Final Report October 2025

Sturgeon COUNTY

Redwater Recreation Area Wildfire

After-Action Review

Prepared By

Transitional Solutions Inc
Emergency Services Advisors

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement of Impacts

$11.5M

Estimated cost of wildfire response at time of reporting.

77

Approximate number of households evacuated.

21

Landowners with loss or property impact.

Initial Wildfire Impacts

The Redwater Recreation Area wildfire has touched the community in many ways, including the loss or damage to homes, property, and the landscape. It disrupted lives, and shook the sense of safety everyone depends on. The memories of fear, uncertainty, and sudden change remain.

The loss—and in many cases, the very real risk of loss—of property, livelihoods, and cherished community spaces is deeply acknowledged. These impacts are felt by residents and are recognized fully by those who responded, by Council, and Administration, and by the authors of this report.

It is with this understanding that this After-Action Review has been undertaken: to honour the experiences of this wildfire, to learn from them, and to ensure that the lessons gained are applied to strengthen Sturgeon County's systems and reduce the likelihood of similar impacts in the future.

3
Dwellings lost: one house, one cabin, and one RV

13
Disturbed Pasture Locations

3,230
Hectares burned

11
Disturbed Hay Field Locations

1,100+ metres
Fencing to repair

2
Disturbed Garlic Field Locations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 Redwater Recreation Area Wildfire was one of the most significant emergency events in Sturgeon County's history, burning over 3,230 hectares and impacting 77 households. The wildfire required a three-week coordinated response from May 3 – 26, involving Sturgeon County, the Sturgeon Regional Emergency Management Partnership (SREMP), neighbouring municipalities, and Alberta Wildfire. This After-Action Review (AAR) was conducted by Transitional Solutions Inc. (TSI) to evaluate the preparedness, response, and recovery efforts, identify strengths, challenges, and provide actionable recommendations for future improvement.

The AAR is a structured mechanism for organizational learning, designed to assess the effectiveness of plans, processes, communication pathways, coordination efforts, and available resources.

Engagement activities involved more than 200 stakeholders through methods including interviews, surveys, and cold washes that took place June 5 – August 21, 2025. Participants included impacted residents, elected officials, staff involved in emergency operations, mutual aid partners, and supporting agencies. In addition, over 400 documents and 120 pictures and videos were studied.

The report is organized into distinct chapters addressing Mitigation and Preparation, Response, Recovery, Financials and Crisis Communications. Each chapter offers comprehensive insight into the respective subject area and forms the foundation for the recommendations set forth.

Key strengths identified included:

- Effective mitigation measures
- Strong regional collaboration
- Timely activation
- Actionable crisis communications

Key challenges experienced included:

- Role clarity
- Fatigue management
- ICP and ECC functional purposes
- Extreme wildfire behaviour

There are 52 recommendations offered across the five chapters, most of which are straightforward, practical, low-cost and manageable internally. To fully appreciate the background and rationale behind each recommendation, it is necessary to consider the context provided throughout the full report. A summary of the 52 recommendations is on the following page.

This AAR reflects a commitment to accountability, transparency, and the pursuit of continuous improvement in organizational resilience. Sturgeon County has a strong foundational emergency management program that, with the adoption of recommendations, will be well positioned to manage future emergencies.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section provides a summary of recommendations grouped by chapter, along with high-level financial implications for each as guidance tools. These cost tiers are intended to give a general sense of resource intensity based on typical assumptions for municipal operations. Sturgeon County may apply its own interpretation or adjustments to these assumptions based on local context, existing capacity, or strategic priorities.

- Low Financial Impact – Minimal or no new funding required
- Moderate Financial Impact – Some new or reallocated funding required
- High Financial Impact – Significant capital or multi-year investment

#	Crisis Communications Recommendations	Cost
1	Revert to an ICS-aligned ICP communications structure.	
2	Establish reporting pathways for communications approval.	
3	Implement minimum training standards for crisis communications.	
4	Integrate the Communications Team into ICP planning cycles.	
5	Review and update the Crisis Communications Plan.	
6	Increase internal capacity for a Public Notification System (PNS).	
7	Streamline access for use of Alberta Emergency Alerts (AEA).	
8	Establish a process for involving third-party communications support.	
9	Set Council expectations in advance.	

#	Mitigation and Preparation Recommendations	Cost
1	Strengthen awareness of SREMP commitments.	
2	Pre-plan for demobilization.	
3	Clarify and commit to the CAO's role in emergency management response.	
4	Continue to refine collaborative software tools and develop a repeatable process for providing personnel with access to necessary communications systems.	
5	Incorporate task-specific and role-specific training.	
6	Train and exercise unit leaders.	
7	Begin annual elected officials refresher training sessions.	
8	Incorporate the elected officials and CAOs into annual training exercises.	
9	Champion external advocacy to the province for clarity and collaboration about mitigation, ESS and safety.	
10	Increase FireSmart™ public education efforts.	
11	Verify that the SREMP document and any other critical emergency management documents are accessible in Council's digital content locker.	
12	Review the organization charts in the SREMP to ensure consistency across the Plan.	
13	Consider adding in a scalable Joint Information System (JIS) to the SREMP	
14	Consider adding Emergency Management support and ICS-100 training to all County job descriptions.	
15	Review the appointment of the Director of Emergency Management and Deputy Director roles.	

#	Response Recommendations	Cost
1	Early Activation of a seasoned Incident Command Resource Unit Leader.	🟢
2	Enhanced training in wildland urban interface (WUI) operations.	🟡
3	Investment in hazard-specific equipment and modernization should prioritize acquiring apparatus suited to WUI terrain and fire behaviour.	🔴
4	An improved field communications and connectivity infrastructure.	🟡
5	Pre-established triggers for scalable incident response.	🟢
6	Continue to develop and maintain a pre-built electronic incident management system.	🟡
7	Develop or redesign a purpose-built dual-function area (“Duty Office”) capable of serving as either an Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) or an Incident Command Post (ICP).	🔴
8	Establish clear activation triggers and a supporting contact list for early access to key resources available in a shared, easily accessible location.	🟢
9	Implement a structured staffing schedule during the early hours of an incident (Fatigue Management Plan).	🟢
10	Leverage the AEMA Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Field Officer to coordinate all provincial resource requests earlier in the incident.	🟢
11	The early establishment of a robust ICS Planning Section, specifically including a Resource Unit Leader, Check-In/Status Recorders, and a Demobilization Unit.	🟢
12	Enhanced Wellness Support for first responders and staff supporting all other aspects of the emergency management.	🟢
13	Add a dedicated firefighter staffing position within the ICP.	🟢
14	Pre-establish Emergency Social Services relief.	🟢
15	Integrate IT presence in the ICP/ECC during the initial activation period.	🟢
16	Request support from a regional All-Hazard Incident Management Team (AHIMT) earlier.	🟢
17	Clearly define the use and functionality of the ICP and ECC.	🟢
18	Introduce a formal Demobilization Plan early in the incident and ensure that it is communicated to all branches and divisions.	🟢
19	Adopt a unified resource ordering system that channels all requests through the Planning and Logistics Sections.	🟢
20	Ensure incident operations are aligned with the Alberta Incident Management System (AIMS) as outlined in the provincial AIMS framework.	🟢

#	Recovery Recommendations	Cost
1	Ensure a cross-disciplinary team leads recovery.	🟢
2	Clarify staff expectations on regular duty business roles and critical service prioritization.	🟢
3	Formalize the recovery program by further capitalizing on the framework utilized in this event.	🟡
4	Continue to build up the Emergency Services Peer Support Team.	🟡
5	Seek opportunities or tools to enhance systems for accessing accurate resident contact information.	🟡
6	Enhance recovery program design and communication.	🟡

#	Financial Recommendations	Cost
1	Develop and distribute clear guidelines for staff entitlements and incidental expenses.	🟢
2	Standardize procurement and vendor documentation.	🟢

INTRODUCING THE AFTER-ACTION REVIEW

An After-Action Review (AAR) is designed to examine how emergency management systems and processes functioned during an event. It is a structured learning tool that looks at the overall system - plans, procedures, communication pathways, coordination, and resources - to understand how they worked together in practice.

This approach is important to keep in mind when reading the AAR. The focus is on systems improvement: recognizing what processes supported success, and where protocols, training, or coordination could be strengthened to improve outcomes in the future.

Purpose of an After-Action Review

An AAR is a learning-focused process with an emphasis on collective learning and building resilience. The purpose of the AAR is to:

- Provide clarity on how the emergency management system functioned as a whole.
- Highlight strengths in current plans and procedures that should be repeated.
- Record challenges that revealed unanticipated pressures or issues. These may increase complexity, stress, or workload but don't always hinder overall effectiveness.
- Identify reasonable and practical opportunities to add, refine or enhance systems for the future.

An AAR reflects a commitment to learning and continuous improvement. By taking this systems-focused approach, organizations demonstrate accountability, transparency, and a strong dedication to building resilience for future emergencies.

An AAR brings significant value to an organization by:

- Capturing lessons observed while experiences are fresh.
- Highlighting strengths that can be reinforced and carried forward.
- Identifying opportunities to add or refine processes and coordination, ensuring the system is stronger for the next emergency.
- Providing actionable recommendations that Council and Administration can use to guide investment, decisions, and training priorities.
- Strengthening transparency and trust with residents by demonstrating that the municipality is committed to reflection and improvement.

Conducting and publishing an AAR demonstrates a high level of organizational maturity. It signals that the municipality is committed to continuous improvement and has the confidence and openness to reflect on its performance constructively. It values transparency and accountability to Council, the organization(s) and the public. Sturgeon County recognizes that learning from each event is an essential part of building long-term community resilience.

SCOPE

Transitional Solutions Inc. (TSI) was awarded the contract to conduct an independent, third-party review of the 2025 Redwater Recreation Area Wildfire.

This After-Action Review is not a forensic investigation, audit, or assessment of individual performance. Instead, it is a systems-focused analysis designed to identify lessons observed and opportunities for improvement.

The scope of the review encompasses preparedness measures in place prior to the wildfire, response actions during the event, and the early stages of recovery. It also includes a consolidated event timeline highlighting key decisions, as well as an analysis of wildfire behaviour. Two specialized areas - financial impacts and crisis communication - were reviewed holistically, recognizing that these two topics span across preparedness, response, and recovery.

In several areas of this After-Action Review, both strengths and challenges are highlighted within the same theme. This should not be seen as a contradiction, but rather as a reflection of how complex emergencies are. Situations often involve both positive practices and areas for improvement occurring simultaneously. Highlighting both sides helps give a clearer picture of what happened and how emergency management can continue to improve and build resilience.

Based on these findings, the report provides key recommendations for consideration aligned with the Sturgeon Regional Emergency Management Plan (SREMP). Council and Administration may choose to adopt the recommendations as written, adapt them to local needs, or set them aside based on their priorities and judgement.

TSI provides all reports to clients for review to identify any factual errors or omissions. While clients are encouraged to provide feedback to ensure accuracy and completeness on the scope of work, the report content, including the substance of the analysis, findings and recommendations remains with TSI. This approach is maintained to preserve impartial independence using fair and reliable professional standards.

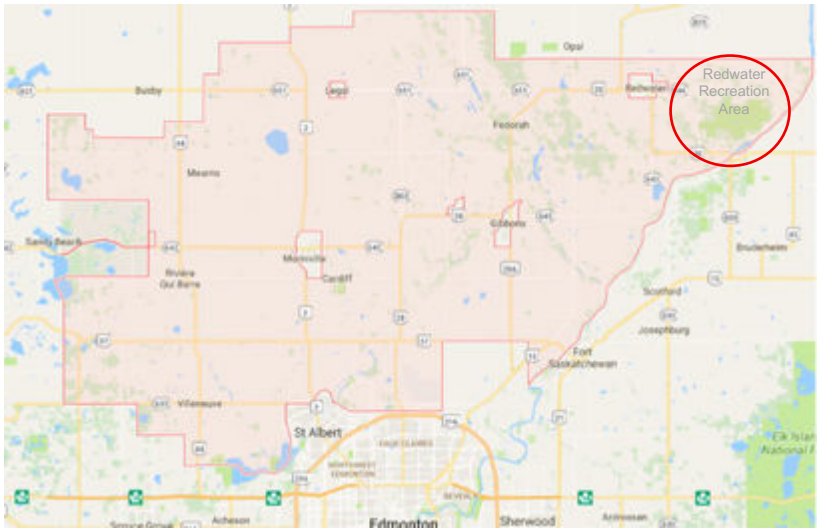
Note on Terminology

Throughout this report, some terms (e.g. Incident Base, Incident Command Post, Emergency Coordination Centre) are used interchangeably to reflect differences between internal municipal documentation, terminology shared during engagement, and recognized industry terminology. Where possible, terminology has been aligned to support consistency and clarity. In some cases, local or legacy terms are referenced. This approach ensures the report remains both technically accurate and locally relevant.

BACKGROUND

Sturgeon County is a large rural municipality located immediately north of Edmonton, covering over 2,000 square kilometres and home to approximately 20,000 residents. The County includes several villages and towns such as Bon Accord, Gibbons, Legal, Morinville, and Redwater, along with numerous hamlets and agricultural areas. It is part of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region and features a blend of rural living, industrial development, and strong agricultural traditions. The County is also home to significant energy and petrochemical infrastructure as part of Alberta's Industrial Heartland. This industrial profile makes the County both an economic hub and an area with unique emergency management considerations.

The **Redwater Provincial Recreation Area** is situated within the northeast corner of the County; it is administered by the province, but fire protection remains the County's responsibility for response. In 2025, this area became the site of a large wildfire that grew to more than 3,000 hectares. The incident was sparked by an ATV fire on May 3rd and required a three-week coordinated response from Sturgeon County Emergency Services (SCES), neighbouring departments, the Sturgeon Regional Emergency Management Partnership (SREMP), and Alberta Wildfire.



SOURCE 1 STURGEON REGIONAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN (REVISED 2024)

Sturgeon County provides fire and rescue services through a combination of full-time and paid on-call firefighters. The County is also a founding partner in SREMP, which unites Sturgeon County with its municipal partners Morinville, Bon Accord, Legal, Redwater and Gibbons in a collaborative regional approach to emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. This partnership played a key role in the wildfire response and recovery.

Historically, Sturgeon County has experienced flooding, severe weather, and localized industrial incidents, but the 2025 Redwater Recreation Area Wildfire represents one of the most significant emergency events in its recent history.

In the Sturgeon Regional Emergency Management Plan, SREMP has identified a commitment to assess "*areas for improvement in the response system and create a plan to implement the recommended improvements*." This report represents another step in its ongoing process towards fulfilling that commitment.

Key Statistics Highlighting Response & Recovery Efforts

A coordinated fire response involved 2,200 shifts, 571 external and 187 County staff, plus extensive equipment and municipal support took place over **three weeks** from May 3 - May 26, 2025.

2,200

Shifts Worked
Total fire response shifts completed by County and external personnel.

571

External Individuals
Unique external personnel engaged in fire response efforts across regions.

187

County Staff Deployed
County employees assigned directly to firefighting and emergency management roles.

5,857

Internal Staff Hours
Hours logged by internal County staff working on emergency management and response tasks.

15,000

External Staff Hours
Many hours by external staff aiding fire control and management.

65

Internal Equipment Pieces
County-owned equipment pieces deployed to assist firefighting operations.

29

Municipalities Supported
Local government entities provided crucial support during fire response.

2

Heavy Industry Supported
Both Northwest Refineries and Pembina answered the call for mutual aid, providing immediate surge capacity.

Wildfire Timeline

The first 2.5 hours on May 3, 2025

17:43
911 call received by dispatch reporting a vehicle fire incident, initiating the emergency response process.

17:47
Emergency units dispatched to respond to the reported vehicle fire, beginning the official emergency response.

17:52
Dispatch receives update from caller that the quad was on fire with **flames still visible but appearing to diminish in intensity**.

18:06
First unit arrives on scene, reports nothing immediately visible at the location.

18:14
First arriving officer contacts caller by phone, confirming **fire contained to 10" x 10" area of quad**, not spreading.

18:38
Firefighter meets caller who leads them to location. **Fire has now spread from quad into trees.** Fire Chief advised that fire is growing in size.

18:40
Firefighter at location reports **fire is 0.1 hectare and spreading east.** Command begins assessment of houses in the area that may be at risk.

18:44
Team spoke with helicopter contractor and then Alberta Wildfire seeking aerial support. No air resources were available **to assist with firefighting efforts** due to staffing and time of day.

18:50
Command dispatched two units to RR 204 for **structure protection** based on initial reports that the fire was spreading eastward.

18:55
Command reports **fire direction has changed** and is now headed south. Resources redirected to Victoria Trail South to protect properties south of the fire.

19:00
SREMP Coordinator advised to be **on standby** for potential Incident Management Team (IMT) activation as situation continues to develop.

19:04
Engine 6 begins **door-to-door notifications** along Victoria Trail to alert residents of the approaching fire threat.

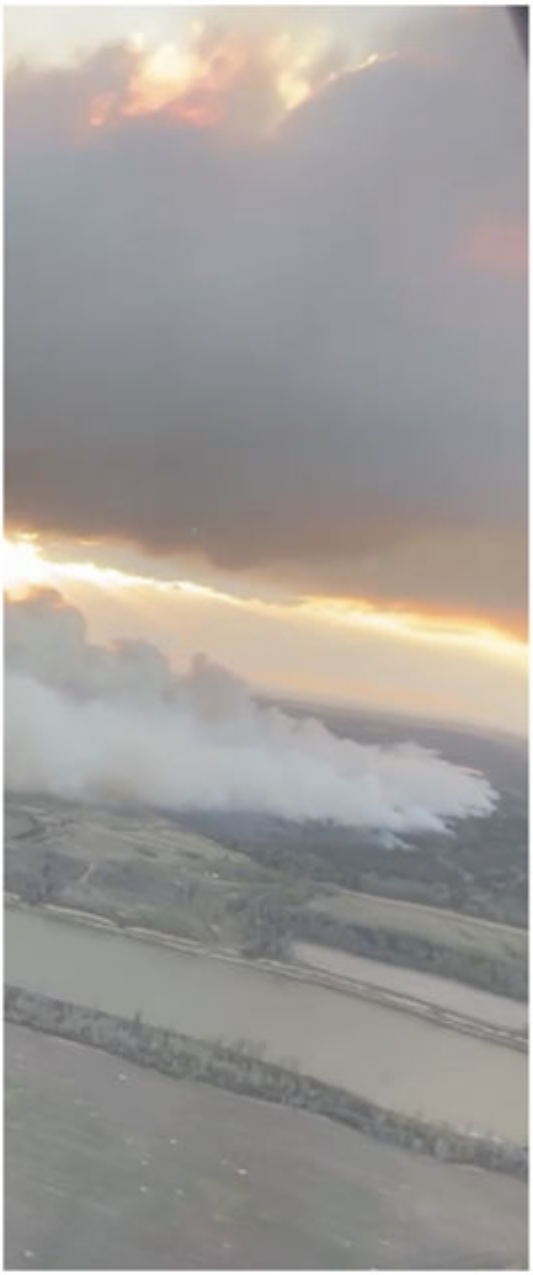
19:21
SREMP Coordinator officially advised to **activate the Incident Management Team (IMT)** as situation escalates.

19:35
Engine 7 **laying hose and supporting residents with livestock evacuation**.

19:43
Engine 5 and Engine 7 forced to retreat from their positions as fire conditions worsen and threaten personnel safety.

20:08
Alberta Emergency Alert issued to notify the public of the fire danger and potential evacuations required.

20:10
Command receives report that the **fire has jumped** south of Victoria Trail and east of RR 205, indicating significant spread.



Redwater Recreation Area wildfire as of 20:14 on May 3, 2025

WILDFIRE TIMELINE: May 3 through May 11

MAY 3, 2025

- Wildfire started halfway between TWP 574 and Victoria trail, east of RR 205
- Strong winds and cross-over conditions enables fire growth
- Sturgeon County declares a SOLE
- Residents advised to prepare for possible evacuation
- Mutual aid requested

MAY 4, 2025

- Temporary road closures were implemented around the Redwater Provincial Recreation Area
- The fire was estimated to be 110 hectares in size
- An evacuation alert area was expanded
- Helicopter support in place

MAY 5, 2025

- The cause of the fire was confirmed to be an ATV that caught fire
- The fire stays 70% contained
- An evacuation order was issued for the area
- Multiple agencies and mutual aid partners on site supporting efforts

MAY 6, 2025

- Airdrops of fire-retardant material were conducted
- An information/reception centre was opened at Pembina Place
- The evacuation order was expanded as the fire grew nearly 300% due to extreme weather

MAY 7, 2025

- The wildfire continued to grow - wind turns 180 degrees within hours
- Additional residents were advised to be ready for possible evacuation
- The current evacuation order remained in effect
- The fire now approximately 1,500 hectares

MAY 8, 2025

- Fire crews focused on containment and preparing for potential high fire behaviour
- Strong wind speeds and aggressive wind direction changes cause fire to double in size to approximately 3,000 hectares

MAY 9, 2025

- Alberta Forestry took the lead on fire operations in Park. SCES continued to manage municipal areas.
- The fire size was estimated to be 3,200 hectares
- Firefighters made good progress on containing the perimeter and structural protection

MAY 10, 2025

- Firefighters continued to work on containment with a focus on the southwest corner
- The fire remained classified as out of control
- RCMP patrolled the evacuation area

MAY 11, 2025

- The hours for the Reception Centre at the Morinville Leisure Centre were adjusted
- Alberta Wildfire used a drone to conduct an infrared scan of the fire
- The fire size remained at 3,214 hectares

WILDFIRE TIMELINE : May 12 through May 26

MAY 12, 2025

- Re-entry planning commenced
- The evacuation alert area was lifted
- Firefighters continued to make excellent progress on containment

MAY 13, 2025

- The evacuation order was canceled, and residents were permitted to return to their homes
- A re-entry guide was made available to assist residents
- Sturgeon County remained under a state of local emergency

MAY 14, 2025

- The Redwater Recreation Area Fire was being held at 3,230 hectares
- Firefighters continued to extinguish hot spots
- Total fire and OHV/ATV bans remained in place

MAY 15, 2025

- Rain fell on the fire, but it did not decrease the severity
- Firefighters continued to look for and extinguish hot spots

MAY 16, 2025

- The Re-entry Support Centre at Pembina Place was permanently closed
- RR 205 between Victoria Trail and TWP RD 574 remained closed
- The fire was being held at 3,230 hectares

MAY 17-18, 2025

- The fire remained at 3,230 hectares
- An infrared scan was conducted to detect hot spots
- Helicopter support continues

MAY 19-20, 2025

- The fire remained at 3,230 hectares
- Infrared scans continued to monitor for hot spots
- RR 205 between Victoria Trail and TWP RD 574 remained closed

MAY 21, 2025

- The fire was classified as under control
- Sturgeon County's State of Local Emergency was terminated
- The fire ban was reduced to a fire restriction

MAY 26, 2025

- A discussion with residents about the Redwater Fire took place

Wildfire Behaviour

Overview

The Redwater Recreation Area wildfire, also known as LCU 002-2025, was unintentionally started by an ATV in the late afternoon of May 3rd. Significant fire growth and behaviour was displayed during changing wind events between May 3rd through May 8th. Reduced wind speeds and sporadic precipitation between May 13th and May 15th, coupled with a lack of continuous fuel substantially moderated fire growth, allowing suppression crews to contain and extinguish the fire fully.

The wildfire area is situated in the Aspen Parkland Ecoregion, located immediately north of the North Saskatchewan River, with undulating topography characterized by sand dunes and boglands. The area is a relatively unique and diverse mixture of jack pine and aspen on sandy soils, as well as black and white spruce with mixtures of larch (also known as tamarack) on lower, wetter sites and northern exposures. The area is also characterized by large continuous stretches of grassy wetlands and meadows, often with a mixture of willow and stunted black spruce. The Redwater Recreation Area is a relatively continuous forest compared to the agricultural lands and acreages immediately adjacent.

Fire Weather

Several nearby weather stations create a relatively accurate account of fire weather conditions leading up to and during the wildfire event. For this analysis, TSI relied upon the Redwater Industrial Weather Station[1], located approximately 8km southwest of the wildfire. The Redwater Industrial Weather station was supplemented with hourly 10-metre wind speed and vector data from the Legal Weather Station, approximately 35 km west of the wildfire. The complete weather data set from April 1st to May 31st, 2025, was assembled and used to calculate fire weather indices consistent with the Canadian Forest Fire Weather Index System.[2].

TABLE 1 REDWATER INDUSTRIAL WEATHER STATION DATA & 1300 FIRE WEATHER INDICES CALCULATIONS

Date	Temp.	RH	Wind	Precip	FFMC	DMC	DC	ISI	BUI	FWI
May 3	26.4	16	8	0	94	70	287	11	85	31
May 4	15	21.2	31	1	88	73	292	15	89	39
May 5	15.7	19.7	17	0.2	91	77	297	12	93	34
May 6	20.3	15.7	32	0	94	82	303	38	101	73
May 7	21.1	27.4	8	0	94	87	309	11	101	34
May 8	13.5	37.4	39	0	91	90	314	34	105	69

Wildfire Hazard Level Rating

Low	Moderate	High	Very High	Extreme

With the extreme Fire Weather Index ratings between May 3rd and May 8th, significant fire behaviour would be expected. Additionally, extreme fire conditions were present for prolonged periods in three of the five days - specifically on May 3rd when crossover

[1] Wind data is 10-m wind data taken from the Legal Weather Station.

[2]Canadian Forestry Service. 1984. Tables for the Canadian Forest Fire Weather Index System. Environ. Can., Can. For. Serv., For. Tech. Rep 25 (4th ed.).

conditions (where relative humidity (%) is lower than the ambient air temperature (°C)) were present for a large portion of the day; May 4th when wind speeds were consistently in excess of 30km/hour; and May 6th when crossover conditions and excessive wind speeds were present throughout most of the day. The combination of extended periods of crossover conditions and sustained high wind speeds on May 6th is particularly problematic, and crossover conditions lasting more than a few hours on any given day are generally an indicator of extreme fire behaviour potential.

Another essential characteristic of fire weather is the direction of the wind. Changes in wind direction can have substantial impacts on the size of the fire front, access to fuels and suppression effectiveness. Table 2 below identifies two key periods where wind directions substantially changed.

TABLE 2 HOURLY WEATHER CONDITIONS FROM THE REDWATER INDUSTRIAL STATION AND LEGAL WEATHER STATION (WIND SPEEDS) DURING PEAK BURNING PERIODS

	Time of Day													
	900	1000	1100	1200	1300	1400	1500	1600	1700	1800	1900	2000	2100	2200
03-May														
Temp (°C)	22.5	24	26	26	26	27	27	26	25	24	22	18	17	16
RH (%)	24	21	19	17	16	16	16	16	17	22	26	30	33	36
Wind Speed (km/hr)	23	17	14	11	8	10	11	12	19	27	21	17	18	25
Wind Direction	NW	NW	NW	NW	W	W	W	W	NW	NW	N	N	NW	NW
04-May														
Temp (°C)	9	12	13	15	15	14	14	16	14	14	14	11	10	8
RH (%)	50	41	35	27	21	20	18	18	19	20	21	22	26	30
Wind Speed (km/hr)	31	36	34	32	31	32	30	30	28	28	27	21	18	14
Wind Direction	W	NW	NW	NW	W	W	NW	NW	NW	NW	W	W	NW	W
05-May														
Temp (°C)	12	13	14	15	16	16	16	17	17	17	16	15	13	12
RH (%)	33	29	25	22	20	18	19	19	18	18	17	20	21	23
Wind Speed (km/hr)	17	16	16	18	17	14	10	8	9	6	8	7	8	10
Wind Direction	NW	NW	NW	NW	NW	NW	NW	NW	NW	NE	SW	SW	S	SE
06-May														
Temp (°C)	16	18	20	21	20	21	21	22	21	21	20	19	17	16
RH (%)	23	20	18	17	16	15	14	14	14	14	14	15	17	19
Wind Speed (km/hr)	25	28	33	33	31	32	33	31	31	33	28	22	21	21
Wind Direction	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	SE	SE	SE
07-May														
Temp (°C)	15	17	19	20	21	22	21	21	21	21	20	18	15	14
RH (%)	42	39	35	31	27	25	26	27	27	27	32	33	41	51
Wind Speed (km/hr)	17	14	11	7	8	4	7	12	7	9	12	16	14	17
Wind Direction	S	S	S	S	SE	W	NW	NW	NW	NW	N	N	N	N
08-May														
Temp (°C)	8	10	11	13	14	14	14	15	16	15	13	12	10	10
RH (%)	84	73	58	45	37	30	26	25	23	20	20	24	30	37
Wind Speed (km/hr)	15	25	30	34	39	37	32	28	30	26	15	19	8	13
Wind Direction	NW	NW	W	W	W	NW	NW	NW	NW	NW	NW	NW	W	W

Crossover Conditions
Moderate Wind Speed
High Wind Speed
Periods of Changing Wind Direction

LCU002-2025 was unique in that it expressed extreme fire behaviour and growth during three key periods[3] between May 3rd and May 8th:

May 3 1830 - 2300	May 6 1400-2300	May 7 2130 to May 8 0100

These periods of time correlate directly with high winds, availability of continuous fuels, and, in the case of the May 6th and 7th spread events, changing wind directions.

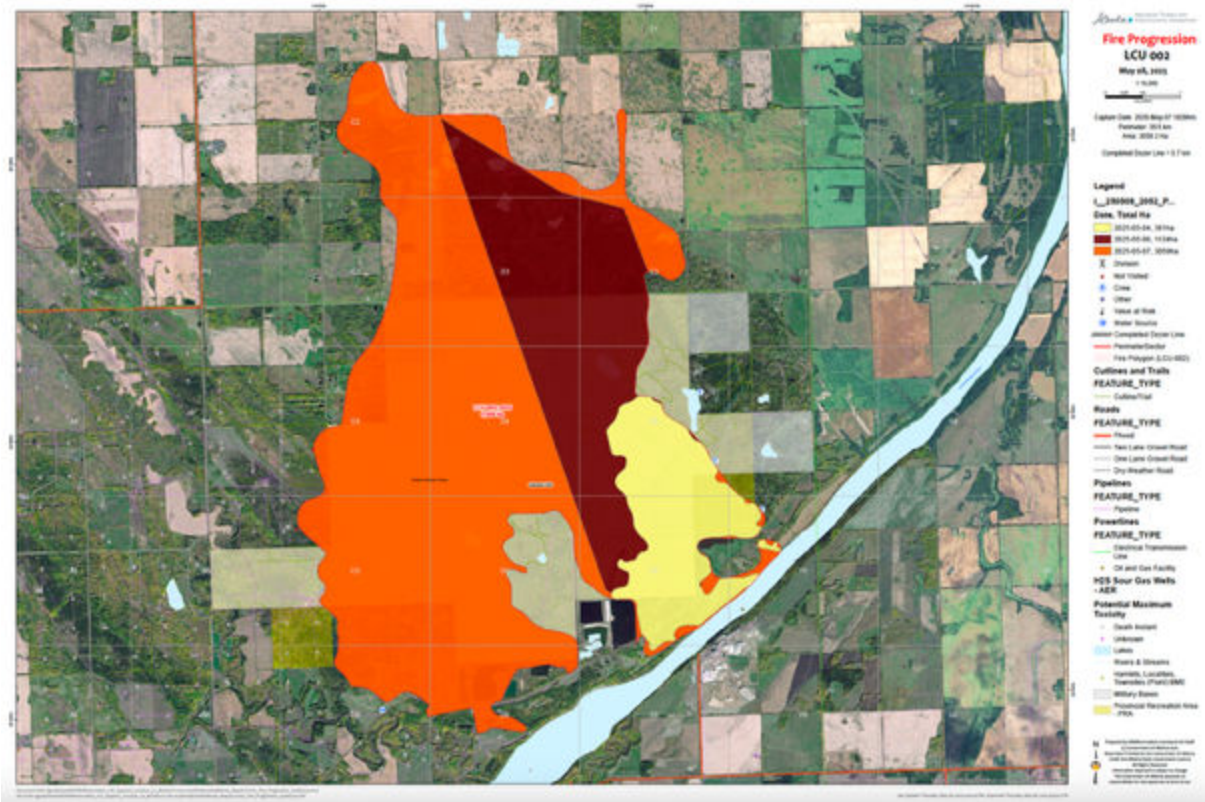


IMAGE 1 REDWATER RECREATION AREA WILDFIRE PROGRESSION AS OF MAY 8, 2025

Fuel Types

Overall, the forest vegetation in the area was dry; foliar moisture contents for spruce and pine would have been at or near their seasonal lows. Additionally, understory and lowland grasses were 90-100% cured. Approximately 50% of deciduous (aspen and balsam poplar) stands were in the earliest stages of bud flush, while the other 50% had not yet commenced. The period of May to mid-June traditionally represents peak fire season in Alberta.

[3] Described in interviews with Sturgeon County Emergency Services, July 2025

Fuel types in the area are diverse, dominated by C-1, C-2, C-3, D-1, O-1a, and O-1b fuels, as described by the Canadian Forest Fire Behaviour Prediction System[4]:

C-1 Spruce-Lichen Woodland - Open black spruce stands with lichen understory.

C-2 Boreal Spruce - Upland and lowland black spruce, white and Engelmann spruce stands. Does not include spruce sphagnum bogs.

C-3 Mature Jack or Lodgepole Pine - Fully stocked mature jack and lodgepole pine stands.

D-1 Leafless Aspen - Pure semi-mature trembling aspen stands in the leafless stage.

O-1 Grass - Matted (O-1a) and standing (O-1b) grass.

Notably, the fire area has a significant presence of lower-density jack pine stands with a lichen/grass understory. Following a site visit, and for the purpose of estimating fire behaviour and fire intensity, these stands were classified as being most similar to the C-1 Spruce-Lichen Woodland. Other stands were assessed to be representative of standard Fire Behaviour Prediction (FBP) fuel types.

The general fire area is constrained by non-fuels in each direction. While some areas classified as non-fuels can sustain fire spread under specific circumstances (e.g., cultivated fields or grazed pastures), they substantially reduce fire intensity. They often cannot sustain fire spread without the presence of large-range spotting events. Non-fuels include the North Saskatchewan River to the south and heavily grazed pasturelands and cultivated/crop farmland to the north, east and south. The combination of changing wind direction and availability of continuous fuels contributed substantially to the fire growth, overall fire size and observed fire behaviour of LCU002-2025.

Fire Behaviour

Extreme fire weather conditions prevailed throughout the peak burning period from May 3rd to May 8th. Observed fire behaviour[5] were generally consistent with the fire intensity and behaviour predictions modelled using the Fire Behaviour Prediction System of the Canadian Forest Fire Danger Rating System (CFFDRS). High winds were sustained throughout the burning window, causing high Initial Spread Index (ISI) values and consequently resulting in **fire intensities exceeding 10,000 kW/m** in coniferous fuel types. Rates of spread in grass and leafless aspen stands were high enough to make fire suppression efforts very challenging.

[4] Taylor, S.W., Pike, R.G., Alexander, M.E. 1997. Field guide to the Canadian Forest Fire Behaviour Prediction (FBP) System, Nat. Resour. Can., Can. For. Serv., North. For. Cent., Edmonton, Alberta. Spec. Rep. 11

[5] Interviews with Sturgeon County Emergency Services Personnel, July 2025

LCU002-2025 experienced three key fire spread events. The first was following ignition, the late afternoon and evening of May 3rd. The second growth event occurred on the afternoon and evening of May 6th, when changing wind directions enabled the fire to spread rapidly to the north and northwest. The final growth event happened late in the day on May 7th, when wind directions changed again, allowing the fire to spread rapidly to the south. Fire growth was minimal on May 4th, 5th and 8th due to wind directions that minimized fire spread into continuous fuel types. A more detailed explanation of the major spread events follows:

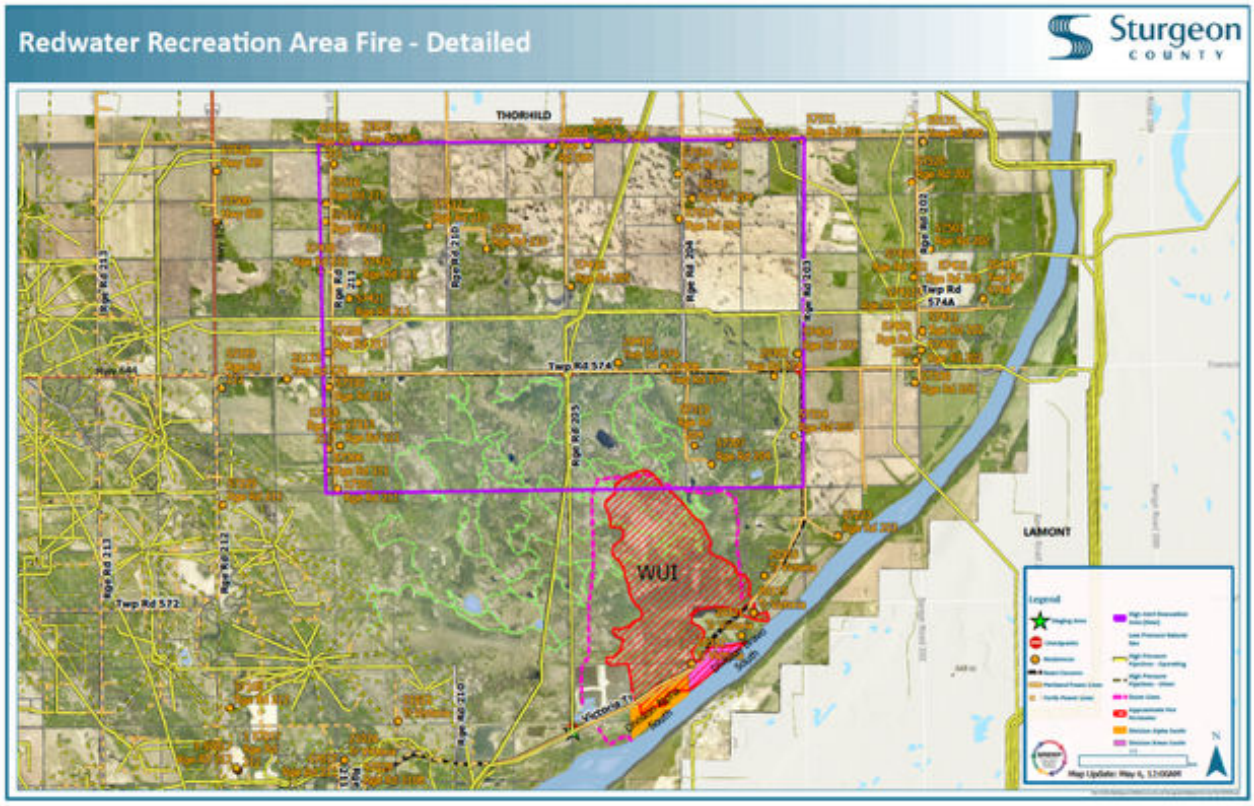


IMAGE 2 REDWATER RECREATION AREA WILDFIRE MAP FOR MAY 6 INCIDENT ACTION PLAN

May 3rd, 2025

The fire started during the late afternoon of May 3rd, 2025. The Fire Weather Index was 31, indicating an extreme condition. Crossover conditions were present throughout most of the day, including the hour the fire started (1700-1800), and winds from the NW were high through the evening period. In these conditions, and as demonstrated in Table 3 below, high-intensity crown fire would have been observed in C-2 and C-3 fuel types, and high-speed rates of spread (>30m/min) would have been observed in O-1a (matted grass) fuel types fully exposed to the wind. Long-range spotting, up to one kilometre or more, was expected and observed by firefighters. Fire size at the end of May 3rd, 2025, was estimated to be approximately 380 hectares.

TABLE 3 CANADIAN FOREST FIRE BEHAVIOUR PREDICTION SYSTEM PRIMARY OUTPUTS FOR PERIOD OF FIRES START AND FIRE GROWTH ON MAY 3RD, 2025

	FFMC	DMC	DC	ISI	BUI	FWI
	94	70	287	11	85	31

03-May-25	1700	1800	1900	2000	2100	2200	2300	2400
Wind Speed (km/hr)	19	27	21	17	18	25	33	33
Wind Direction	NW	NW	N	N	NW	NW	NW	NW
C-1 Spruce Lichen Woodland (Open, Low Density Jack Pine)								
Rate of Spread (m/min)	23	41	20	8	6	15	29	15
Intensity Class	6	6	6	5	4	5	6	5
Fire Type	CC	CC	CC	IC	IC	CC	CC	CC
C-2 Boreal Spruce								
Rate of Spread (m/min)	34	49	33	21	19	29	40	29
Intensity Class	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Fire Type	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC
C-3 Mature Jack Pine								
Rate of Spread (m/min)	25	43	22	10	8	18	31	18
Intensity Class	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6
Fire Type	CC	CC	CC	IC	IC	CC	CC	CC
D-1 Leafless Aspen								
Rate of Spread (m/min)	7	10	6	4	3	6	8	6
Intensity Class	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4
Fire Type	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
O-1a Matted Grass								
Rate of Spread (m/min)	59	81	56	37	34	50	67	50
Intensity Class	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	5
Fire Type	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S

S - Surface Fire IC - Intermittent Crown Fire CC - Continuous Crown Fire

Intensity Class 2	Creeping surface fire, < 1.5 m flame length
Intensity Class 3	Vigorous surface fire, intermittent crown fire, 1.5-2.5 m flame length
Intensity Class 4	Intermittent crown fire, short range spotting, 2.5-3.5 m flame length
Intensity Class 5	Intermittent/sustained crown fire, moderate range spotting, 3.5-5 m flame length
Intensity Class 6	Sustained crown fire, long range spotting, >5.5 m flame length

May 4th and 5th 2025

While weather conditions were more favourable on May 4th and 5th, Fire Weather Index values continued to be extreme. Winds were moderate to high and continued from the northwest on May 4th, persisting until late in the evening on May 5th. The direction of the wind and the lack of continuous fuels at the fire front resulted in little fire growth and a much lower frequency of high-intensity fire, relative to the evening of May 3rd. Had there been continuous fuels, particularly C-2 and/or C-3 fuels, fire growth would have likely continued to be substantial.

May 6th, 2025

Fire growth on May 6th, 2025, was significant. Fire Weather Index values continued to be extreme, and winds shifted overnight from the northwest to the south and southeast, causing the back of the fire from May 5th to become the head fire on May 6th, with access to continuous fuel in the Redwater Recreation Area.

TABLE 4 CANADIAN FOREST FIRE BEHAVIOUR PREDICTION SYSTEM PRIMARY OUTPUTS FOR PERIOD FIRE GROWTH ON MAY 6TH, 2025

	FFMC	DMC	DC	ISI	BUI	FWI
	94	82	303	38	101	73

06-May-25	1000	1100	1200	1300	1400	1500	1600	1700	1800	1900	2000	2100	2200
Wind Speed (km/hr)	28	33	33	31	32	33	31	31	33	28	22	21	21
Wind Direction	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	SE	SE	SE
C-1 Spruce Lichen Woodland (Open, Low Density Jack Pine)													
Rate of Spread	11	41	41	41	52	52	62	62	52	41	13	9	6
Intensity Class	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	4
Fire Type	IC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	IC	IC
C-2 Boreal Spruce													
Rate of Spread	25	49	49	49	57	57	65	65	57	49	27	23	19
Intensity Class	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Fire Type	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC
C-3 Mature Jack Pine													
Rate of Spread	14	43	43	43	55	55	65	65	55	43	16	12	8
Intensity Class	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5
Fire Type	IC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	IC	IC
D-1 Leafless Aspen													
Rate of Spread	5	11	11	11	13	13	15	15	13	11	5	4	4
Intensity Class	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	3	3
Fire Type	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
O-1a Matted Grass													
Rate of Spread	43	81	81	81	93	93	103	103	93	81	46	40	34
Intensity Class	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4
Fire Type	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S

S - Surface Fire IC - Intermittent Crown Fire CC - Continuous Crown Fire

Intensity Class 2	Creeping surface fire, < 1.5 m flame length
Intensity Class 3	Vigorous surface fire, intermittent crown fire, 1.5-2.5 m flame length
Intensity Class 4	Intermittent crown fire, short range spotting, 2.5-3.5 m flame length
Intensity Class 5	Intermittent/sustained crown fire, moderate range spotting, 3.5-5 m flame length
Intensity Class 6	Sustained crown fire, long range spotting, >5.5 m flame length

Model outputs indicate that the conditions on May 6th were the most extreme of the fire event, resulting in extreme fire behaviour in all conifer fuel types and very fast rates of spread in open, matted grass. Full crown fire was modelled and observed in C-1, C-2 and C-3 fuel types, and long-range spotting was both expected and consistently observed.

The fire grew aggressively in a north and northwest direction from 1400 to 2300, driven by high winds and crossover conditions, before running into cultivated land and disrupting continuous fuels north of Township Road 574. The fire size at the end of the day on May 6th was estimated at 1,124 ha, an approximate 300% increase from the estimated fire size at the end of May 5th.

May 7th, 2025

The early portion of the burning window on May 7th, 2025, did not produce significant fire behaviour. Wind directions remained from the south during the morning, limiting the fuel available. However, an abrupt change in wind direction occurred from early afternoon until early evening, and at approximately 2100 that evening, fire intensities increased dramatically as the fire entered tracts of continuous and unburned fuels in the south and west portions of the Redwater Recreation Area.

TABLE 5 CANADIAN FOREST FIRE BEHAVIOUR PREDICTION SYSTEM PRIMARY OUTPUTS FOR PERIOD FIRE GROWTH ON MAY 7TH, 2025

	FFMC	DMC	DC	ISI	BUI	FWI
	94	87	309	11	101	54

07-May-25	1000	1100	1200	1300	1400	1500	1600	1700	1800	1900	2000	2100	2200	2300	2400	100
Wind Speed (km/h)	14	11	7	8	4	7	12	7	9	12	16	14	17	10	5	5
Wind Direction	S	S	S	SE	W	NW	NW	NW	NW	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
C-1 Spruce Lichen Woodland (Open, Low Density Jack Pine)																
Rate of Spread (m/min)	1	2	2	2	2	2	7	3	3	4	7	3	3	1	0	0
Intensity Class	2	3	3	3	3	3	5	3	3	4	5	3	3	2	2	2
Fire Type	S	IC	S	IC	S	IC	IC	IC	IC	IC	IC	IC	IC	S	S	S
C-2 Boreal Spruce																
Rate of Spread (m/min)	9	13	11	13	11	13	21	15	15	17	21	15	15	9	4	4
Intensity Class	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5
Fire Type	IC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	CC	IC	IC	IC
C-3 Mature Jack Pine																
Rate of Spread (m/min)	2	4	3	4	3	4	10	6	6	7	10	6	6	2	1	1
Intensity Class	4	5	4	5	4	5	6	5	5	5	6	5	5	3	3	3
Fire Type	S	IC	S	IC	S	IC	IC	IC	IC	IC	IC	IC	IC	S	S	S
D-1 Leafless Aspen																
Rate of Spread (m/min)	2	2	2	2	2	2	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	1	1
Intensity Class	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2
Fire Type	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
O-1a Matted Grass																
Rate of Spread (m/min)	18	24	21	24	21	24	37	27	27	30	37	27	27	18	9	9
Intensity Class	3	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3
Fire Type	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S

S - Surface Fire IC - Intermittent Crown Fire CC - Continuous Crown Fire

Intensity Class 2	Creeping surface fire, < 1.5 m flame length
Intensity Class 3	Vigorous surface fire, intermittent crown fire, 1.5-2.5 m flame length
Intensity Class 4	Intermittent crown fire, short range spotting, 2.5-3.5 m flame length
Intensity Class 5	Intermittent/sustained crown fire, moderate range spotting, 3.5-5 m flame length
Intensity Class 6	Sustained crown fire, long range spotting, >5.5 m flame length

In the mid-evening burn period (i.e. 2100), fire intensities were in excess of **10,000 kW/m** in C-2 fuel types and between 4,000 and 10,000 kW/m in C-3 fuel types. Spread rates in O-1a (matted grass) fuels would have been **in excess of 20 m/min**. Long-range spotting was both expected and observed, and active and intense fire behaviour was observed until 0100 on May 8th, when wind speeds reduced and relative humidity set in, further limiting fire growth due to the availability of fuels along Victoria Trail. The fire size at the end of the day on May 7th was estimated at 3,087 ha, representing an approximate 250% increase from the estimated fire size at the end of May 6th.

Mitigation and Preparation

Overview

SREMP is a formal regional emergency management partnership in Sturgeon County that allows several municipalities to meet their legal obligations, build response capacity, and manage emergencies together more effectively. The SREMP program has identified two primary goals related to mitigation and preparedness:

1. Prevent emergency/disaster incidents whenever possible.
2. Strategically mitigate impacts with permanent or temporary resources.[6]

When it comes to being ready for emergencies, the region has taken several important steps. For this report, review of the full regional mitigation program was out of scope. However, it is worth a more detailed exploration and discussion at the partnership table to understand better and clarify the regional context under which mitigation is managed and applied. For this report, preparation was examined, and several strengths and challenges were identified. It is evident that numerous elements are working well.

Strengths

Effective Implementation of Mitigation Measures

Across the region, key preparedness steps are working as intended. Evidence from the Redwater Recreation Wildfire and follow-up debriefs, interviews, and surveys shows that plans are kept current, teams train and exercise regularly, responses are reviewed to learn and improve, and the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) is kept ready to operate.

Regional Emergency Management Plan Updates

The Regional Emergency Management Plan is reviewed on a regular basis, with the most recent update completed in March 2025. Regular reviews help to keep the plan current and ensure it meets both best practices and legislative requirements.

Planning And Executing Regional Training, Drills, And Exercises

Many of the people who responded to this emergency had received emergency management training, and most had recently taken part in a regional practice exercise. Both the ECC and ESS functions were exercised a few weeks before the fire, so both teams had recent familiarity with the process and the facilities.

Timely Completion of An After-Action Review

A formal After-Action Review (AAR) by a third-party was initiated in the immediate post-incident period and is documented in this report. The AAR compiles observations and

[6] Sturgeon Regional Emergency Management Partnership, p.8

identifies opportunities to strengthen the region's existing emergency management program—with a focus on mitigation and preparedness—in advance of future emergencies. Review and prioritization of recommendations before the next wildfire season will further build on the County's level of operational readiness.

Regional Program Collaboration

The Sturgeon Regional Emergency Management Partnership (SREMP) is a cooperative program where municipalities work together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies. Built on collaboration, the program makes communities stronger, giving them access to more resources and helping them adapt more effectively when faced with an emergency impacting any partner community. The regional program establishes a framework for this collaboration and creates an insurance policy that can pay dividends should they experience a devastating event. The response in this particular event demonstrated that, fundamentally, the regional program is effective in practice and can lend strength to big and small municipalities.

57%
of IMT survey participants felt adequately prepared for deployment.

Challenges

Emergency Management Governance Structure

During this incident, the region's senior-level emergency management arrangements were exercised under real-world conditions. Feedback from debriefs and interviews indicates opportunities to clarify decision-making roles, reporting lines, and information pathways among the ECC and corporate leadership. Documenting and exercising these interfaces support coordinated decision-making and consistent situational awareness for senior leadership.

Variance in Perspectives and Interpretations

During this event, regional partners in the SREMP program approached their roles in different ways, particularly when the emergency did not directly affect their community. This led to varying interpretations of responsibilities among staff, senior leaders, and communities. Some staff found themselves balancing emergency duties alongside their regular work, with little time for rest. Moving forward, work is needed to clarify expectations, improve support, and refine the structure to allow staff to focus on emergency response while maintaining necessary downtime and business continuity.

Communicating Plan Updates

Through the review process it has been noted that Councils across SREMP partner communities could benefit from a clearer understanding of local emergency management processes and how the regional partnership works during an emergency. This suggests that the SREMP expectation that updates on the Regional Emergency Management Plan (REMP) are communicated through each Municipal Emergency Management Agency to Councils, administration, and leadership may not always be fully achieved and could be reviewed to improve consistency and effectiveness. It may also be useful to consider direct communication with each Council and their local Director of Emergency Management to strengthen or reinforce messaging.

There is also opportunity to proactively work with Councils, especially after new councils are sworn in, to further educate them on the process and their roles, in alignment with provincially mandatory elected officials training.

Technology and Infrastructure Readiness

The Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) faced some technology challenges during the initial setup. This included some uncertainty around the processes for building access, limited workstations and workspace, and restricted computer access for external agencies. There were also gaps in pre-established incident email accounts, phone lines, and printer capacity, which slowed early coordination.

Microsoft Teams was used as the main platform for sharing information, however access for external users was sometimes difficult. These challenges highlight opportunities to improve the ECC's technology setup in advance, ensuring it is fully optimized for a regional, multi-jurisdictional response in future emergencies.

Facility Infrastructure and Conditions

The Protective Services building, serving simultaneously as an active fire hall and the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC), presented several operational challenges. The primary issue identified was the facility's limited size, which is not purpose-built to support the management of a complex emergency. Additionally, the dual use of the space as both an active fire station and an ECC created logistical difficulties and distractions that complicated coordination efforts during the incident.

The cramped space in the ECC contributed to discomfort (including overheating) and operational disruptions. The space is too small to host an ECC effectively. With minimal wall space, the space also lacked the capacity to post visual aids. The ECC had limited breakout rooms, which made planning and small discussions challenging.

Public Education and Expectations

Several responder groups observed that, during the response, community expectations of municipal and provincial support did not always align with the resources, roles and responsibilities in place. There is opportunity to improve public awareness of the SREMP program, FireSmart™ principles, and preparedness measures within communities. Increasing understanding may assist residents in knowing what to expect, how emergency response operates, and how to prepare themselves and their households ahead of time.

74%
of public survey participants were unaware of local risk reduction measures.

Elected officials have a unique opportunity to leverage their role specific to public education with further role enhancement, integrating their public-facing role with the emergency response to help guide and support resident expectations.

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Demobilization Planning

Demobilization, the process of safely releasing and returning resources and staff after an emergency, emerged as an area for improvement. Without formal plans in place, there were challenges in coordinating the release of resources, maintaining accountability for equipment, and transitioning out of active operations efficiently. Developing clear demobilization plans for future emergencies will confirm resources are managed effectively and that staff have adequate time for rest and travel after long shifts, supporting both safety and a successful response.

Roles, Responsibilities and Reporting Lines

Overview

Recent ICS and Emergency Social Services (ESS) training delivered through SREMP provided a common baseline for many personnel. Because large-scale incidents are infrequent, day-to-day familiarity with specific roles can diminish between events. During this response, opportunities were observed to further clarify how roles are carried out and how key interfaces work—particularly coordination between field operations (Incident Command Post) and the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC)—including communication cadence, decision pathways, and reporting lines. For elected officials, clearly outlining policy-level responsibilities and points of engagement can support consistent governance and sharing of public information. Documenting and exercising these interfaces in advance of future incidents will help sustain a common operating picture and smooth handoffs across the team.

Strengths

Role Clarity and ICS Knowledge

Staff in the ECC reported that their primary role within their team was reasonably clear. Most people in the ECC generally understood how their role supported the broader picture. Many responders had some exposure to the Incident Command System (ICS), either through previous experience, exercises, or training. This led, for the most part, to an organized response where most participants had a general sense of where they were being asked to support.

Practice with Emergency Social Services (ESS)

Reception Centre staff felt fairly confident and comfortable with the deployment as they had regularly practiced ESS functions and had practiced setting up the centre during these exercises. Reception Centre staff worked well together and felt supported by other staff working in the reception centre, regardless of their community of origin.

Teamwork and Morale

A strong sense of camaraderie and "we are in this together" was observed by both firefighters and Incident Management Team (IMT) members, with demonstrated high morale, dedication, and determination, working diligently and persevering despite limited sleep and increasing fatigue. This is a testament to the work culture that Sturgeon County has developed, as well as the value of networking to form regional relationships prior to an emergency.

Response teams took pride in being part of the team. The ability of people from various backgrounds to come together and work cohesively under pressure was a significant success.

Challenges

Limited Real-Event Experience

For many responders, this event was the first major incident managed under the SREMP partnership. While several members of the IMT had less than five years of experience and limited real-world experience outside of exercises and training, the preparation they had received helped them respond effectively. This is common in municipalities, as large-scale emergencies are rare and fortunately, they shouldn't happen often, but strong training and practice ensure teams are ready when they do.

57%
of responder survey participants had less than 5 years of experience in emergency management.

Alignment of Key Messages to Objectives

It was noted that at times, objectives between the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) and the Incident Command Post (ICP) may not have been fully aligned, which led to delays in communication and some duplication of work. Key messages were revised multiple times in a short period due to uncertainty about who was responsible for situational awareness and message approval. This highlights an opportunity to better align the emergency plan to ensure decision makers are clear to all staff, in the field and in the ECC, including those with less experience in emergencies.

Clarifying the Response Structure in the Plan

The ICS structure identified in the Plan describes an outdated reporting structure. It would be advisable to update the structure described in the plan to reflect the real-world practices that the communities of SREMP have found effective. Some staff identified that the Incident Command System (ICS) structure was not always fully understood or followed. Clear plans help inexperienced staff when experienced staff aren't present. Now that the plan has been tested during an actual emergency, it's an opportune time to review and update it accordingly to what works in practice. Include the use of an Incident Base into the plan when reviewing the overall response structure.

The Role of the Elected Official in an Emergency

Elected officials had completed their mandatory training; however, as is common, many did not have any experience with a real-world activation. Some elected officials expressed uncertainty about their role in practice during a significant event and about what to expect from their response teams. While staff worked hard to provide updates and key messages, it was not always clear who had responsibility for supporting elected officials. As a result, several elected officials reported feeling disconnected from the event, with unmet expectations at times.

When expectations were not aligned, alternative processes were developed to manage information and fill the gaps. These processes may have circumvented the traditional command and control structure and wise operating practices. Future planning for a

more resilient resident communication platform would be beneficial. Support protocols for elected officials will also help leaders and staff stay confident, informed, and effective during emergencies.

The Role of the CAO in an Emergency

The role of the CAO could have been better utilized. Although it is critical that the CAO remain responsible for the continuity of the community and its government, the CAO also has a foundational relationship with the elected body. This alignment makes them a valuable ally in supporting the elected official.

The CAO concurrently focuses on corporate continuity, governance, and strategic-level decision support. While the Incident Commander directs field operations and the ECC Director manages coordination, the CAO can fill a role to ensure that elected officials are connected, that municipal administration continues to function, and that the overall response remains aligned with the community's broader needs.

Strengthening and more fully utilizing this role in future responses would enhance both governance and operational effectiveness during large-scale emergencies.

Dual Role of Fire Chief and DEM

The Fire Chief is the appointed Director of Emergency Management (DEM) for Sturgeon County. In large, multi-operational-period incidents, concurrent tactical and strategic responsibilities can create competing demands. During this event, the Fire Chief also served as Incident Commander in the field. Consolidating these roles places simultaneous requirements on strategic coordination, field leadership, and continuity of core fire services. Clarifying delegations and alternates for DEM, Incident Commander, and ECC leadership in advance supports sustained operations and continuity of municipal services.

Interjurisdictional Roles in Preparedness & Mitigation

Interjurisdictional roles for wildfire preparedness and mitigation would benefit from additional clarity between the province and municipalities. The current Mutual Aid Agreement defines response roles; however, pre-incident responsibilities—including fuel management on shared lands, public education on wildfire risk reduction, consistent prevention messaging, and the application of FireSmart™ practices—are not fully specified. While the response was ultimately effective, the Redwater Recreation wildfire underscored the value of aligning these responsibilities across municipal and provincial jurisdictions. A jointly developed addendum or annual workplan that sets out lead/support roles, cost-sharing approaches, and measurable targets would reduce duplication, support readiness, and strengthen community resilience while maintaining existing response arrangements.

Training Gaps

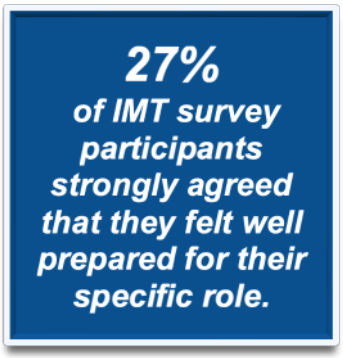
Opportunities exist to strengthen familiarity with the Incident Command System (ICS) among the leadership team and Council members. For example, elected officials

undertake a one-time mandatory training session through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) when they take office; however, knowledge can diminish over time unless an organization choses to train beyond the minimum legislated requirements. Incorporating additional micro-training can support ongoing development of confidence and knowledge.

Staff exhibited varying levels of ICS training and experience in practicing the system. Notably, paid-on-call firefighters had fewer opportunities to receive training and implement ICS protocols. Engagement identified specific training needs, including demobilization procedures, role-specific ICS instruction, and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) training, as priorities for future development initiatives.

Role-Specific Training

Several participants noted that while they had received general emergency management training, there was limited training tailored to their specific roles, with the exception of those working in Emergency Social Services (ESS). Most participants reported having a broad understanding of their function but had not yet attended role-specific training. While role-specific training is available in the province, the length of these certification courses (typically two to five days) often creates scheduling challenges for municipalities. Providing opportunities for targeted training can support individuals in becoming fully prepared and confident to perform their roles during an emergency.



OHS Legislative Responsibilities

A recurring challenge identified through this review is the lack of clarity around who is ultimately responsible and accountable for worker safety during multi-jurisdictional incidents. The central question voiced by many was: *"Who is ultimately responsible for worker safety?"* This becomes particularly complex when multiple entities are involved.

This ambiguity is not unique to Sturgeon County and highlights the need for candid discussions between municipalities, AEMA, and OHS to clearly understand how safety in emergencies is interpreted, including accountability when multiple jurisdictions are involved. It also underscores the importance of explicitly identifying the employer of record in emergency planning documents such as the SREMP program. Without such clarity, organizations risk significant liability if OHS and Labour Code standards are not consistently upheld - particularly during a State of Local Emergency when there may be a perception that regulations are relaxed or exempt.

Mutual aid agreements and formal contracts may offer temporary mechanisms to help address these jurisdictional and legal gaps, but they must be underpinned by clearly articulated roles and responsibilities specific to safety. A critical component is ensuring that anyone joining the response meets validated competency requirements.

Equally important is the consistent presence and strength of the Safety Officer function. The Safety Officer and Incident Commander, as final approvers of work direction at the incident site, must be both highly competent and fully empowered to stop unsafe work. In the initial few days of the wildfire the Safety Officer role was lacking perceived authority, and needed deeper resourcing in the early stages. Those on scene did not always know who held the role, and there was insufficient depth of trained safety personnel to sustain it across the initial response. This was improved when the All-Hazards Incident Management Team arrived to support the operations.

Going forward, best practice would be to strive for a minimum of one Safety Officer and at least two equally trained assistants identified from the outset, supported by clear scope, authority, and guidelines. Doing so will strengthen both worker protection and organizational resilience in future multi-jurisdictional responses, as well as reduce liability for all parties involved.

Access to Emergency Management Documents

In municipal government, it is common practice for Administration and Council to store documents in separate digital content lockers. While this approach is appropriate for day-to-day operations, it can create challenges during emergencies if Council does not have ready access to key emergency management documents. Because Council has an important role to play in emergency response, certain foundational documents, including but not limited to the SREMP Plan and pre-approved key messaging, should be identified and shared across both systems to ensure consistent access. Providing hard copies of these documents to Council would add an extra layer of assurance, ensuring they have the information needed to fulfill their responsibilities during an emergency.

Mitigation & Preparation Recommendations

1. **Strengthen awareness of SREMP commitments.** Member communities participate in the Sturgeon Regional Emergency Management Partnership (SREMP), which provides a framework for regional preparedness, response, and recovery. There is an opportunity to strengthen foundational awareness of SREMP commitments across partners by clarifying expectations, roles, triggers, and how municipalities balance continuity of daily operations with support to incidents outside their own jurisdiction. Awareness can be supported at all staff levels by routine updates and distribution of approved information to senior leadership and elected officials for awareness, helping maintain consistency in public information. The regional partnership should provide a sustainable structure that allows staff from all communities to focus on emergency response while maintaining necessary downtime.

   To further support transparency and accountability, partners may consider providing an annual public update on SREMP participation and activities (e.g., deployments, training, exercises, improvement actions). Orientation for new

appointees and periodic refreshers for senior leaders can help keep governing concepts current and roles clear.

2. **Pre-plan for demobilization.** Develop demobilization templates and plans to ensure that demobilization is thought out and intentional; detailed demobilization planning can then begin during the response phase. Demobilization must consider all aspects of deployment, including people, equipment, supplies, legal instruments, financial closure and post-incident assessment. Demobilization processes can be easily tailored to the specific event at hand. Future training and exercises should consider elements of demobilization to reinforce proper implementation.

3. **Clarify and commit to the CAO's role in emergency management response.** It is essential to clarify how the CAO will remain aware and engaged in the response while continuing to manage critical operations in the community. Within a significant emergency, the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) can play a critical leadership role in ensuring continuity of government operations while supporting the broader community response. A clear reporting structure in this area would streamline governance and communication, enhancing overall efficiency. Beyond maintaining the essential services of the municipality, the CAO can serve as a key bridge between the response and the elected officials, helping ensure they remain informed, aligned, and confident in their role during a crisis. It will be helpful to clearly identify the CAO in the Emergency Plan as the connection and support for the Elected Officials. Additionally, CAOs from each jurisdiction could explore backfilling for each other as the conduit to elected officials in longer responses, providing respite to over-stretched CAOs and the opportunity to re-focus on critical community services.

4. **Continue to refine collaborative software tools and develop a repeatable process for providing personnel with access to necessary communications systems.** SREMP should explore technology platform capabilities that provide access to all staff across all communities. Implement integrated technology software for managed forms and access control (web-based), enhance printing capabilities, and explore role-based email options for ICS positions to improve continuity and access. Create streamlined, consistent processes that provide personnel access to the appropriate IT tools upon activation.

5. **Incorporate task-specific and role-specific training.** Offer pre-incident training for elected officials focused on their roles in emergency response under the ICS structure. This training should clarify the boundaries between governance and operational response, reducing unintentional pressure on the IMT and ensuring smoother procedural flow during critical periods. IMT members identified role-specific training would provide them with more confidence and effectiveness. Additionally, Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) training would provide field

responders with an enhanced understanding of how municipal fire services and WUI teams integrate and work together.

6. **Train and exercise unit leaders.** Sturgeon County has a maturing organization that is ready and able to focus training on the Unit Leaders to further deepen staff's competency in their roles. This will benefit staff who are identified as Unit Leaders, and will also benefit all roles – because if the unit is not activated, the responsibilities of that unit fall onto the Section Chiefs and Officers.

7. **Begin annual elected officials refresher training sessions.** Elected officials are legislated to complete emergency management training once they take office; however, there are no requirements to review or recertify this training. ICS 402 (ICS Overview for Executives and Senior Officials) is available online and would also be of benefit to the CAO role for annual review.

8. **Incorporate the elected officials and CAOs into annual training exercises.** While invitations to observe have been extended, it is recommended that the elected officials and CAO roles get added into the exercise design as active participants. This will provide elected officials, senior administrators, and policymakers with a stronger understanding of the Incident Command System (ICS), their role during an incident, and how they interface with the ICP/ECC.

9. **Champion external advocacy to the province for clarity and collaboration about mitigation, ESS and safety**: Municipalities, particularly those aligned under a partnership such as SREMP, should continue to advocate for the province and others towards clarity in mitigation, safety, and liability improvements. Several areas of advocacy might be beneficial, including:

    a. **Mitigation responsibilities within municipal and County Fire Protection Agreements:** These agreements tend to clarify the roles for response and fire management, but often neglect to identify (or share) the role in mitigating and preventing significant incidents by caring for the land, implementing planning prescriptions, managing fuels, and engaging in educational efforts with the public.

    b. **Advocating for a Provincial ESS augmentation team**: Although the IMT was backstopped by a provincially coordinated IMT providing much-needed relief to the ECC, the ESS teams for this incident received no similar backstop. The ESS community is potentially well established in the province; local ESS structures may need to lean into this larger group sooner. Additionally, events such as these could be used as examples to advocate with the province for the development of an Alberta ESS deployment team.

c. **Safety for Emergency Management:** This is an emerging challenge to monitor. Advocacy will be invaluable towards establishing modern guidelines for safety in significant multi-jurisdictional events.

10. **Increase FireSmart™ public education efforts**. Seek innovative ways, potentially through grants and learning from other municipalities such as Lac Ste. Anne County who have strong integrated FireSmart™ programs. Mitigation and preparedness are more effective when both personal and community preparedness occurs.

11. **Verify that the SREMP document and any other critical emergency management documents are accessible in Council's digital content locker**.

12. **Review the organization charts in the SREMP to ensure consistency across the Plan.** To ensure clarity and assist new staff, the plan should generally align to how the organization intends to operate, or it may cause confusion. Alignment between the plan and practice will ensure better clarity and transparency on reporting and the information flow between field activities and the ECC.

13. **Consider adding in a scalable Joint Information System (JIS) to the SREMP** so that Elected Officials, CAOs, Directors of Emergency Management and the ICP/ECC are all working with the same communication flow expectations. Refer to Appendix B for an example of a JIS.

14. **Consider adding Emergency Management support and ICS-100 training to all County job descriptions.** Consider ICS-300 for all personnel in Section Chief roles, as well as Command roles.

15. **Review the appointment of the Director of Emergency Management and Deputy Director roles.** Consider capacity, practicality and functionality. Utilize the regional model lens during this review. While the current appointed DEM is highly capable, their current role is already overtaxed without the addition of the DEM appointment.

Response

Fire Suppression Strategies & Tactics

Overview

Sturgeon County Emergency Services operates as a composite fire department consisting of both full-time and Paid-on-Call (POC) firefighters, a staffing model common across Alberta. While the department benefits from a dedicated group of full-time personnel, routine staffing and service delivery are designed to meet the day-to-day demands of the municipality. This approach is well-suited for typical short-duration emergencies; however, during prolonged or large-scale events such as wildfires, heavy reliance on Paid-on-Call personnel, many of whom maintain full-time employment outside the fire service, presents inherent challenges. Extended operations place considerable strain on staffing and emphasize the need for enhanced logistical and resource support to sustain effective service delivery.

This wildland urban interface incident (WUI), which began on May 3rd and was declared under control on May 19th, required sustained suppression efforts over more than two weeks and multiple operational periods. The response demonstrated exceptional dedication from personnel, supported collaboratively by Alberta Wildfire, Mutual Aid Partners, and Provincial WUI Teams. Together, these agencies played critical roles in resourcing, coordination, and fireground operations, enabling continuous 24-hour efforts over several days.

SOURCE 3 STURGEON COUNTY (2025)

The scale and complexity of this incident were unprecedented in recent operational memory within Sturgeon County. As a low-frequency, high-impact event, it introduced unfamiliar challenges for both frontline personnel and incident command. A key operational complexity involved distinguishing and effectively responding to grass fires, wildland fires, and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) fires, each demanding unique tactics, equipment, and decision-making processes. Adapting to these dynamic conditions in real time underscored the need for more specialized training in WUI operations and hazard-specific suppression strategies.

Notably, the collaborative efforts and strong interagency support contributed to a successful outcome, with no loss of life and limited damage to structures. This positive result reflects the high level of coordination, professionalism, and community partnership demonstrated throughout the incident.

Engaged participants noted that structural protection strategies were successful, resulting in saves at multiple properties and notable positive outcomes beyond the initial ignition day. Structural protection with sprinkler systems worked well.

While the overall response was positive, there always remain areas where improvements can be made. The incident provided valuable insights and highlighted opportunities to enhance operational readiness, including more focused training, updated equipment better suited for this type of wildfire, and improved field information technology systems. Addressing these areas will help ensure future responses are even more effective, bolstering firefighter safety and operational performance.

This experience highlights the crucial importance of ongoing investment in preparedness through specialized training, interagency collaboration, and equipment readiness, ensuring the municipality's ability to respond effectively to large-scale emergencies.

Furthermore, the incident reaffirmed that the most reliable way to validate an organization’s operational readiness, across strategies, tactics, and capabilities, is ultimately through direct involvement in managing complex and sustained events. Significant knowledge and practical insights have been gained not only during the incident itself but also through the comprehensive reflection, after-action review and analysis that followed.

Strengths

Incident Commander Experience

The Incident Commander's prior experience with similar incidents provided clear guidance on strategies and tactics, enabling coordinated and focused operations. This experience helped the organization avoid common early challenges in complex events. Sturgeon County crews noted that strong field-level mentorship was crucial to the incident's successful outcome. Having experienced personnel in key roles during large-scale events is essential, as it quickly establishes effective leadership and sets the incident up for success.

97%
of firefighters felt tactical objectives aligned "somewhat or very well" with field conditions.

Effective Use of Mutual Aid and Community Support

The incident benefited from strong mutual aid cooperation, with timely assistance from neighbouring agencies enhancing firefighting capacity. Additionally, local communities demonstrated excellent responsiveness and support, which contributed significantly to overall incident management and safety. Having strong regional programs in place, along with existing and functional mutual aid agreements that can be quickly actioned, is critical to an organization's ability to resource and scale incident response effectively.

Effective Use of Support Resources

Mutual aid resources, including the Major Event Support Apparatus Incident Command Post from Parkland County, provided valuable operational support. Additionally, assistance from AEMA, such as the use of the Alberta First Responder Radion Communication System (AFRRCS), served as a force multiplier, enhancing communication and coordination during suppression efforts. Knowing the right resources to request early in the incident was vital to ensuring continuity during the initial stages. Sturgeon County effectively leveraged resources from regional partnerships and the Province of Alberta to support sustained operations.

SOURCE 4 STURGEON COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES

Challenges

Limited Experience in Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Operations

A key challenge during the wildfire response was limited prior experience conducting operations in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). The unique complexity of the WUI, where wildfire behaviour intersects with residential areas and infrastructure, requires specialized strategies, equipment deployment, and coordination. Interviews with County staff consistently highlighted that more focused and scenario-based training on WUI-specific tactics, structure protection, and operational decision-making would significantly improve preparedness.

Many personnel expressed that while general suppression experience existed, applying it effectively within a WUI context was unfamiliar territory. Enhancing operational knowledge in this area would not only support safer and more efficient responses but also ensure alignment with provincial WUI guidelines and best practices in future incidents.

What is often treated as an emergency, particularly after the initial 24 hours, is more of a sustained, ongoing process, rather than a life-threatening emergency. Within the context of this type of incident (WUI operations) and other sustained responses, increased clarity around what constitutes an emergency would help avoid over-resourcing non-critical situations and assist the team to prioritize effectively.

SOURCE 5 STURGEON COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICE

Challenging Wildfire Behaviour

It was cited that challenging fire weather conditions impacted operational planning, compounded by a broader lack of familiarity with the Canadian Forest Fire Weather Index system, which limited crews' ability to anticipate fire behaviour and led to more reactive operations during some periods.

Additionally, highly unfavourable fire suppression weather and sudden pattern changes increased the complexity of suppression efforts, forcing the incident into reactive modes on several occasions - **circumstances beyond the control of operations teams that hindered their ability to provide effective suppression**. Enhanced training in interpreting, forecasting, and using fire weather data and fire behaviour potentials to develop and disseminate contingency plans to the field would be beneficial in supporting proactive and adaptive decision-making under rapidly changing conditions.

Hazard-Specific Equipment Limitations

A notable challenge during the wildfire response was the lack of hazard-specific equipment suitable for sustained Wildland Urban Interface operations. It was noted that some response items were not optimized for the terrain and fire behaviour encountered. Personnel identified the absence of utility terrain vehicles (UTVs) outfitted with firefighting skids and a fully equipped Structure Protection Unit (SPU) as a significant limitation.

These resources would have improved mobility, increased suppression capacity in remote areas, and reduced reliance on outside agencies for structure protection. Additionally, the limited availability of specialized gear placed increased strain on mutual aid providers. The event underscored the need for targeted investment in modern, hazard-appropriate apparatus and corresponding training to ensure operational readiness and resilience in future events of this hazard type.

Field Communications and Connectivity Limitations

Cellular and internet connectivity were inconsistent or unavailable at several field locations throughout the incident, creating significant challenges for fireground communication and coordination. These limitations compounded existing issues with situational awareness, including delayed information sharing, reduced access to mapping tools, and difficulty in maintaining a common operating picture. The lack of reliable digital communication infrastructure impacted the ability of crews to stay informed and aligned with incident objectives in real time, particularly in remote or high-activity zones.

Strategies and Tactics Recommendations:

1. **Early Activation of a Seasoned ICS Resource Unit Leader** is crucial to establishing an effective and structured resource tracking system from the outset. This ensures accurate visibility of incoming, assigned, and out-of-service personnel, enabling better crew rotation planning, rest cycles, and tactical reserve staffing strategies. Strengthening resource accountability directly supports fatigue and attrition management, reducing operational impacts during dynamic incidents.

2. **Enhanced training in wildland urban interface (WUI) Operations** is essential for personnel operating in complex environments where wildfires intersect with communities and infrastructure. Focused, scenario-based training on WUI-specific tactics, structure protection, and operational coordination will ensure safer and more efficient responses, aligning actions with provincial WUI standards.

3. **Investment in hazard-specific equipment** and modernization should prioritize acquiring apparatus suited to WUI terrain and fire behaviour, such as UTVs with firefighting skids and fully equipped Structure Protection Units. Supporting this with relevant training will improve operational reach, reduce reliance on external agencies, and increase self-sufficiency in high-risk zones.

4. **An improved field communications and connectivity infrastructure** is necessary to overcome existing gaps in real-time information flow, mapping access, and situational awareness. Deployable communications solutions should be established to ensure consistent cellular and internet coverage across operational areas, particularly in remote or high-activity zones.

5. **Pre-established triggers for scalable incident response**. While the incident benefited from early activation of resources, procedures should be formalized to ensure a repeatable escalation to larger incident management systems. These triggers should include thresholds for evacuation coordination, activation of advanced ICS structures, and pre-templated orders for both Overhead Team positions and tactical suppression resources. Using this incident as a baseline, a scalable framework will support rapid, organized, and resource-efficient escalation during future high-impact wildfire events.

IMT Activation Process

Overview

Sturgeon County currently utilizes a multipurpose room within the Protective Services headquarters, an active fire station, as the designated space for housing either the Incident Command Post (ICP) or Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) as required. This dual-use space also serves as the fire department's training room, presenting unique challenges during the incident due to its multifunctional nature and operational demands.

The early activation of the ECC/ICP during nighttime hours led to several operational difficulties, including limited staffing availability, responder fatigue after full workdays, and complexities in establishing effective command and coordination structures quickly during off-hours. Access to necessary technology, adequate workspace, and logistical support was also constrained during these early stages.

In large, complex municipal incidents, it is common for the initial activation phase to be less than fully organized. This is often driven by multiple factors, most notably the fact that fire crews are frequently tasked with protecting property that, in many cases, are their own homes. Additionally, municipal employees are often required to step into expanded or unfamiliar roles, sometimes with limited training or experience in those capacities. These factors create inherent challenges to early incident management.

Despite these pressures, the collaborative efforts of Sturgeon County's personnel and partners were exceptional. Across departments and agencies, there was a clear demonstration of unity, adaptability, and commitment to the collective mission. Personnel worked closely together to manage immediate priorities while simultaneously initiating the structured incident planning and management cycles needed to support sustained fireground operations. This joint effort, undertaken under intense pressure and evolving conditions, underscores the resilience of the regional response network and the professionalism of those involved. The ability to effectively coordinate and support each other during the critical early hours was a significant contributor to the overall success of the incident response.

Strengths

Notification systems

The County utilizes remote notification systems that are capable of quickly reaching large numbers of personnel, contributing to an overall strong turnout for the event. Most personnel noted the effectiveness of these systems in delivering timely notifications and their ease of use, which helped ensure that responders were promptly informed and able to mobilize. It was also clearly communicated that the activation notice was not a drill, with explicit instructions provided in the message. Due to the high operational demands of the hazard, a substantial number of resources were requested and successfully deployed to manage the surge in tasks.

Positive Personnel Engagement

While sending out a request for assistance late at night presents inherent challenges in communication and mobilization, the remarkable response from personnel demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting the community. The willingness of individuals to promptly respond to such calls reflects positively on the dedication and resilience of the response teams involved.

Preplanned ECC Setup

The preplanned setup of the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC), guided by recommended layout diagrams, enabled optimal use of the available space. This preparation provided a functional and efficient starting point during the most hectic phases of the incident, supporting effective coordination and response efforts despite challenging conditions.

Activation of Provincial Supports

The activation of provincial All-Hazards Incident Management Teams (AHIMTs) provided critical support to the incident, bolstering both capacity and capability within the command structure. Their deployment not only ensured that additional personnel were available to manage the event's expanding complexity but also brought valuable experience into key Command and General Staff positions. This integration enhanced decision-making, improved coordination, and supported the development of local capacity through mentorship and the sharing of expertise. Continue this practice in future emergencies.

Challenges

Evening Activation

Activating the incident in the evening created unavoidable staffing challenges, as many responders had already completed full workdays. While the initial callout resulted in a strong turnout, the evening activation led to fatigue and reduced overnight capacity, which in turn impacted staffing for the subsequent operational period. Overnight activations also reduced access to support services and shortened planning timelines, placing additional pressure on the initial response. This is a reality any emergency plan needs to account for, as emergencies often occur outside regular business hours.

It's important to recognize that Provincial Incident Management Teams (IMTs) are not immediate-response resources. Once requested, deployment can take 24 to 72 hours, depending on availability and logistics. Timely activation is therefore critical; waiting until operational pressures peak may result in the team arriving too late to prevent fatigue among local responders.

In this incident, IMT support from a regional AHIMT was requested on May 6 (approximately 60 hours into incident); ideally, such requests could be made even

earlier. Standing a team down is far easier and less costly than pushing local staff to their limits while awaiting support. Early activation enables a smoother transition, maintains operational continuity, and helps protect responder wellbeing.

Requesting mutual aid from industrial partners within NR CAER can also support the “go big fast” approach, as the County experienced when they reached out for industrial mutual aid support for this wildfire. Industrial partners can provide critical surge capacity in the early stages of an incident in addition to regional IMTs.

Expanded Utilization of Provincial WUI Resources

It was observed that during the initial stages of the incident, there was an opportunity for broader utilization of provincial Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) teams. The wildfire demonstrated strong adaptability in managing complex conditions with the resources available, which contributed to the overall success of the response.

Due to the high-risk characteristics of wildland-urban interface (WUI) environments, where wildfire poses a direct threat to homes and infrastructure, future approaches may consider focusing on the prompt request and confirmation of provincial WUI crews and equipment to enhance response efforts.

Early integration of these specialized resources at the branch level would further enhance structure protection operations and reduce the demand placed on local resources during the critical early operational period.

Activation Recommendations

6. **Continue to develop and maintain a pre-built electronic incident management system** containing standardized forms, digital folders, workbooks, messaging templates, and hazard-specific plans. This system should be securely accessible to all community partners, regardless of their home organization's technology, and tailored to a range of incident types to enable rapid onboarding of personnel during activation. Sturgeon County was in the process of building this system, but it was not yet complete prior to the wildfire.

7. **Develop or redesign a purpose-built dual-function area (“Duty Office”) capable of serving as either an Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) or an Incident Command Post (ICP)**, specifically designed to address the operational needs identified during this incident. Using this event as a model, the area should offer ample space, functional workstations, secure access, and robust technology infrastructure to support complex, multi-agency emergency operations. Seek an opportunity to collaborate with industry partners who utilize Sturgeon County's ECC as their secondary ECC location. This could also serve as a training and meeting space to increase its utilization.

8. **Establish clear activation triggers and a supporting contact list for early access to key resources available in a shared, easily accessible location.** On these resources, include AEMA WUI Field Officers, Regional Field Officers, mutual aid partners (both municipal and industrial), and emergency management partners. This enables early incident commanders to quickly engage critical support, even under task saturation, ensuring timely decision-making and resource mobilization in the initial phase of an incident.

Staff Scheduling

Overview

The recent wildfire incident prompted a rapid activation of the Incident Management Team (IMT) to support local response efforts and ensure a coordinated, efficient approach to wildfire suppression. One of the critical components of a successful response during such incidents is the effective scheduling of staff and resources. Staff scheduling is not only vital to maintaining a consistent and effective operational tempo but also essential to preserving the mental and physical wellbeing of responders operating in high-stress environments.

It is not uncommon for the first hours of an evolving incident to be tumultuous, with incoming resources arriving in an unstructured manner, evolving situational awareness, and competing operational demands. Amid this early complexity, the IMT must prioritize establishing a safe and organized working environment for all responders. Ensuring safety includes providing clear direction, avoiding excessive fatigue, and quickly organizing shift rotations to prevent burnout.

Despite the inherent challenges during initial activation, the goal remains to transition rapidly into a structured schedule that supports operational consistency. This includes implementing defined shift changes, maintaining accurate check-in/check-out processes, and tracking resource assignments throughout operational periods. A well-established scheduling framework enhances accountability, promotes effective communication, and ultimately supports the overall safety and effectiveness of the incident response.

Strengths

Regional Collaboration

A key success of the incident response was the strong turnout and collaboration across the regional partnership. Responders from multiple agencies and jurisdictions contributed to every aspect of the operation, from command and coordination at the ECC/ICP and Incident Base to direct firefighting efforts on the front lines. This collective commitment and interagency cooperation significantly strengthened the response capacity and demonstrated the value of established regional relationships in managing large-scale emergencies.

Coordination with Provincial Resources

Many respondents noted that while considerable work was already underway, the arrival of the Provincial WUI team and regional AHIMT brought a clear improvement in coordination and clarity. Their structured processes, experienced personnel, and established protocols helped formalize resource tracking, enhancing accountability, operational planning, and responder safety for the remainder of the incident.

Challenges

Fatigue Management and Staff Scheduling Process

Fatigue emerged as a major concern throughout the incident, especially among suppression personnel from Sturgeon County, who reported little to no rest during the initial operational periods. The urgent demands on local responders led to extended work hours across multiple shifts, with many staff members working well beyond recommended limits without structured breaks.

This continuous strain adversely affected both physical and cognitive performance, diminishing operational effectiveness and increasing health and safety risks. The experience underscored the necessity for early adoption of rotation plans, surge staffing approaches, and scheduled rest periods to maintain responder wellbeing and operational continuity during lengthy, high-intensity events.

One critical issue was the late implementation of formal work-rest cycles for both firefighting and overhead personnel. The immediate operational pressures resulted in prolonged shifts and insufficient rest, making fatigue-related incidents more likely. Many responders worked 16 hours or more, with some exceeding 25 hours straight, which not only heightened stress during and after the incident but also increased risk under occupational health and safety and labour laws—an exposure that can be mitigated with improved scheduling practices in future incidents.

Resource Management amongst ICP, ECC and ESS

One of the challenges during the incident was coordinating resource management between the Incident Command Post (ICP), the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC), and Emergency Social Services (ESS). Planning and tracking, including the work of the Resource Unit Leader, were handled at the ECC. Resources were at times ordered directly from the ICP without alignment or coordination with the ECC, where planning and logistical tracking functions were being conducted. This led to some minor duplication of requests, and gaps in situational awareness.

Because these important roles were split between locations without a consistent way to coordinate, some communication gaps occurred. This made it harder to anticipate staffing needs and plan schedules as smoothly as possible. As a result, resource allocation was sometimes more reactive than proactive, which affected the flow of operations and responder support. At times, the ESS response also felt a bit disconnected, which contributed to responder fatigue and feelings of isolation. Recognizing these challenges offers a valuable opportunity to strengthen coordination and build on the great work already being done, ensuring even better support for everyone involved in future incidents.

Resource Scheduling

While the use of mutual aid partners was effective in bolstering response capacity, it introduced challenges in maintaining consistent resource scheduling. Several

respondents noted that some partners were inconsistent in the timing and delivery of resources, which created tactical impacts on the ground and complicated operational planning.

Staff Scheduling Recommendations

9. **Implement a structured staffing schedule during the early hours of an incident (Fatigue Management Plan)** to support sustained operations across multiple operational periods. This should include both frontline and overhead personnel, with clearly defined work-rest cycles (e.g. 12-hour shifts), shift rotations, and coverage planning. Establishing a schedule early enables a more strategic and sustainable approach to staffing, reduces fatigue, and ensures operational continuity throughout prolonged or complex incidents. Assign dedicated personnel within the IMT to manage schedules and monitor shift hours.

10. It is recommended that **the Incident Management Team leverage the AEMA Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Field Officer to coordinate all provincial resource requests earlier in the incident.** This approach alleviates the IMT's direct strain for ordering, streamlines resource deployment, and ensures incoming crews are incorporated into a structured rotation schedule from the start. Implementing this process will enhance operational efficiency, improve resource tracking, and support consistent staff scheduling.

11. **The early establishment of a robust ICS Planning Section, specifically including a Resource Unit Leader, Check-In/Status Recorders, and a Demobilization Unit**, is critical for effectively tracking, onboarding, and demobilizing all personnel involved in the incident. These functions ensure accurate resource accountability, facilitate smooth transitions during shift changes, and support safe and efficient demobilization processes.

12. **Enhanced Wellness Support for first responders and staff supporting all other aspects of the emergency management:** Prioritize wellness checks and critical incident stress support *during* and after events, not just post-demobilization, for all responders, including but not limited to the firefighters, the IMT and ESS staff.

13. **Add a dedicated firefighter staffing position:** Assign a member to manage firefighter staffing schedules, ensuring sufficient staff rotation and relief for all personnel, including those at fire stations providing business continuity municipal

fire services. Experience from this event noted that three people initially supporting this role would be ideal to get organized.

14. **Pre-establish ESS relief:** When the provincial AHIMT provides support to the response, it is worth rebalancing staff effort to ensure that the ESS teams are also offered some form of relief. In an ideal state, a provincial ESS relief team would also be requested, allowing all teams to recover.

15. **Integrate IT presence in the ICP/ECC during the initial activation period.** Activate IT personnel for in-person ECC setup and support during the initial 48 to 72 hours of activation, and on-call afterwards for any external personnel upon activation.

IMT Functionality

Overview

The Incident Management Team plays a central role in coordinating and overseeing all aspects of incident response. Operating within the Incident Command System, the IMT is responsible for establishing command and control, setting objectives, managing resources, and ensuring the safety of responders and the public.

The tremendous pressure that individuals can feel when stepping into critical roles during a real-time incident, especially within their own home municipality and in a complex environment, cannot be overstated. Managing such responsibility requires resilience, adaptability, and strong teamwork.

During the Sturgeon County wildfire, the Incident Management Team included municipal staff and was supplemented by the five municipal partners who make up the SREMP. The response also involved Alberta's Provincial All-Hazard IMTs, support from NRCAER, and later, coordination with Alberta Wildfire.

The response effort was further strengthened by support from surrounding communities, representing a practical demonstration of the collaboration within the Sturgeon Regional Emergency Management Partnership. This response highlighted the value of a regional approach to emergency management, demonstrating that regional coordination is not only feasible but also an effective model for managing complex incidents across the province of Alberta.

Strengths

Pre-Established Relationships

Respondents noted that recent preparedness efforts through SREMP helped build existing relationships across agencies. These pre-established connections fostered trust, grace, and effective collaboration during the incident, allowing teams to work together efficiently under pressure.

Composite of the Incident Management Team

One of the key strengths observed during the incident was the composition of the Incident Management Team, which included individuals with a wide range of experience levels and backgrounds. This diversity not only contributed to strong team cohesion but also created a highly effective training environment for developing members. By working alongside more experienced personnel during real-time, complex incidents, newer team members gained valuable hands-on experience, deepened their understanding of ICS roles, and built confidence in high-pressure situations.

Clear Workflow Processes

Respondents noted a clear understanding of workflows within the ECC as time went on, which contributed to efficient decision-making and coordination throughout the incident. Familiarity with roles, processes, and communication pathways allowed the ECC team to manage information flow, resource requests, and support functions effectively.

Flexibility and Willingness to Learn

The organization demonstrated strong flexibility throughout the incident, with personnel willingly stepping into roles and tasks outside their usual responsibilities to support overall response needs. This adaptability, combined with a strong sense of teamwork, allowed individuals and departments to back one another effectively, fill critical gaps, and maintain operational momentum.

Improved Morale

Once logistical support was established, there was a clear and noticeable improvement in morale among incident personnel. Reliable access to necessary resources, supplies, and support services helped responders feel valued and better equipped, enhancing overall motivation and effectiveness throughout the response.

Shift Hand-Offs

Survey respondents cited clear shift hand-off documents and robust Microsoft Teams communication as key supports for incident response. This indicates an effective and structured shift handoff process is in place.

Unification with Alberta Wildfire ICP

Interviewees noted many positive instances of collaboration during the incident between the municipal ECC and Alberta Wildfire's ICP, where information was freely shared and support was reciprocal.

Challenges

Incident Action Plans

Field-level feedback indicated that the initial Incident Action Plans (IAPs) provided were often modified very early in the operational period. In some instances, the plan did not entirely reflect the actual operational conditions for that period. While experiences varied, these factors somewhat limited the IAP's effectiveness as a reliable guide for field operations, contributing to occasional initial challenges in maintaining coordinated and consistent tactical efforts.

ICP and ECC Blended Structure

Elements of both an ICP and an ECC were merged into one structure for this event, with an Incident Base in the field. An ECC Director headed a structure that was functioning as an Incident Command Post with Section Chiefs.

When key roles and responsibilities are shared between systems or locations, or are blended without clear definitions and communication pathways, decision-making can slow, and overall operations may become less effective. A well-equipped ICP supports stronger coordination, reduces duplication of effort, and helps maintain a steady, timely flow of information throughout the incident. Most municipalities in Alberta will see success in Type 3 emergencies operating an Incident Base, supported by a fully flushed out Incident Command Post.

IMT Functionality Recommendations

16. **Request support from a regional All-Hazard Incident Management Team (AHIMT) earlier** in prolonged incidents to maintain effectiveness and relieve local staff. Call in additional agency partners in advance of resources getting overwhelmed.

17. **Clearly define the use and functionality of the ICP and ECC.** It's important to ensure that the Incident Command Post (ICP) is fully staffed with all essential incident functions before establishing an Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC).

18. **Introduce a formal Demobilization Plan early in the incident and ensure that it is communicated to all branches and divisions.** Use standardized ICS demobilization forms and require all resources to check out through established procedures on a tactically driven release schedule. This will help maintain accountability, support post-incident reviews, and ease fatigue-related pressures.

19. **Adopt a unified resource ordering system that channels all requests through the Planning and Logistics Sections.** Reinforce training and expectations with ICP staff to ensure all resource movements are recorded and tracked centrally. This will reduce duplication, improve awareness of resource availability, and prevent unnecessary delays.

20. **Ensure incident operations are aligned with the Alberta Incident Management System (AIMS) as outlined in the provincial AIMS framework.** Utilizing established guidance, such as the Alberta Provincial Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Guideline, is essential when managing complex wildfire incidents. These documents provide standardized structures, roles, and procedures that enhance coordination, improve operational efficiency, and support effective, scalable responses across jurisdictions.

Recovery

Overview

Recovery is a lengthy process which far too often focuses on rebuilding physical structures and cleaning up debris. Community recovery is, however, recognized as far more complex and interdependent on individual and community resilience. Recovery in this report refers to both the continuity of government and the ability to resume regular business, as well as the immediate support provided to those who have experienced loss.

In this event, the human side of initial recovery was led mainly by the ESS teams, who transitioned reception centres into resiliency centres. The staff providing ESS support were already connected to community support structures. They possessed the necessary knowledge to support community recovery and continue managing the long-term needs of their clients. Although this team was ideally suited to the work, the intensity of the activation, followed by long hours and days after the ECC had closed, had a detrimental effect on the staff.

Strengths

Critical Incident Stress Management

Following demobilization, the majority of field team noted they were offered Critical Incident Stress support from the County's Peer Team. This is a newer team for the County, and it continues to provide beneficial services to the fire services. This is a best practice and should be continued with the fire service and expanded to emergency management.

Utilizing a Recovery Expert

Sturgeon County chose to hire a third-party to support resident recovery efforts, with a focus on helping residents navigate the insurance process; continue this wise practice moving forward. A comprehensive flat sheet was created to assist property owners who experienced property damage. It clearly explained the compensation process, eligible expenses, and required documentation. Having a person that residents could reach directly was a good practice for the scale of this emergency.

Sturgeon County

Redwater Recreation Area Fire
Assistance for Property Owners

Required Documentation

- Photos of the damage and photos of the repairs.
- For landowners doing their own work, requirements include*:
  - A description of the different areas of repairs completed and the scope of what was done;
  - Receipts for material used;
  - Time sheets for the labour hours claimed;
  - A listing of equipment used identifying the type of equipment, year, make and model number, and the number of hours for each piece;
  - Any back-up documentation to verify the rates charged for things such as bales of hay.

*The consultant will work with you on the submission and can provide equipment rates and other support throughout the process.

- Quotes from any contractors must*:
  - Outline the location and scope of work;
  - Detail the equipment and labour being used, showing the rate and number of hours;
  - Outline the materials used as a separate line item.

*Any contracted work that exceeds $10,000 requires two quotes.

Eligible expenses

The County could be responsible for:

- Fences and gates damaged while creating access for fire response personnel and equipment (this does not include fences/gates damaged by the fire itself).
- Private access roads (limited to rutting or lost gravel due to heavy equipment access).
- Damaged land/crops due to heavy equipment access.
- General clean-up of the area due to fireguards or temporary access roads, if it poses a safety hazard.
- Spot roof repairs for areas where sprinkler systems were mounted.
- Damage due to fire retardant drops.

It is situation-specific and the best way to figure out what is covered is to speak with the County's consultant to assess what is covered.

Your consultant is:
Laurie Halldorson
Email: lhalldorson@sturgeoncounty.ca

Page 2 of 3

SOURCE 6 STURGEON COUNTY (2025)

Personalized Recovery Interactions

The recovery phase is often a gray area for residents to navigate, with praise for the County's efforts to provide face-to-face assistance to the relatively small number of affected

individuals. This approach worked well given the number of residents impacted; the empathetic aspects of this methodology can be leveraged for larger-scale events where personalization may not be possible, but empathy and compassion can continue.

Proactive and Structured Damage Assessments

Damage assessments completed during the incident provided a strong foundation for effective remediation planning. By aligning remediation activities with the eligibility criteria of the Hazard Assistance and Resilience Program (HARP), the municipality ensured that recovery efforts were both strategic and financially accountable. To maintain consistent communication with residents, Administration prepared and distributed information outlining the process and available supports.

Remediation efforts were organized into two clear streams—County-led and Owner-led—which created structure and clarity in the recovery approach. This proactive and organized approach reflects strong administrative leadership and a commitment to transparent, resident-focused recovery.

Strong Community Connection and Responsiveness

A strong connection was established with residents immediately following the event. Damage reports were collected in a timely manner, ensuring that needs were documented and addressed with minimal delay. The efficiency of this process was well received, with 89% of property owners indicating satisfaction with the approach.

Effective Communication with Residents

Survey results indicated that the majority of residents felt communication during the recovery phase was clear and effective. Timely updates and accessible information channels helped residents remain informed about available supports and next steps. This positive feedback demonstrates the value of consistent and transparent communication in building trust and supporting community recovery.

Municipal Business Continuity Role

Staff were aware of their role in business continuity and felt supported in the return-to-work process. Most community staff reported being aware of the critical functions within their own community; however, many were not aware of a business continuity plan or documentation of essential services relevant to this incident.

Return to Normal Operations

The majority of firefighting and IMT members had returned to normal duties and had cleared the backlog of work that had built up during their activation in the emergency. This is a good sign that business continuity was effective (operations didn’t cease), that workloads resumed reasonable levels and that staff were given the space and time to catch up on regular duty tasks. The County should be commended for supporting staff taking personal time off after the event to reconnect with friends and family, reflect on the event, and come back to work fit for duty.

Some roles, primarily in emergency services leadership, communications and finance, will have residual tasks from the 2025 Wildfire that will continue to require their attention for months to come. Space may need to be created in their work portfolios to accommodate these additional demands.

The County can leverage this success and apply these principles to future activations that may be longer in duration or have greater business continuity impact.

Challenges

Comprehensiveness of Community Recovery

Public events (e.g. town hall) focused primarily on the reclamation process. Though this was an important topic, this could have also been prepared as an opportunity to acknowledge loss and facilitate initial community healing. Town halls often present a starting point to initiate a more comprehensive recovery process while residents are curious about the response as part of their acceptance process in dealing with trauma. Though the public event did reactively address response questions, the subject matter experts to answer these questions were not available. Advance planning allows the County to identify relevant experts for public events and clarify shared responsibilities in emergency mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Ongoing Resident Communication

Residents primarily sought reassurance that communication would be effective in future emergencies, expressing concerns about the real and perceived limited time provided during the initial evacuation. **There is opportunity to enhance** communication regarding aftermath concerns such as recovery activities, animal safety, navigating insurance, and shared responsibilities.

Accessibility of Resident Contact Information

Response and recovery efforts were affected by challenges in accessing accurate and complete resident contact information. This limited the ability to reach all affected individuals quickly and consistently, and in turn, made coordinated recovery communications more difficult to sustain. Municipalities are limited in their ability to collect, use and retain private resident information so a balance is needed to ensure privacy while at the same time meeting the needs and expectations of residents in an emergency.

Limited Staff Support

Community recovery was led by a small group of individuals for several weeks following the incident's conclusion. These same staff had already invested long shifts in the response without reprieve (as was received by the ECC when the AHIMT provided relief).

Perceived Gaps in Support

Despite positive feedback regarding communications, 40% of surveyed residents reported feeling inadequately supported during recovery. Although a significant portion of the community felt their needs were not fully met, this more accurately underscores the importance of setting the right expectations with the public around the responsibilities for recovery and preparedness, as it relates to building resilience to negative impacts. It is unlikely that all recovery needs of all residents could be met, however public education around personal preparedness and recovery will assist to build realistic public expectations and improve community resilience.

Specific Areas of Recovery Need

Residents identified several priority areas where they required additional support, including financial assistance and insurance navigation, debris removal and clean-up, and opportunities for ongoing community meetings. These findings suggest that while immediate recovery actions were effective, further resources and programming would strengthen long-term resilience and ensure residents feel fully supported through the recovery process.

Unmet Expectations Around Recovery Services

Some residents anticipated immediate recovery actions following the event, such as the repair or replacement of fences. Delays in addressing these needs created frustration and highlighted a disconnect between resident expectations and the pace of formal recovery programs.

Limitations of Provincial Recovery Program (HARP)

The scope of the Provincial HARP program presented challenges, as it did not provide coverage for non-insured items such as fences. This gap left residents without support for certain tangible recovery needs, resulting in dissatisfaction and confusion about available options.

Recovery Recommendations

1. **Ensure a cross-disciplinary team leads recovery.** Recovery is a complex and cross-sector discipline. The recovery team should be selected from a range of support services and should be staffed to provide depth and adequate coverage. The complexity of recovery can be better managed by a larger team, beyond those who typically manage the provision of support services. This will aim to reduce staff burnout.

2. **Clarify staff expectations on regular duty business roles and critical service prioritization.** Ensure that staff and leadership are clear on which regular business roles in their community must return first (and when). This is

directly connected to a demobilization plan, but also enables staff to begin recovery and resume regular business methodically and effectively.

3. **Formalize the recovery program by further capitalizing on the framework utilized in this event**, especially in communication regarding aftermath concerns such as recovery activities, animal safety, navigating insurance, and engagement activities. This will capture the institutional knowledge, tools and resources used for future emergencies.

4. **Continue to build up the Emergency Services Peer Support Team.** Add additional team members in alignment with wise practices through peer nominations. Consider a cross-section of peers at various ranks so that all members have access to a peer of similar rank and file. Looking forward at future program growth, the SCES Peer Team could function alongside a corporate Sturgeon County Peer Team with representatives from the Incident Management Team as well to support all responders. This will relieve some of the pressures on the current peer team and provide homogenous groups for emergency responders as resources to the IMT members.

5. **Seek opportunities or tools to enhance systems for accessing accurate resident contact information.** Research contact information management processes and systems that align with privacy legislation.

6. **Enhance recovery program design and communication.** Establish clear, pre-approved recovery protocols that outline the types of support available for both insured and non-insured losses (e.g., fences, debris removal), while clarifying any limitations. Communicate these protocols early and transparently to residents to ensure expectations are aligned with what the program can reasonably provide. Where provincial program limitations exist, consider offering municipal-level guidance or information about alternative support options, while recognizing that not all gaps can be addressed or funded by the Province or County.

Financial Review

Overview

TSI conducted interviews with Sturgeon County senior finance and procurement leadership. All offered thorough responses during their interviews and completed a detailed questionnaire, providing extensive information about their involvement in the ECC and financial operations.

Due to the need to redact confidential information, the County was unable to provide TSI with the detailed cost tracking and application data. Therefore, a comprehensive review and evaluation of the financial data was out of scope.

The County intends to submit a funding request to the Alberta Hazard Assistance and Resiliency Program (HARP), formerly known as the Alberta Disaster Program.

The HARP application estimates have been submitted to the Province for their review. The County is waiting to hear back from the province. At the time of this report, the total funding request from Sturgeon County for the HARP program is $11.5 million.

Feedback from engaged parties consistently highlighted the proactive establishment of financial processes in the early stages, attributing this approach to achieving very positive outcomes. This suggests a strong correlation between early financial planning and successful project execution, emphasizing the importance of foundational financial frameworks.

Successes

Rapid Activation

The finance staff were in the ECC the day it was activated. The Manager, Corporate Finance & Treasury was the Finance / Administrative Section Chief from the beginning and was included in the discussion on how to manage the fire disaster.

The Finance Business Partner was assigned to the ECC very quickly to assist the Manager and ECC team. They provided administrative support and started the process for data entry.

Cost Tracking

The finance team promptly established new job and general ledger codes to track fire disaster-related expenses. Additionally, new payroll codes were implemented in the Avanti payroll system, allowing employees to record time spent on fire suppression efforts.

An Excel workbook was utilized to track all costs and purchases. Key expenditures, including internal and external personnel check-ins and check-outs at various sites, were initially recorded on ICS Form 211 (Check-In). This data was subsequently transcribed into the Excel workbook. Additionally, ICS Form 214 (Activity Log) was employed to monitor activities, with any associated costs also being entered into the

Excel workbook. The ICS 211 and 214 forms were used to confirm whether resources were on site during the hours billed.

To efficiently track County equipment, a Titan GPS geo-fence was implemented, addressing the initial lack of a system for internal equipment mobilized to the incident. This geo-fence successfully monitored total engine hours and time on-site for all internal equipment, significantly simplifying the calculation of equipment costs. This method proved to be highly effective for tracking equipment usage during the disaster.

Early access to detailed and accurate information was critical and highly beneficial for planning and cost tracking.

Financial Oversight

Financial oversight during the emergency response relied heavily on the use of spreadsheets to track all expenditures and open purchase orders. This system ensured transparency and accountability for financial transactions. Upon the disbandment of the ECC, the finance team assumed responsibility for the reconciliation of all outstanding purchases.

IMT survey respondents noted that the finance/admin section was able to establish effective processes for tracking financial information, vendor payments, and internal staff lists, enabling quick post-event payments

Training & Experience

The finance team possesses significant experience in emergency operations. All staff members have participated in mock ECC operations. Both the Manager and the Finance Business Partner have completed ICS 100 training. The Manager has prior experience managing large-scale projects, including the Covid-19 grant process. The Financial Business Partner played a crucial role in the Buck Lake fire disaster in 2023, providing invaluable financial management expertise to the County during that crisis.

Cohesive Financial Team

The Finance/Admin team felt they worked exceptionally well together, demonstrating strong collaboration and adaptability. Despite the long days and intensity of the response, the team maintained a positive atmosphere

Challenges

Increased Credit Limits for Emergencies

A key adjustment involved raising the individual purchasing credit card limits for finance staff to $75,000. This expedited necessary purchases, offering a quicker resolution than waiting for invoices or establishing new accounts. Credit cards are, however, not a sustainable method of payment in long-duration emergencies.

Reliance on Hard Copy Paperwork

The finance group felt the reliance on paper forms created additional challenges. A reduction to rely on paper forms and transition to tablets or laptops would significantly increase efficiency, accuracy and streamline operations.

Information Flow between the ICP/ECC

A common theme heard across all engagement was the challenge in information flow between the activities in the field and the staff working in the ICP/ECC. The same was felt within the finance section. Improving this connectivity would enhance situational awareness and coordination. It will also likely improve purchasing efficiencies.

Unclear Staff Entitlements

Preplanning was not in place for staff entitlements and incidental expenses, including confusion around staff pay and mileage during the incident.

Access to Vendor Lists

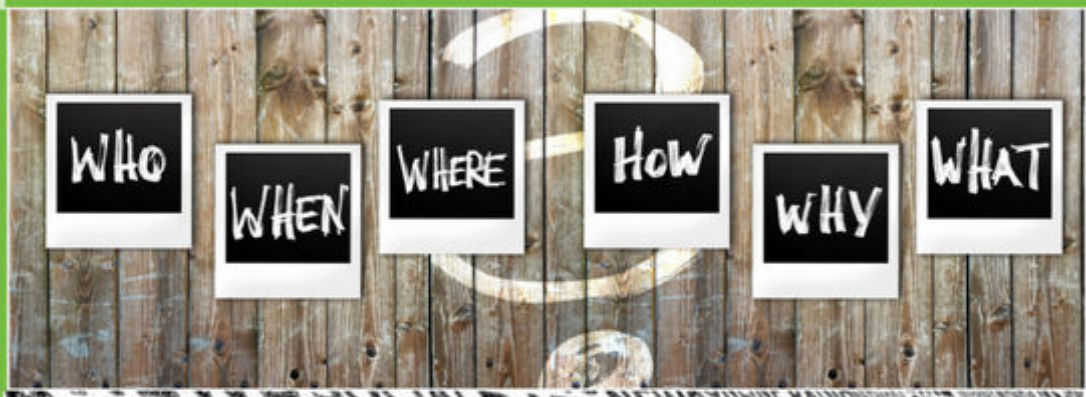
Pre-qualified vendor lists were not easily accessible or shared early enough in the response. Procurement guidelines were unclear or unavailable to groups in the Incident Management Team who would have benefited from this awareness to increase effective decision-making and possibly reduce emergency costs.

Financial Recommendations

1. **Develop and distribute clear guidelines for staff entitlements and incidental expenses**. During emergencies, staff must make quick decisions and often incur out-of-pocket expenses; clear guidelines help avoid uncertainty, prevent delays in reimbursement, and promote fairness and transparency.

2. **Standardize procurement and vendor documentation.** In collaboration with all community procurement staff, SREMP should establish clear guidelines for procurement processes and preferred vendor lists to ensure accurate financial tracking. By creating and sharing pre-established lists, ad hoc purchases would be reduced. These lists should be incorporated into the processes and plans and made universally accessible by both Finance and Logistics staff.

Crisis Communications



Overview

Crisis communications are the planned and coordinated exchange of information before, during, and after a crisis to ensure public safety, maintain trust, reduce misinformation, and support effective decision-making and recovery. This exists through the information function of the ICS structure, under the direction of the Information Officer (IO). Unlike general public communications, emergency communications focus on urgent, high-stakes situations where clarity, accuracy, and timeliness are critical. In the context of this After-Action Review, the information function was reviewed to ensure appropriate processes and practices are in place to foster successful information outputs, and the execution of crisis communications were examined to assess how effectively information was shared among responders, elected officials, and the public.

Despite complexities, the public communications outputs produced by the Sturgeon County team are largely appropriate and aligned with best practices to an acceptable degree. There are opportunities for improved consistency, the incorporation of plain language to a greater degree, increased empathetic and human-centric practices, and the inclusion of more visuals, such as photos and videos (again, with an appropriate level of empathy based on the photo/video content).

These areas of improvement are not without exception. The level of clarity and consistency varied throughout the event, as expected. Within that timeline, there were significant successes that can be built on moving forward, including the Communications Team's rapid development of a re-entry guide, which was not just comprehensive in nature but also clear and actionable.

When conducting a review of crisis communications following a major emergency or disaster, it's important to focus on both ends of communications; on one hand, evaluating the quality of public information and the connection built between the municipality and its residents throughout the event; on the other hand, it's critical to assess the internal structures associated with the execution of crisis communications. Oftentimes, the latter disproportionately impacts the former, as was the case for Sturgeon County.

To evaluate these functions objectively, crisis communications are viewed through a core set of principles. These core principles remain consistent across emergencies.

Table 6 Crisis Communications Core Principles

Principle	Reasoning	Pitfall
Timeliness	Information evolves quickly during a crisis. Provide timely updates, helping to establish the County as a source of truth.	Failing to communicate promptly creates an information vacuum, which can lead to a decline in public trust and an increase in misinformation.
Accuracy	Information must be verified as factual before dissemination. Get it right the first time, while recognizing the rapid changes in information that occur in a crisis. Correct false or misleading information permeating the public conversation.	Inaccurate or ambiguous messaging can create confusion, leading to heightened public anxiety and erosion of public trust.
Consistency	The County must establish clear resident expectations in public communications, including details on where, when, and how residents can obtain updates.	A lack of consistency, to residents, acts as another form of information vacuum and can be perceived as a lack of transparency, resulting in reduced trust. A lack of consistency can also drive residents to other sources, regardless of the level of accuracy involved.
Transparency	The County must be transparent about the situation, sharing all information that is known and acceptable for public disclosure. This includes responding to resident inquiries and frustrations.	Vague responses or the perception of withheld information can result in eroded trust and increased public tension.
Empathy	The brain operates differently during a crisis; the County must connect with residents on an emotional and human level, through all messaging.	A lack of empathy can cause friction between the organization and the community.

Additional thematic elements are considered in the creation of the message. At the same time, some areas of operations (i.e., internal structures, capacity, etc.) are evaluated through a combined lens of best practice, emerging trends, and situation-specific challenges.

Successes

External Support

It is considered best practice for municipalities to access crisis communications support through two means. The first step is to establish Mutual Aid Agreements (or less formal agreements, if a formalized structure can't be established) with municipal partners, leveraging their communications capacity within the ECC. This did occur, as Sturgeon County brought in outside support. The support and expertise provided was greatly appreciated by County staff.

In addition to bolstering expertise and experience, these external resources play a key role in simply building team capacity, supporting appropriate and efficient resource management.

Support from North Central All-Hazards IMT

The arrival of the North Central AHIMT was noted to have resulted in improved communication structures and increased efficiency, serving as local evidence of the impact of bringing in experienced external resources. Incorporating this greater level of structure earlier in the activation process in future events will eliminate many of the challenges experienced in the 2025 wildfire response.

Training Needs Identified

The Communications Team immediately recognized the need for additional training and has already begun scheduling basic ICS training for all members while looking at further opportunities based on lessons observed during their experience in the ECC.

Crisis Communications Plan

Sturgeon County's Crisis Communications Plan (CCP) is informed by best practice at the time of creation, with a significant amount of valuable information available to communicators. There is opportunity to improve upon its theoretical applicability by adjusting its effectiveness to align with practical crisis response wise practices. This is discussed further in the challenges section below.

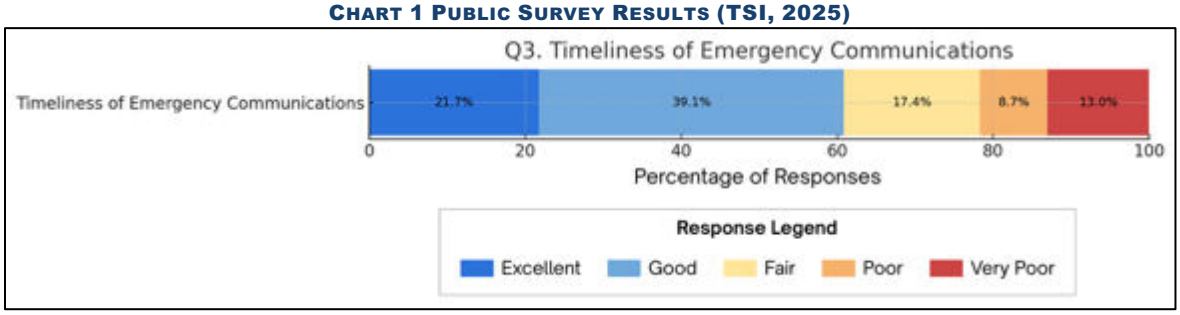
Public Communications

The execution of crisis communications, including outputs and associated interactions with the community, lives in two worlds. The first evaluates efforts based on a review of individual outputs, including alignment with best practice, while the second gauges the impact of communications on public sentiment. In a perfect world, these are largely aligned, as is the case for Sturgeon County.

In a public survey of wildfire evacuees, many respondents (61%) rated the timeliness of emergency communications–including evacuation notices and public updates–as “Good” or “Excellent,” with another 17% of respondents rating timeliness as “Fair,” which is perceived as a neutral-positive response, with room for improvement. The

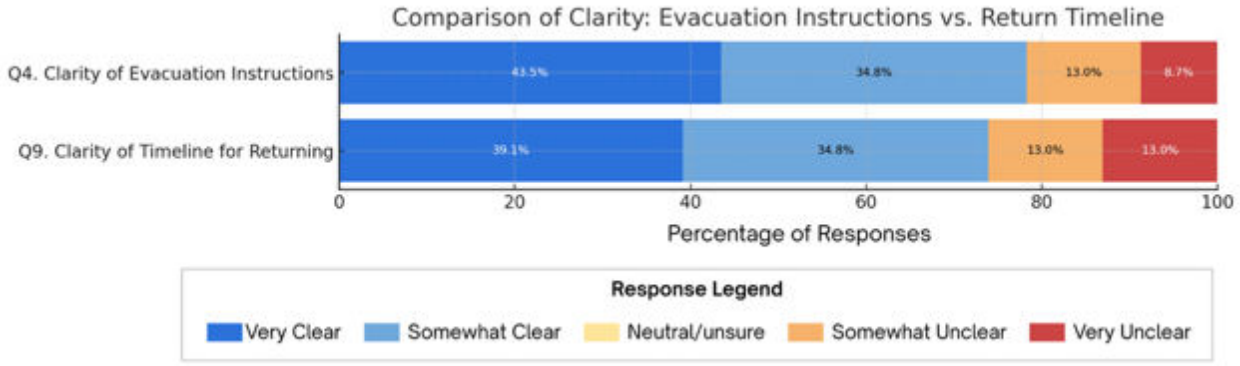
remaining 22% qualified the timeliness of information communicated as either “Poor” (8.7%) or “Very Poor” (13%).

CHART 1 PUBLIC SURVEY RESULTS (TSI, 2025)



Similarly, nearly 80% of surveyed evacuees found that evacuation instructions were clear, with a similar 74% expressing a positive opinion regarding specific re-entry communications as well.

CHART 2 PUBLIC SURVEY RESULTS (TSI, 2025)



These are positive results; however, one in five respondents expressed some degree of confusion during evacuation, and another quarter of respondents found the re-entry timelines unclear, indicating room for improvement in communication consistency and accessibility. The absence of neutral responses in both questions suggests that residents had clear opinions driven by personal experiences; either they understood instructions, or they didn’t.

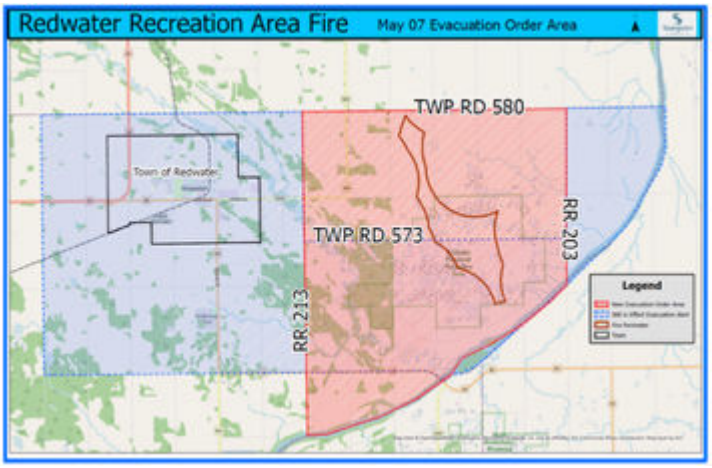
Emergency Alerts

The County's use of Alberta Emergency Alerts (AEAs) occurred promptly at the onset of the wildfire, with a steady cadence of Alerts issued following May 3rd, 2025. Initial messaging was appropriately proactive, effectively laying the groundwork for potential evacuations and setting clear expectations amongst Alert recipients. From there, AEA content escalated appropriately up to the point of initial evacuation alerts being issued on May 6th, 2025, and thereafter as the situation continued to evolve.

Upon reviewing all alerts issued throughout the event, it was found that alert content consistently followed a clear structure, aligning with best practices in executing AEAs.

This consistency is a strength, providing residents with familiar cues during an evolving emergency.

The inclusion of visual maps was important, as the geographic descriptions may have been challenging for Alert recipients to interpret and understand quickly (i.e., "...between Range Road 213 East to Range Road 203 and between Township Road 580 South to Township Road 573"). This was how most information through AEAs was presented: technically precise but lacking plain language. While this may create challenges or confusion, the County was correct in its wording and followed best practices in the development of AEAs.



Source 7 Alberta Emergency Alert (Government of Alberta)

Moving forward, the County should include a minimum of three (3) identifiers in every alert/map:

1. Named places: Communities, hamlets, neighbourhoods/subdivisions, etc. Put conventional location references on maps to make it easier for residents to understand quickly.

2. Plain-language Boundaries: Prioritize highways and major roads/landmarks over minor range roads (i.e. North of HWY 28, West of RR 223, South of TWP RD 570, East of the Sturgeon River).

   Landmarks people know (such as schools, recreation facilities, rivers, industrial sites, etc.) can be used in developing maps and alerts, as well.

3. Let residents self-check based on their current location, through easily incorporated digital tools. Those issuing an alert can add a button labelled “Am I Affected?”, which goes to an address checker on the County’s website, and returns a clear statement of whether the resident is inside, outside, or adjacent to an impacted or active zone. This can be incorporated into alerts, social media posts, media releases, as a link and QR code.

For those who are new to digital literacy, or whose internet accessibility is challenged, the County can publish a call-taker script for County customer service representatives to paste an address into the same checker, and read back the results and instructions to the resident in question.

While adjacent to these core location markers, there are ways to make the content more accessible to users, including the incorporation of a mobile-friendly “tap-to-open” map link that shows the shaded area; and attaching a .jpeg or .pdf file of the map with the polygon, and a list of named areas and major roads.

One of the strongest elements was the actionable guidance included in every alert; early advisories emphasized preparatory actions (e.g., preparing documents, gathering supplies), and evacuation orders were generally unambiguous. Evacuees were also given clear instructions on where to go, how to register, and other relevant details. Through this high level of actionability and clarity, the County was able to set clear expectations amongst AEA recipients.

Call to Action

All communications were developed with a high level of actionability. This included clear instructions for community members at all stages of the emergency response, with messaging that set clear and reasonable expectations among various audiences. The development of a centralized webpage for information and increased consistency in messaging from initial ECC activation to evacuee re-entry supported this actionability.

Timing

Communications were timely. This would be a success in any emergency, and deserves specific applause in recognition of just how quickly Sturgeon County's situation evolved, at all hours of the day and night, and often without warning. Consistency is not the same as timeliness, and while there is an opportunity to improve consistency moving forward, success in issuing timely messaging lays a foundation for greater consistency in the future.

Challenges

Internal Structure

The way in which the Information Officer (IO) and communications function was established in the Sturgeon County ECC did not follow ICS structure. Throughout activation, all members of the Communications Team were assigned and operating under the IO title, rather than having a designated lead IO supported by a structured team with defined roles.

Standard ICS information protocols establish a single IO within the Command Staff, with assigned supporting roles (often referred to as Assistant Information Officers [AIO]), often titled based on core deliverables, to ensure clarity of responsibility, unity of command, and coordinated messaging. Under this structure, depending on the size of the Communications Team, all members working under the supervision of the lone IO can be simply referred to as AIOs with specific roles such as Site Information, Social Media, Media, and so on. This appropriately separates the information structure into a leadership and functional positions:

- **Leadership Position (IO):** Develops information strategies, coordinates all public information activities, interfaces with the IC/ECC Director.

- **Functional Positions (AIOs):** Support the IO in execution of information functions, such as executing specific information tasks, managing media relations, ensuring accurate and timely information dissemination, and so on.

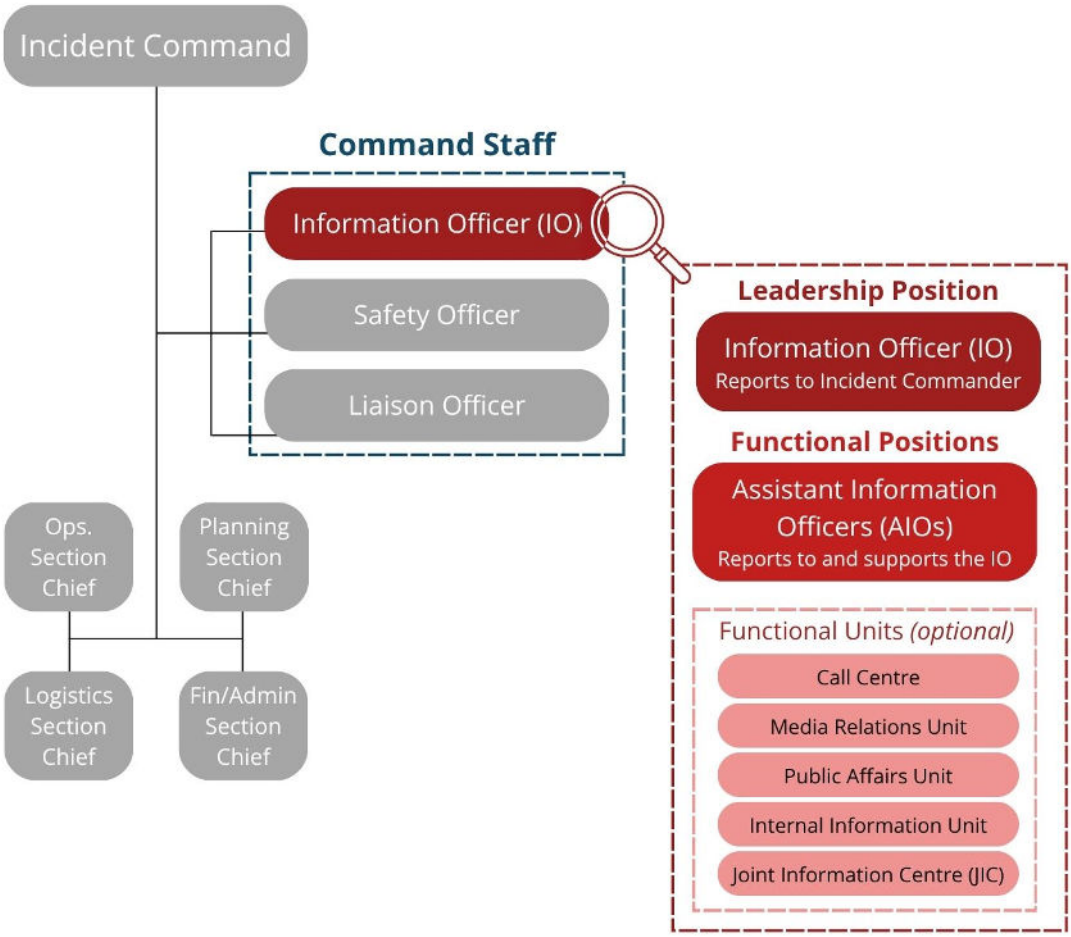


FIGURE 1 COMMAND STRUCTURE FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS IN AN ICP

The all-IO structure that was adopted by Sturgeon County went against best practice. In an ICS-driven structure, the IO would be the only member of the team wearing a red vest, creating a defined leadership role and a clear point person for others within the ECC to go through for communications-related needs. Anecdotally, the absence of this structure, where the IO and AIOs were wearing multiple red vests, did create confusion within the ECC, as those outside the information function did not know who the designated IO was at any given point. Ensuring alignment with ICS structure, and a single, red-vested IO, eliminates this confusion, creating clearer paths of communication and command within the ECC, while also having the impact of allowing AIOs to function effectively within their respective roles. These roles and responsibilities should be outlined in a County Crisis Communications Plan.

After Day 1 of activation, the Sturgeon County information function established a site AIO to take photos in the field and to relay information between the IC and the ECC. This position, too, would warrant wearing a red vest, while on-site only.

While it was widely acknowledged that the first days of activation were unstructured, it did not help that communications were not fully integrated into overall emergency operations. The Communications Team, to their credit, was working under very stressful conditions, with limited support from more experienced personnel within the ECC or the County, and with little proactive collaboration amongst Command Staff. This was improved when North Central Region support arrived, with a widespread belief that their involvement added critical structure and provided invaluable guidance in increasing the communication process efficiencies.

Communications Approval Process

Timely and accurate public information is essential in emergencies, so that residents can make informed decisions, and to help in establishing the County as a source of truth. In this incident, communications required approval from the IC, whose field operations and separation from the ECC sometimes delayed review.

This delay compromised four of the five principles of effective crisis communications. Most significantly impacted was the opportunity for timely and consistent communications, with the potential of negatively impacting accuracy and transparency, as well. Where changes to messaging were required, additional layers of back-and-forth compounded these challenges. While there was a perception raised by some outside of the information function that public communications were taking too long to be disseminated, initial communications drafting was often executed in a timely and responsive manner.

Through the AAR process, it was discovered that as these perceptions progressed, message revisions and additional approval steps were introduced outside of established operational approvals, including through local elected officials. This, too, increased turnaround times.

To support timeliness and consistency, the approvals process should be clearly documented and exercised before an incident, and then followed during operations, with delegated authority applied when the primary approver is unavailable. Again, drafting by the information team was often completed quickly, and perceived delays were primarily associated with the approval workflow.

Capacity and Experience

Sturgeon County was in a somewhat unique position following a fair amount of turnover that impacted the organization's crisis communications capacity, leading up to ECC activation. This included the fact that across all members of the Communications Team, none had previously been activated in an ECC, and there was a notable lack of experience in executing public crisis communications at the municipal level.

This is not the fault of any Communications Team member, many of whom had either attended or had scheduled training (including ICS-100) prior to the onset of the wildfire. In many of those cases, the ICS training would have occurred at the time during which Sturgeon County's ECC was activated. Regardless, when it comes to crisis communications, training is critical to success, but there is no substitute for experience. Where capacity can be built through theoretical and practical knowledge, it must be supported by on-the-ground experience. That was an area in which Sturgeon County lacked capacity.

External Support Considerations

On numerous occasions, discussions were held regarding the potential of bringing in external expertise to support the management of communications or to assume an IO leadership role within the ECC. However, that did not occur; anecdotally, there were several reasons that additional support was not secured, including that there was a perception that bringing the contracted position up to speed would create extra work when time was limited; that the in-house County Communications Team members were best suited to tackle the role, due to existing organizational and community knowledge; and that bringing in outside support could reflect poorly on County staff.

Many of those involved in ECC operations, including communicators and personnel in other roles, described the initial 72 hours of activation as "chaos." This assessment is typical in an emergency of this nature and emphasizes the need for solutions to reduce chaos, particularly during those initial operational periods. Had external resources been brought in to support or lead crisis communications, including establishing an appropriate structure and workflow, many of the challenges experienced would likely have been mitigated or addressed more effectively by parties with more experience working in the ECC environment and under ICS structures.

The lack of a structured agreement between municipal partners and Sturgeon County specifically for communications support created challenges and inefficiencies. This included technological barriers, with obstacles in providing system access to non-County team members and integrating them into County communications platforms and assets.

At one point, concerns were brought forward to County leadership about the number of people being granted administrator access to Sturgeon County's Facebook page. While permissions can be altered as a person joins the team and again after they stand down, there should be clear processes and practices that help avoid these sorts of issues in the first place. It is becoming common practice for an IT team member to work in the ECC for the first 48-72 hours of activation to address some of these unanticipated or emerging challenges.

The second method of securing external support is through a contracted, third-party crisis communications expert or communications professional with a significant amount of crisis communications experience and expertise. This can be done on an as-needed basis, through a more formalized Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), or through an

ongoing retainer structure, in which a contracted third party provides ongoing advisory, training, and issue management support, while also serving as a crisis communications resource upon ECC activation. This is a proven model, which was particularly valuable to many municipalities in Alberta and beyond when capacity was stretched thin during the 2023 Wildfires, including high-profile wildfires such as those in the Town of Edson, Alberta, and the Columbia-Shuswaps wildfires in B.C.

There are times at which it is appropriate, instead of bringing in additional members to the IO team, that an IO mentor be engaged to support the team without taking on a role in execution. The local members of the IO team know their community and their municipality, and are well-versed in using their own tools; securing guidance in the initial phases of an emergency would help with the early phases of standing up the information function.

Scheduling

Communications were initially activated as a two-person function, through which—despite the titles used—one person held the role of IO, and the other took on the functional role of Digital Communications Specialist. This approach evolved in reflection of the scope of emergency and public communications requirements, at which point staffing was expanded to include a three-person per day schedule for the information function, with members essentially fulfilling the role of IO, Site AIO, and Digital Communications Specialist. As the event continued to evolve, the entire seven-person County Communications Team was engaged, and then supported by other County staff.

While scheduling lacked consistency and clear structure, particularly early on, this is typical during an ECC activation, and is not cause for concern. As scheduling needs evolved, the IO and their supporting team members were intentional in how staffing was managed.

Where their efforts were challenged, however, was in the lack of human capacity. Communicators regularly worked shifts that ranged from 12 to 20 hours, and some remained on call after leaving the ECC. This was made more challenging by the lengthy commute for the IO/AIOs, some of whom reported struggling to stay awake while driving home after a shift.

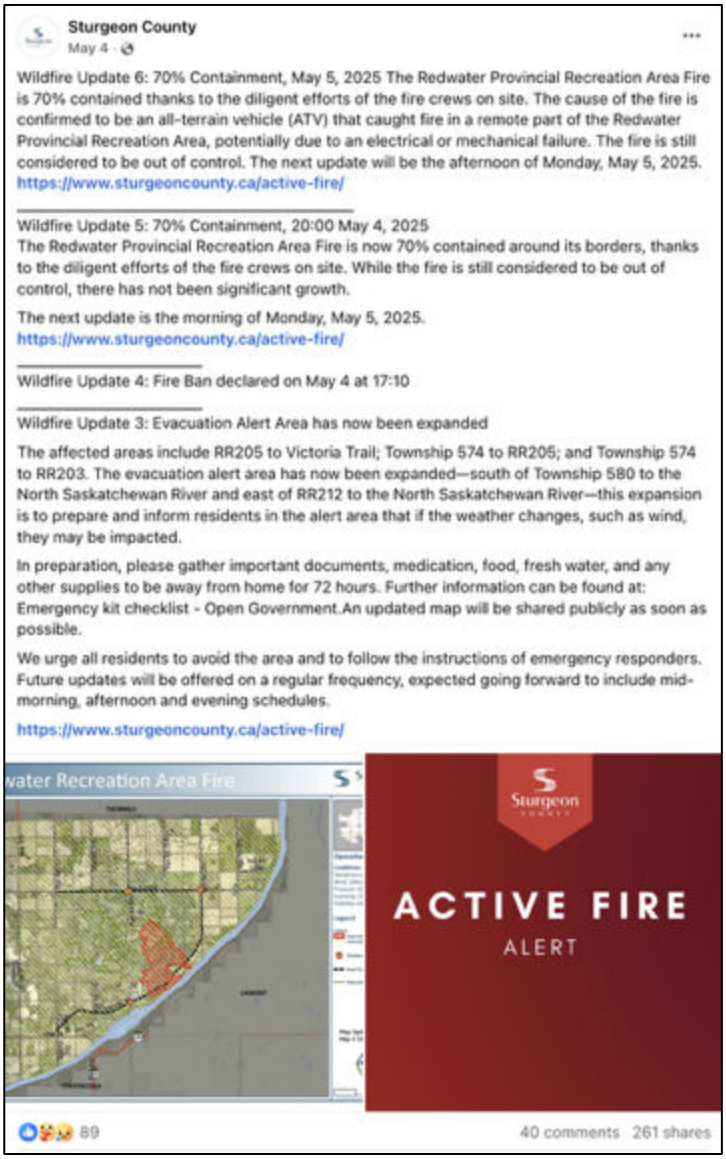
Crisis Communications Plan (CCP) Adaptability

In addition to requiring updates to account for shifting best practices and industry trends since its creation, the CCP has the potential to be a more nimble, adaptable, and actionable document in the event of an emergency. Given the scope, complexity and size (approx.150 pages) of the County's CCP, it functions more as an organizational Crisis Communications Framework (CCF), with some elements straying towards a Crisis, Reputation, and Issues Management Plan (CRIMP). These documents can serve as both training tools outside of a crisis and as ongoing frameworks for managing day-to-day and operational issues; however, they are not adaptable in an emergency.

The Communications Team would have benefited from a concise CCP, aligned with best practices, that provides critical and actionable in-crisis information, practices, processes, and resources (including appropriate tools, templates, and checklists). These documents are concise, featuring easy-to-understand graphics and visuals instead of lengthy text, and include actionable and adaptable processes. These are essential resources, not just for a less experienced ECC Communications Team as was the case in Sturgeon County, but for all communicators, and particularly in the chaotic first 48-72 hours of an emergency.

Increase Human-Centred Communications

While the County demonstrated strong operational fundamentals in areas such as timeliness and, above all others, in actionability (which is a significant success), there are gaps in consistency, clarity, and empathetic messaging.

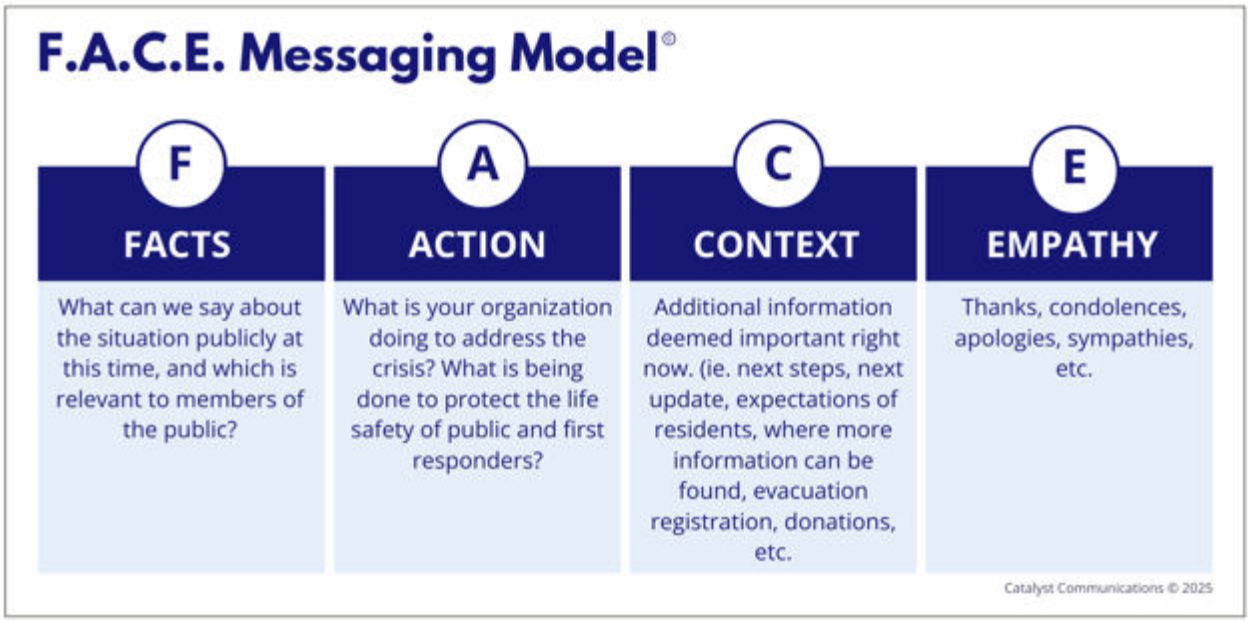


The latter of these, where empathy is required, refers specifically to public communications released through channels such as social media and the County website; AEAs require strictly informational content. These more consistent public communications were effective but procedural, and would benefit from stronger human-centred and inclusive communication practices. While messaging was effective in delivering essential information, there was room for increased accessibility and empathy, which are crucial in building public trust during high-stress events.

It was reported, anecdotally, that the direction from ECC leadership was to include only the facts of the fire, and to avoid softer language, so as not to editorialize the information. This approach is outdated based on current best practice.

This can be aided by the inclusion of one or more trusted spokesperson(s), known to the community. It would have been helpful, for instance, to have a daily video update featuring the Mayor, with a script developed by the IO. This approach will prove helpful in future events of a similar scale. It can also be valuable in balancing the influx of media requests, where reporters can be directed to the daily video update as a first point of contact. This approach will also help to improve messaging consistency and timeliness.

Additionally, incorporating emerging and best practices into a new/revised CCP will provide the IO and their Communications Team with a clear path to developing consistent, clear, and empathy-infused messaging. The use of the F.A.C.E. Messaging Model is one example that can be utilized and implemented immediately.



The County's commitment to rapid and responsive updates was evident across all phases of activation. This is essential, as it supports a high level of actionability seen across communications, including clear instructions.

Overall, the evaluation finds Sturgeon County's public communications to be strong, but—again—procedural. The County excelled in delivering timely, actionable information, but fell short in human-centred areas of empathy, tone, and visuals. By adopting clearer formatting, differentiating alert levels visually, and incorporating additional visuals (e.g., photos, video), as well as including deeper empathetic messaging, crisis communications can be strengthened moving forward. This approach would help foster community trust, calm public anxieties, and build resilience.

Alberta Emergency Alert (AEA) Access

In reviewing all Alerts issued, there was a notable stretch of confusion in issued and re-issued/corrected alerts between 23:07 on May 7th, 2025, and 00:01 on May 8th, 2025,

during which time there were six (6) AEAs issued in less than an hour. This was not the result of situational changes, but rather incorrect wording in the issued AEAs compared to what was intended.

It is understood that during this time, County staff were not the ones issuing AEAs as the Communications Team members working did not have access to the AEA system. Instead, they provided instructions to a member of the provincial AEA team, who issued the Alerts on their behalf. This emphasizes the importance of having the maximum number of two (2) County Communications Team members with access to the AEA system, and for one of those two trained members to always be active (to the greatest extent possible and reasonable).

This is an instance in which County messaging and directions were appropriate, but the proper execution was lost in the hand-off.

Public Notification System

As a member of NRCAER, Sturgeon County has access to the Everbridge platform, a Public Notification System (PNS). There are several similar platforms, all of which offer different features, but share the same general directional applicability. Everbridge was used to activate the IMT. However, those on the County IO team were unaware of the system and its potential functional capability to connect with residents in the early days of activation; it was not used until late in the event. At that point, low levels of opt-in registration meant that County staff were working diligently to input residents' contact information where possible; there are privacy considerations that accompany this practice, and the level of reactivity seen in this instance is noted as unusual.

A local PNS is valuable in reaching community members directly, particularly for those alerts which would not be appropriately issued as AEAs. However, these are opt-in tools which require resident registration.

Moving forward, the County could advertise Everbridge (or a different PNS, if they choose an alternative local or regional platform) and encourage residents to register. This can also be leveraged in the pre-crisis/risk communications phase, alongside preparatory messaging.

SOURCE 8 NR CAER

Communications Recommendations

1. **Revert to an ICS-aligned ICP communications structure.** Adopt the standard ICS communications model that includes a single lead IO, supported in leadership by role specific assistants(i.e., Social Media, Media, etc.).
    a. Develop a Communications Team organizational chart for emergencies. Pre-define roles and responsibilities within the Communications Team for different scales of emergency, including clear lines of reporting and task assignment, as well as the potential integration of third-party resources.
    b. Establish a delegation protocol. As part of organizational chart design, pre-designate role adoption for when the on-duty IO is unavailable, without assigning the IO title broadly across all team members.

2. **Establish reporting pathways for communications approval.** Design and establish a clear process for reviewing draft public communications for authorization in a streamlined and efficient manner.

3. **Implement minimum training standards for crisis communications.** Develop a training schedule to continually enhance crisis communications capacity.
    a. Establish consistent expectations for ICS training. Ensure all Communications Team members are trained to a minimum standard of ICS-200. The Information Officer would benefit from ICS-300.
    b. Incorporate and encourage role-specific training. Ensure opportunities for individual professional development for those designated to perform specific functions within the ECC Communications Team structure.

4. **Integrate the Communications Team into ICP planning cycles.** Involve the designated IO in Planning P meetings to ensure they serve as the single point of contact between the ICP and public communications functions.

5. **Review and update the Crisis Communications Plan.** Reimagine a user-friendly, concise and adaptable CCP appropriate for in-crisis activation.
    a. Update/revise the current County CCP as a Crisis Communications Framework or Crisis, Reputation, and Issues Management Plan. Recognizing the value that exists within the current CCP, undergo an update and revision process that translates the current CCP into more of a framework, or broader issues management plan, appropriate for training and ongoing reference.
    b. Develop a series of adaptable templates for in-crisis actioning. Create scenario-specific and general emergency communications templates for quick adaptation, ensuring brand and visual consistency across all templates.
    c. Incorporate F.A.C.E. Messaging Model for a consistent process. Leverage the use of F.A.C.E. Messaging Model to develop easily understandable and digestible messaging, free of complexities and jargon, with an emphasis on a consistent flow of messaging and a high level of empathy.

6. **Increase internal capacity for a Public Notification System (PNS).** Leverage the use of Everbridge (current) or a similar PNS system, either as a member of SREMP or individually, as the County, as an appropriate PNS for emergency communications.
    a. Train County communications staff in using the chosen PNS. Ensure a comprehensive understanding of how to utilize PNS effectively for rapid implementation and efficient use in crises.
    b. Develop PNS message templates. Within the PNS, develop a series of adaptable message templates for high-risk scenarios specific to Sturgeon County, for easy implementation in-crisis.
    c. Advertise PNS publicly. Secure opt-in registration of community members to County or regional PNS on an ongoing basis, outside of emergencies, through consistent promotion and advertising. This is often done in alignment with Emergency Services public education campaigns.

7. **Streamline access for use of Alberta Emergency Alerts (AEA).** Ensure the maximum number of allowable County staff have access to the provincial AEA system, and are trained in its use.

8. **Establish a process for involving third-party communications support.** Establish Mutual Aid Agreements with municipal partners and MOUs with third-party communications consultants, whose expertise and experience can be leveraged to support County capacity in the event of an emergency.

9. **Set Council expectations in advance.** Provide pre-crisis briefings to Council on the role of IOs during emergencies, including their reporting structures and effective crisis communications, as well as how elected officials can support communications efforts constructively. Identify the key support role of the CAOs (further easing the burden on the IO team). This can be incorporated as part of a post-election Council session, or as its own session separately.

Improvement Opportunities

In addition to the system-wide recommendations provided earlier in this After-Action Review, several function-specific "quick wins" have been identified. These opportunities emerged both through this review process and through hotwashes conducted internally by Sturgeon County during and immediately following the 2025 wildfire response. Unlike broad recommendations that require structural or organizational shifts, these opportunities are more targeted improvements that can be implemented within individual ICS functions.

The intent is to provide staff serving in these roles with clear, actionable areas where their expertise and institutional knowledge can make an immediate difference. Many of these opportunities reflect challenges or efficiencies observed during recent responses and can be addressed through updates to processes, documentation, or practice at the functional level.

Importantly, the success of these improvements will rely on senior leadership enabling the time, tools, and support for those in these ICS functions to act on them. When given the space to lead development and champion implementation, these role-specific opportunities will strengthen operational readiness and contribute to the long-term resilience of Sturgeon County's emergency management system.

Table 7 Improvement Opportunities By ICS Role

Role	Improvement Opportunity
ECC Director / Incident Commander	• Consider purchasing Job Aid resource books for the ECC. This will provide all positions, including Unit Leaders, with user-friendly handbooks. They do not require laborious updating (purchase ready-made). Job aids complement the existing “All-Hazards Incident Management Team Response and Planning Guide”. • Working with IMT members, create pre-built objectives and key considerations for various hazards specific to the County then design these into the SREMP.
Information Officer	• Consider information or awareness boards pre-built on rollers for easy set up in the ICP/ECC
Safety Officer	• Utilize QR codes for responders to access Incident Report forms from multiple locations.
Liaison Officer	• Have a designated corporate Liaison Officer phone that can be handed off to incoming relief.

Role	Improvement Opportunity
Operations	• Pre-plan staging area and Staging Manager logistics and responsibilities
Planning	• Utilize QR codes for everyone necessary to be able to access the Incident Action Plan (IAP) digitally, reducing the critical amount and timing of photocopying. • Ensure preplans note to activate the Resource Unit Leader immediately • Establishing pre-existing agreements with printing companies • Establish a livestock evacuation pre-plan (utilize training exercises for groupthink).
Logistics	• Add a second printer to the ICP/ECC • Establish a catering rhythm at the immediate onset of an incident • Clarify if ESS food provision is provided from within Logistics or if this duty rests within ESS. • Pre-plan to order handwashing stations alongside porta-potties from the outset of an event. • Familiarize Logistics staff with the online NR CAER Resource Inventory System so the team has ongoing live access to heavy industry's available resources (people, apparatus, and equipment).
Finance & Administration	• Pre-build spreadsheets to support tracking; this is the only ICS section that does not have formal ICS forms available for use.
General / Emergency Management Coordinator	• Assess how current emergency processes could scale for larger incidents (more government entities, more resident impacts, larger geographic area impacted, etc.). • Incorporate the ICS Canada forms available online to have the instructions on how to complete the forms (and examples)

Role	Improvement Opportunity
	available to download. https://icscanada.ca/resources/ics-forms/ • Continue to encourage participation in complimentary training offered by partner organizations where possible. • Identify barriers to participate in training and IMT roles on an ongoing basis to ensure there is always sufficient depth in all positions. This can be done anecdotally and formally (e.g. surveys). Encourage feedback from team members regarding training and support needs to reduce barriers. • Create position-specific emergency management email addresses (e.g.InformationOfficer@SREMP.ca) • The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) note-taking in Teams presents a valuable opportunity to explore, being careful of privacy settings on some AI note-taking services. By enabling this feature, administrative and emergency response staff—such as Scribes—could benefit from streamlined documentation and enhanced efficiency, supporting more effective decision-making during emergencies.

Appendices

Appendix A: Engagement Summary

Coldwashes

100%
Activity Complete

Three coldwashes were hosted in June and July, garnering feedback from the ECC, firefighters and Council/CAO. Topics focused on Planning & Activation, Response activities and Recovery. Participants were engaged and shared thoughtfully.

Council Participation
7+

ECC Participation
30+

Firefighter Participation
20+

Interviews

100%
Activity Complete

One-on-one virtual and in-person interviews were conducted June 5 through August 15. An initial 25 interviewees were identified; as research continued, an additional 29 interviews were added. Participants shared freely and provided excellent insights.

Interview Invitations
54

Completed Interviews
46

Incomplete Interviews
8

Surveys

100%
Activity Complete

Four surveys were conducted, reaching out to Sturgeon County and Redwater Councils, the Incident Management Team including Business Continuity, firefighters, and the public who were in the evacuation zone. The public survey closed August 19.

Total Internal Surveys Sent
179

Internal Results Received
53%

Total Public Surveys Sent
77

Public Results Received
30%

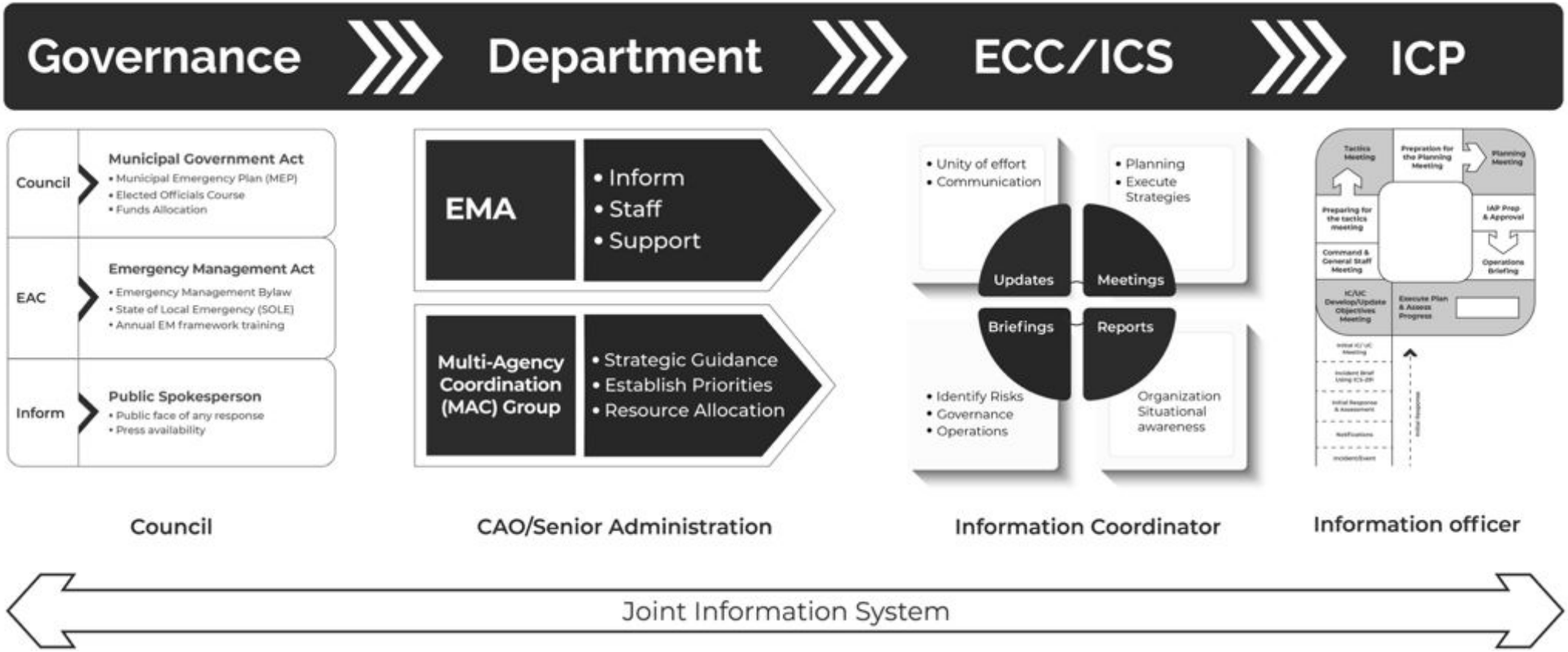
Documentation Review

100%
Activity Complete

443 documents were reviewed, in addition to 120 pictures and video.

Appendix B: Sample Joint Information System

The Joint Information System (JIS) is a scalable framework that connects the ICP, ECC, CAO, DEM, Regional Emergency Management Agency (EMA), Regional Emergency Advisory Committee (EAC) and Councils to ensure clear, coordinated communication during an incident. It outlines how information moves between operational and strategic levels, ensuring messages are accurate, consistent, and approved before release. The JIS also shows each partner where they fit into the information flow, clarifying how information is shared, validated, and communicated outward. This helps support timely decision-making, public confidence, and a unified message to the community—whether the response involves one spokesperson or a fully activated Joint Information Centre.



Appendix C: Acronyms

AEA	Alberta Emergency Alert
AEMA	Alberta Emergency Management Agency
AFRRCS	Alberta First Responder Radio Communications System
AHIMT	All-Hazards Incident Management Team
AIO	Assistant Information Officer
ATV	All-Terrain Vehicle
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CCF	Crisis Communications Framework
CCP	Crisis Communications Plan
CFFDRS	Canadian Forest Fire Danger Rating System
CRIMP	Crisis, Reputation, and Issues Management Plan
DEM	Director of Emergency Management
ECC	Emergency Coordination Centre
ESS	Emergency Social Services
F.A.C.E.	Framework for Accessible, Clear, and Empathetic Messaging
FBP	Fire Behaviour Prediction
HARP	Hazard Assistance and Resiliency Program
ICP	Incident Command Post
ICS	Incident Command System (Canada)
IMT	Incident Management Team
IO	Information Officer
ISI	Initial Spread Index
JIS	Joint Information System
NRCAER	Northeast Region Community Awareness & Emergency Response
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
PNS	Public Notification System
POC	Paid On Call
SCES	Sturgeon County Emergency Services
SOLE	State Of Local Emergency
SREMP	Sturgeon Regional Emergency Management Partnership
TSI	Transitional Solutions Inc.
WUI	Wildland Urban Interface

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