Taming “the Beast”: Alberta’s Coordinated Response to the 2016 Wood Buffalo Wildfires

October 19, 2016
The Beast – an Overview

Outline

- The New Reality
- The Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA)
  - The Legislation
  - AEMA Role
  - EM Governance in Alberta
  - Wildfire Executive Summary
  - Initial Lessons Learned
Major threats

- Summer storms
- Petro-Chemical release
- Public Health Emergency
- River flooding
- Tornadoes
- Wild Fires
- Interface fires
- Cyber Attacks
- Terrorism
- Earthquakes
- Public order
- Flash flooding
Legislation

• **Federal**
  – Emergency Management Act

• **Government of Alberta**
  – Municipal Government Act
  – Emergency Management Act
  – Government Emergency Management Regulation
  – Disaster Recovery Regulation

• **Municipalities**
  – Municipal Bylaws
Alberta’s Emergency Management System

Lead Agency: Depending on the nature of the hazard, this organization *leads* in the emergency management of a specific hazard.

Supporting Agency: Depending on the nature of the hazard, this organization *assists* in the emergency management of a specific hazard.
- Provide general or specialized assistance to the lead agency.

Coordinating Agency: Assist in the coordination of requests from the lead agency to deal with the direct effects of the hazard, while dealing with the indirect consequences of the specific hazard.
- AEMA – Provincial
- Public Safety Canada - Federal
Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA)

EMA: AEMA provides strategic policy direction, co-ordination, and leadership for emergency management and disaster response to the Government of Alberta (GOA) and its emergency management partners.
Provincial Operations Centre (POC)

The POC is where GOA ministries and other key stakeholders come together to co-ordinate a “whole of government” response to emergencies and disasters.

- Allows GOA to work in partnership with communities, industry and non-governmental organizations.
- Staffed 24/7 to monitor for emerging or potential emergencies.
- Four escalating levels of activation (next slide).
Level 1
Information on routine and potential incidents assessed and circulated to public safety partners on a daily basis

Level 2
Elevation of POC readiness due to an incident or conditions with the potential to be significant (disrupt community functionin

Level 3
Mandatory coordination of key GOA organizations to respond to a significant incident that has occurred or is about to occur

Level 4
Mandatory full GOA coordination of cross-government response to a significant incident that has occurred
Response Flowchart

Phase 1
Warning and Notification:
Premier alerted by AEA or by Lead Minister

Phase 2
Initial Briefing / Guidance:
Premier and EC / EMC briefed by Lead Minister and MD AEMA

Phase 3
Ongoing Coordination and Reporting: Premier receives regular updates (COPR) in accordance with operational rhythm

Phase 4
Transition and Resolution:
1. POC co-ordinates resolution / transition activities
2. Lead Department approves public communications and key messages, and assumes or transfers responsibility for ongoing activities

1. POC receives information on Significant emergency event
2. If necessary, POC prepares and issues and Executive Alert
3. Minister(s) are informed by MD AEMA or DM MA
4. Initial Lead Ministry is advised and provides advice / update as necessary
5. Situation brief provided to Ministers / DMs and appropriate members of Executive Council
6. Lead Ministry is confirmed or designated, and operational rhythm / reports Established

Emergency has or may occur

1. Minister(s) are informed by MD AEMA or DM MA
2. Initial Lead Ministry is advised and provides advice / update as necessary
3. Issue Managers contact POC direct for specific operational questions
4. MLA’s are provided KM’s and can request further information through Lead Ministry COS
5. Daily Media briefs as necessary.
Emergency Management Governance

Routine Operations

- Executive Council
  - Lead Ministry
    - DM PSC
      - Ministries
      - ADM PSC
        - Ministries
        - Working Groups

Emergency Event (Level 3/4)

- Executive Council or EMC
  - Lead Ministry Or AEMA
    - POC
      - Response Assets
        - External Stakeholders
        - Supporting Departments
          - GoA Programs or Resources
Executive Summary
Fort McMurray Wildfire
Executive Summary – Chronology

May 3, 2016  at 1400 hrs POC was elevated to a Level 4
- The entire community of Fort McMurray (80,000), as well as Fort McMurray First Nation (700), and Anzac (714) were placed under a mandatory evacuation order
- At 2200 hrs Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation declared a State of Local Emergency

May 4, 2016
- A Request for Assistance (RFA) was sent to the Federal Government for RCAF aerial surveillance / search
- At 1415 hours, the province declared a **Provincial State of Emergency for the area of the RMWB**
- Fire changes direction and moves east and then south – goes on a 40 km run in 6 hours to the South South East (to ANZAC)

May 5, 2016
- Oil and gas industry partners offered camps accommodate evacuees and air transfer of 6,800 evacuees began; industry partners facilitated the majority
EMA State Of Emergency
Extraordinary powers

• Acquire/utilize any personal property to prevent, combat or alleviate the effects of an emergency or disaster;
• Control or prohibit travel
• Provide for the restoration of essential facilities and the distribution of essential supplies and provide, maintain and co-ordinate essential services
• the evacuation of persons/removal of livestock
• Authorize the entry into any building or land, without warrant
• Procure or fix prices and the use of any property, services, resources or equipment
Wood Buffalo Fires
Concept of Operations

• Phase 1 – Response – Get People Safe
  • Pri 1 – Fight/Control Fire
  • Pri 2 - Support Evacuations

• Phase 2 – Stabilization/Re-entry – Get People “Home”
  • Pri 1 – Make communities safe
  • Pri 2 – Safe and expeditious returns

• Phase 3 – Short Term Recovery - Get Community Functioning
  • Pri 1 – Community life support
  • Pri 2 – Medium term Interim accommodations

• Phase 4 – Medium Term Recovery (TBC) – Get Community Rebuilt
  – Recovery Task Force led by Bill Sweeney (ADM JSG)
- Minimal growth – 581,586 Hectares
- 70 % contained
Destroyed Homes

Fort McMurray Damage Assessment
Okay to Occupy: 16,801
Restricted Use: 113
Unsafe to Enter/Occupy: 643
Destroyed: 1,929
Executive Summary – Chronology

May 20, 2016
- Phased re-entry of industry camps was approved, and identified camps were allowed re-entry for damage assessment and fire mitigation

May 28, 2016
- The re-entry rehearsal of RMWB was completed to test the procedures to be used for the voluntary phased re-entry. The size of the wildfire was 580,633 hectares

May 30, 2016
- The province’s Chief Medical Officer of Health provided final re-entry recommendations

May 31, 2016
- Provincial state of emergency extended until June 30, 2016

June 1, 2016
- The phased re-entry process began
Criteria For Re-entry – “Big 5”

1. Wildfire is no longer an imminent threat

2. Critical Infrastructure is repaired to provide “basic” level of service

3. Essential Services restored to “basic” level
   1. Emergency Services restored (Fire, EMS, Police, 911)
   2. Open, safe transport to / within community
   3. Access to emergency medical care / transport
   4. Access to water / electricity / gas
   5. Access to food / pharmaceuticals / banks other essentials
   6. Access to mental health supports

4. Hazard areas secure

5. Local Government re-established
Re-Entry Plan for Fort McMurray

18 May - Essential Retail Inspection
21 May - Essential Services Identification and Certification
29 May - Defined Essential Hospital Services Functioning
31 May

1 June - Lower Townsite, Waterways, Anzac, Fort McMurray First Nation
2 June - Timberlea, Parsons Creek
3 June - Thickwood
4 June - Gregoire, Abasand / Beacon Hill, Saprae Creek Estates
15 June - General Returns

Reentry dates by Neighborhood
Supporting Organizations
Government of Canada

- The following Government of Canada departments have provided support:
  - Public Safety Canada
  - Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
  - Department of National Defence (DND)
  - Environment and Climate Change Canada
  - Health Canada First Nations and Inuit Health Branch
  - Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)
  - Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)
  - Service Canada (SC)
  - Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
  - Canada Revenue Agency
  - NAV Canada

Note: organizations in **bold** present in the Provincial Operations Centre throughout
Supporting Organizations to the Alberta Effort

- The following organizations provided support to the GOA and RMWB:
  - Municipalities and Communities
  - Non Government Organizations
  - The Canadian Red Cross
  - Oil and Gas Industry Partners
  - ATCO Gas and Electric
  - Retail Council of Canada
  - West Jet and Northern Air
  - Post Secondary Institutions
  - Service Industry
  - Many others
Executive Summary – Chronology

• Between June 1 and June 5, almost 31,000 people passed through information centres as they returned home.

June 5, 2016
• ATCO Gas provides data they have relit 67 percent of structures in Fort McMurray
  – as not all residents attended the information centres on return, this is the best indicator of the number of residents that have returned.

June 6, 2016
• The POC reverted to Level 3
• The size of the wildfire was 581,586 hectares and 70 percent contained
Provincial Recovery Framework

1. Response
2. Stabilization
3. Intermediate Recovery
4. Long Term Recovery

GOA Coordination Lead
AEMA/POC
Recovery Task Force
Recovery Coordination Group
Business As Usual

Enable Coordinate Support Fund
Regional Recovery Operations Center
Local Community (lead)
Local Community (lead)
Local Community (lead)

GOA on-the-ground support
Field Officers
Recovery Coordination Team
Cross-Ministry Recovery Coordination
Business As Usual

Pre-emergency Support
Emergency Support
Transition and Intermediate Recovery Support
Enhanced Cross-Ministry Support
Routine Ongoing Support
Initial Lessons Learned
Initial Lessons Learned

- **Mutual aid / Regional Agreements** - Communities need to have partnering/regional arrangements in place to provide depth in their response. This includes industry partners.

- **Networking** – There is a continuous requirement to engage with other EM stakeholders to establish the connections and relationships required to be effective in crisis EM situations.

- **ICS Training** – ICS training is required.

- **Tempo** – The importance of establishing a sustainable operational tempo at the start of an incident cannot be overstated. Ensure that all key positions have built in redundancies (one or more trained and trusted back-ups)
Early Lessons Learned (continued)

• **Crisis Communications** - Train staff in crisis communications and plan to engage / communicate with your employees. Keeping them informed builds trust, allows them to plan, and helps to minimize their stress. Establish regular update schedule - daily update briefs, town halls, etc.

• **Industry Role in Emergency Management (EM)**
  - Have an effective plan and exercise it!
  - Understand the community EM Plan and your role in the community response plan. Good corporate Citizens!
  - Engage with the community and discuss the process and understand the process.
  - Ensure your employees have some EM training and encourage family plan
Initial Lessons Learned

- **Business Continuity vs Re-activation**. Cessation of all services vice disruption. No population present.
- Understand where you sit in the community essential services list (Retail Council of Canada):
  - retail (liaison with private industry);
  - Fuel services (liaison with private industry);
  - Utility services (liaison with private industry);
  - RMWB (childcare, court house and other human services needs to support service providers)
- criteria and timelines re-entry
Discussion
References


• Government Emergency Management Regulation, Alberta Regulation 248/2007 with amendments up to and including Alberta Regulation 112/2012. (under review)

Website Materials

AEMA: http://www.aema.alberta.ca/

Public Safety Canada: http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca

Canadian Centre for Emergency Preparedness: http://www.ccep.ca/

Public Safety Canada website: http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca