

Alberta Health Services, Capital Management Response Team, Zone North Captures Wayne McLellan Award of Excellence

The Project: Capital Management Response Team North Zone to the Slave Lake Fire Disaster, May 2011

On Saturday, May 14th, 2011 a large wildfire burned through the town of Slave Lake, Alberta. The fire pushed through fire barriers established to protect the town at a speed of 100 kilometers/hour. The fire forced the complete evacuation of the town's 7,000 residents and ultimately destroyed roughly one-third of the town. The hospital occupants were evacuated and efforts were made by the fire fighting teams to focus their energy on saving the hospital from the fire. The fire came within meters of reaching the building. The site received severe smoke damage throughout and all systems required thorough cleaning and re-commissioning. A Facilities Maintenance and Engineering (FM&E) team, led by Phil Creteau, Director of FM&E - Rural North East zone, soon established their presence on site. The team worked closely with the local municipal government, provincial disaster services, and associate Alberta Health Services departments to coordinate the necessary manpower and supplies to access the damage, make the repairs and re-commission the site back to full operation.

FM&E staff were initially housed in temporary camps as housing was in short supply. Obtaining food, potable water and generator power was the first order of business. Once established, a systematic review of all building systems was conducted to assess the extent of damage and establish a repair sequence. FM&E staff reached out from all over the province to assist in the effort. Select staff from Edmonton were chosen to augment the local staff complement; addressing the most pressing needs. Contractors were hired (electrical, painters, plumbers). Emergency operations stakeholder groups were established early on, incident command centers were manned and regular updates were provided to all relevant personnel. FM&E coordinated the entire building system(s) reclaim and re-commissioning efforts.

Alberta Health Services is Canada's first province wide, fully integrated health system and was formed in 2008. Capital Management is accountable for the safe and well maintained space in support of the delivery of quality health services across Alberta. Under their Senior Vice-President, Penny Rae, there are Five Zones; Capital Operations and Government Integrations and Provincial Supports. Capital Management North Zone has the town of Slave Lake within its zone. Capital Management North Zone has Project Management, Facilities Maintenance and Engineering (FM&E); Clinical Engineering, Protective & Parking Services; and Property Management.

The effort of reclaiming and re-commissioning an entire hospital site was not an easy task and could not have been accomplished without the merits of having an established Disaster plan in place. Having effective, established working relationships with external partners was also paramount to the success of the operation. Collaboration between individual FM&E groups to collectively work together also was a true gain in this effort.

Main utility systems (gas, power and water) were isolated immediately upon site evacuation. The reclamation efforts proceeded while waiting for the municipality to reconnect these systems. The FM&E team was one of the first teams to re-enter the evacuated site to quickly assess the damage and project a rough time-line for reclaim and re-commissioning efforts. The time-line information was critical for other stakeholders to map their efforts against. The coordinated efforts of FM&E at the ground level, at the EOC command table and in conjunction with the multitude of separate stakeholders all working with the sole purpose of re-establishing the hospital to address the needs of the stricken community was vital. Clear leadership was exhibited; true collaboration with all parties in and outside of their division was evident throughout the entire process.

Initiatives included in the project.

- Equipment or building efficiency upgrades
- Process changes resulting in increased efficiency

All construction elements (mechanical, electrical, structural, architectural) were reviewed. Mechanical systems were cleaned - repaired and re-commissioned before being turned back into service. All duct work was cleaned, and extensive painting was done throughout the hospital site. The provincial fire threat assessment exercise gained momentum as a result of the fire. Improved compliance on the completion of the assessments was noticed following the event. Ensuing efforts with this program aim to keep the database current.

The following successes helped to reach the objectives and goals of the project.

- TEAM support - within AHS - within FM&E - between external agencies.
- Fire Treat Assessments - taken more seriously.
- Disaster/Emergency response planning - importance of having current plan in place.
- Collaboration with external contractors - all in this together.

The effort was challenged by the logistics of operating within an active disaster zone that was still engulfed by fire and severe smoke.

- No power, water, or gas services.
- Limited food and lodging.
- Transport of vehicular traffic in and out of the town was tightly controlled which often added delays to the process.
- Fatigue - staff worked extremely long days in an adverse environment.
- Stress - staff were under stress to bring the building up to full operation as quickly as possible.
- Supplies and contracted manpower - all in short supply.
- Procurement - coordination of goods and services was a challenge but did benefit with the close involvement of the AHS Contracting Procurement Supply Management department throughout the process.

These comments came from Penny Rae, our Senior Vice President:

“Through all the chaos, the incident led to an outpouring of support from across AHS. For our part we have had a number of staff who travelled to (or in some cases returned to) Slave Lake to help get the hospital up and running. Our thanks go to Phil Creteau, Paul Van Bendegem, Brian Schamehorn, Shayne Ruch, Brian Hyndman, Dean Cail, Dean Babuik, Danny Dianescu, Chris Chamberlain, Richard Baker and Kathleen McCabe for their work restoring the hospital,

recommissioning all the systems and helping operational leadership find accommodation for staff as they returned to the town.

The Slave Lake Fire Incident resulted in all zones and all facilities carefully reviewing their Disaster Response Manuals and Plans. The town of Slave Lake has had a long history with wild fires. Weather in the past has assisted in preventing these fires from entering the town, but this was not the case in 2011. The wildfire did enter the town. This incident not only tested the skills of AHS staff, but also their ability to work together across the province. It was a coordinated and collaborated effort by all.

Alberta Health Services provided daily updates of the Slave Lake situation on the provincial shared web site called "AHS Insite".