facilitate inter-department co-operation and mutual aid and ultimately improve the quality and value of the province's fire services.



February 2004 meeting of the Fire Services Advisory Committee

2005

Fire departments from across the province are given direct access to the response-related capacities of the entire Alberta fire service through the Alberta Emergency Resources Inventory System (AERIS). This first-of-its-kind system helps protect the public by allowing fire departments to quickly locate and begin dispatch procedures to obtain the specialized personnel and resources they might require during a major emergency.

Alberta Fire News is published three times a year, by the Fire Commissioner's Office of Alberta Municipal Affairs, for the information of the fire service and others with an interest in fire protection.

Opinions expressed in this publication are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of Alberta Municipal Affairs or the Government of Alberta. Your comments and suggestions are encouraged. The contents of *Alberta Fire News* may be reproduced with the appropriate credit to the source. The editorial office of *Alberta Fire News* is located at:

Alberta Fire Commissioner's Office
 16th Floor, Commerce Place
 10155-102 Street
 Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4L4
 Phone: (780) 427-8392
 Fax: (780) 427-5898
www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco



Editorial Board

Lyle Birnie
*Fire Chief (Retired),
 Westlock Fire Department*

Bob Galloway
Fire Chief, Leduc County

Alberta Municipal Affairs:

Pat Graham
Fire Commissioner

Ernie Polsom
Assistant Fire Commissioner

Mahendra Wijayasinghe
Assistant Fire Commissioner

Te-Jay Smart
Fire Safety Officer

Jay O'Neill
Director, Communications

Kari-Ann Kuperis
Public Affairs Officer

Jayne Jeneroux
 Writer

Jack Born, Design Quarry
 Design and Pre-Press Production

In remembrance

Not forgotten – our fallen firefighters

Name	Fire Date	Location
H.E. Smith	May 26, 1971	Calgary
J.W. Walter	April 19, 1972	Calgary
R. Hopp	August 15, 1976	Edmonton
M. Clark	August 15, 1976	Edmonton
M. Hein	May 29, 1979	Wembly
G.R. Look	December 31, 1980	Calgary
H. Norden	December 19, 1987	County of Newell
R. Tippe	December 25, 1987	County of Red Deer
F.B. Beuerlein	March 4, 1989	County of Grande Prairie
M.F. Johnson	November 10, 1990	Calgary
J.M. James	July 13, 1992	Calgary
B. Dempsey	September 7, 2003	Youngstown

In this centennial issue, we recognize all firefighters who have made the ultimate sacrifice over the last 100 years in Alberta. Since our electronic records go back only until 1971, we have compiled a list of fallen firefighters as recorded in the Fire Commissioner's Fire Statistics Information System (FSIS).

The FSIS defines firefighter deaths as those who have lost their lives while in the process of fighting a fire or who died from a fire action injury within

one year following the date on which the injury was sustained. Also included are firefighters killed as a result of accidents while en route to or returning from a fire, or who died from an injury received in such an accident. The table above captures fallen firefighters during the time period 1971-2004. They are remembered and honoured along with many who are not named due to a lack of clear historical records prior to 1971. 🔥

