ALERT: Wildfires Cause Mandatory Evacuation of Alberta Town



Out of control wildfires have resulted in the evacuation of the town of Fort McMurray in the heart of Alberta's oil sands region. All residents have been ordered to leave by Premier Rachel Notley. Residents of some areas have been told to shelter in place. The city's only hospital has also been evacuated.

In addition, due to heavy smoke and fire, the government asked motorists not to travel to Fort McMurray on either Highway 63 or Highway 881. Only essential travel should be undertaken.

So far, no serious injuries have been reported. But smoke from such fires can irritate throats and sinuses and cause headaches, coughing, a runny nose and itchy eyes. And individuals who have asthma or chronic conditions can have more serious reactions.

Detailed information on the situation and emergency updates are available on the Alberta government's website.

This on-going catastrophe is a reminder of the importance of emergency planning for both individuals and employers'and ironically is occurring during Emergency Preparedness Week in Canada (May 1-7, 2016).

So ensure that your workplace has appropriate emergency plans

in place to address the kinds of emergencies to which it's vulnerable, including:

- Fires and explosions
- Natural disasters, such as floods, tornados, earthquakes and hurricanes
- Workplace violence, such as active shooters
- Serious safety incidents.

And make sure that workers are aware of and trained on these plans, including by conducting regular emergency drills. Also, ensure that emergency equipment, such as fire extinguishers, is working properly.

The OHS Insider has a lot of information, tools and other resources on emergencies such as wildfires, including:

- The OHS requirements for fire preparedness and response
- Fire safety checklists for industrial workplaces and offices
- 8 emergency preparedness and response tips
- How to address the needs of disabled workers in emergencies
- Checklists for ensuring you properly handle workers' personal information before, during and after an emergency
- A tornado preparedness checklist
- A natural disaster preparedness infographic
- An emergency preparedness infographic.