



BRUDERHEIM

Educating residents about wildfire risk

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Source: Town of Bruderheim

THE SCIENCE

Wildfire activity has been increasing in many parts of the country in recent years, with longer fire seasons and larger areas burned. Beyond the direct damage caused to properties and structures in affected communities, smoke that is generated during wildfires can greatly affect the health of populations living in areas sometimes quite distant from the flames. The smoke that results from wildfires is composed of a mixture of pollutants and can have a major impact on air quality and public health. In fact, many Canadian communities that haven't been directly affected by fire itself have suffered from the presence of wildfire-related smoke in their communities. Some have started working locally and with neighbouring communities to reduce their future risk.

THE TRIGGER

Bruderheim is a small community of nearly 1,400 inhabitants located north-east of Edmonton. While the community is not located in the wildland urban interface per se, it is bordered by tall grass on undeveloped lands to the north. Neighbouring communities have been affected by wildfires in the past and, as such, these events have become a growing concern for the town. Additionally, the smoke caused by these events has often reached the community of Bruderheim, causing public health concerns for its residents.

As wildfire risk became a growing concern for Bruderheim, the town was selected to become a part of the Climate Resilience Express program through the All One Sky Foundation, a not-for-profit organization established to help vulnerable populations at the crossroads of energy and climate change. The support provided by the Foundation allowed community members to participate in a climate adaptation workshop that led to the development of a resilience action plan. The initial workshop held through the Climate Resilience Express program confirmed original concerns around fire risk stemming from the industrial centre located in close proximity to the community. The presence of the oil and gas industry in the area also came up as a contributing factor to an enhanced fire risk.

THE APPROACH

Given the growing health concerns associated with neighbouring fires, as well as the risk assessment provided through the Climate Resilience Express program, the Town started thinking more actively about what could be done to reduce fire risk and educate residents on best practices around risk reduction within the community. In order to do so, the community of Bruderheim secured a FireSmart grant to develop public education programs for local homeowners.

In order to establish which strategies should be pursued to encourage residents to become proactive about wildfire risk, a group of municipal staff and community members got together to brainstorm ideas for how key educational initiatives might look. With the support of FireSmart Canada, the Town was able to host several events, such as barbecues and door-to-door campaigns to disseminate information on



Figure 10: *The Resilient Rurals platform aims to provide resources to assist small and rural communities define their path to resilience. (Source:Town of Bruderheim)*

how to best prevent fire damage around private properties. Several events were also held during Emergency Preparedness Week.

An important part of Bruderheim's strategy around public education was to get children of the community involved in risk reduction efforts. In order to do so, municipal staff connected with school principals to prepare an activity that would familiarize local children with key actions that can be taken around their homes to be better protect them. Each participating student was given a FireSmart checklist and were asked to take it home and work through the list with their families. Their teachers planned various activities associated with the checklist and students came back to their classrooms with a completed project around the theme of wildfire risk reduction. In order to make this activity more special for the children participating, the Town had purchased various prizes that were handed out upon the submission of their projects.

THE OUTCOME

The various outreach activities pursued by the Town and its residents contributed to heightened awareness around wildfire risk and risk reduction activities that can be taken at the private property level for community members. As Bruderheim was working locally to promote public education around wildfire risk, municipal staff realized that neighbouring communities were faced with similar challenges and decided to approach them to partner on developing various resources that could be

helpful in the event of a disaster. Bruderheim now leads a formal partnership with the Towns of Gibbons and Lamont, called Resilient Rurals, which is working to define the path to resilience for small and rural communities. The partnership currently provides resources for community risk assessments, business continuity strategies, as well as a communication toolkit to assist small towns in informing their residents of various risks and risk reduction actions that can be taken before an emergency occurs. There is also a resource hub housed on the Resilient Rurals website that brings together relevant data, resources and contacts that would otherwise be difficult for communities to find. Other areas of focus include the review of plans, policies and bylaws, and development of networking and implementation plans, and a regional resilience plan. The latter is set to advance social and business continuity priorities, and address climate concerns such as wildfires, flooding, extreme windstorms, and extreme heat. Innovative ideas were shared during the creation of Resilient Rurals, which will be explored as the partnership progresses.

A WORD FROM BRUDERHEIM

An important factor that contributed to the success of Bruderheim's approach, which involves educating residents about wildfire risk and possible mitigation actions, was the use of various communication activities. When asked about what contributed to the success of the public education effort pursued in her community, Sherry Cote, Director of Planning and Legislative Services, highlighted the importance of using multiple tools to carry a consistent message. "I believe that if one of the strategies you use to communicate risk to people makes an impact on them, they are much more likely to carry the message with them to others in the community," said Sherry Cote. The more communication tools used, the greater the chances for more heightened public awareness.