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Wildfire and Business

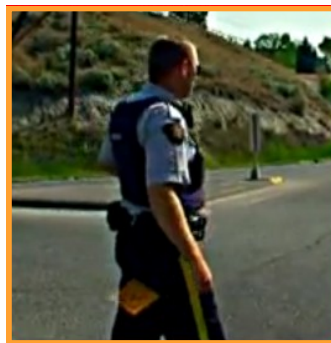
According to the *Kelowna Capital News*, tourists and their dollars were markedly absent for the two weeks following the outbreak of the Glenrosa fire on July 18, 2009. Some businesses reported as much as a 50 percent drop in business over that period. Heat, fire and smoke were all given as reasons for cancellations at local hotels. The Holiday Inn in Westbank reported the economy and the fire combined resulted in a 10-14 percent drop overall in visitors. The hotel was under evacuation order for the first two days of the fire. West Kelowna Tourism statistics show tourism was up in June by 15 percent over the previous year, then dropped 22 percent in July, before showing a slow recovery into August.

How can a wildfire affect business? One of the most obvious problem is access, such as customers unable to get to a local business due to road closures and not knowing an alternate route, should one exist. Many companies conduct business by internet or phone, and a disruption of service could have serious financial consequences.

Would business insurance cover loss of business or be adequate if a wildfire resulted in structural losses? How long would it take to rebuild both the business and consumer contacts?

What are the impacts to businesses if their staff is evacuated from their homes? There may be a psychological toll—some staff may continue to work, but some couldn't. How does the business deal with an absent workforce who may be essential to business or who are close friends as well as co-workers? A fire is more than a physical threat, it can be a financial and psychological one as well.

The cost of doing business in a community that could be affected by a wildfire is often underappreciated, until the wildfire starts. Some careful consideration could assist business owners to recover quickly in the event of a wildfire, and permit them to support activities that could minimize the impacts to their investments.



Blackcomb Success

On July 30, 2009, a lightning-caused fire caused the evacuation of Blackcomb Mountain in Whistler. As the fire gained momentum tourists were escorted from the mountain, and the fire quickly grew to engulf 57 hectares of the mountainside.

The Crystal Hut restaurant and the Blackcomb chairlift were immediately closed. And for several days the resort chose to keep both the chairlift, the Crystal Hut and the Rendezvous restaurants closed.

The heavily promoted newly opened Peak 2 Peak gondola operated round trips instead of dropping tourists at the top of Blackcomb to enjoy the view and to hike the trails. And while the resort claimed that they had no cancellations, some tourists stated they had come to Whistler because of the reduced room rates during the fire.

With some proactive steps, such as contacting guests before their arrival, explaining the circumstances and assuring guests that there was no danger in the Whistler village, the resort was able to deflect bad publicity during the event with a "business as usual campaign". The business announced their full and unwavering support of fire suppression activities, and even offered access to snow-making equipment water lines.

Senior Vice President, Doug Forseth, assured the public that it was 'normal volumes' on the Peak 2 Peak only days after the fire broke out. A 'business as usual' Facebook was created to bolster his claims, and to keep potential visitors informed.



Photo of Blackcomb Mountain Fire

Reprinted from: http://www.ctvbc.ctv.ca/gallery/html/bc_blackcomb_fire_20090730/photo_0.html

To Date in Coastal

Fires to Date

Person Caused **201**

Lighting Caused **331**

Total Number of Fires Actioned **532**

Hectares burnt **7132**

Number of Incidents Responded To this year **1857**

Fire Danger Rating



Low—Moderate

Be Safe!

Hazardous Forest Fuel Accumulation

Wildfire is a natural event in a forest and can not be eliminated. We can, however, effectively prepare for wildland fires by reducing fire behavior potential in fire-prone areas.

The first step is to assess forest fuel hazard accumulations, prioritize high risk areas to allow for the effective allocation of funds for treatment, and recommend general fuel treatment strategies that will reduce the risk to structures and human life.

Hazardous fuel accumulations in our forests, and the related threat from wildfires, have become a growing concern across the province. This threat was made very apparent this fire season when there were over 180 fires burning at one time in the Coastal Fire Centre, many over 100 hectares in size. Fires of this size can threaten structures and human lives, impact wildlife populations, damage soils, increase erosion, degrade water quality and increase air pollution. Com-

pounding these factors is the continued development of values into the urban/wildland interface. Homes, businesses, roads, communication equipment, hydro lines and water systems and all at risk from wildfire, and the risk increases if the forest fuels are not mitigated.

Interface fuel hazard assessments are a large component of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The goal of this type of assessment is to provide a standardized fuel hazard ranking system that accounts for the fire behavior potential as well as the potential consequences of a fire to interface structures. It provides a plan for determining where fuel treatments will effectively reduce wildfire threat and to prioritize these areas for treatment.

By first identifying and then treating these areas, these hazards can be reduced or eliminated as a threat to life and property in communities.

Coastal Fuels Management

The Coastal Fire Centre Fuels Forest Management team congratulates the Resort Municipality of Whistler on the planned commencement of their ground operational fuel management treatments next week, tied to their Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). This project was complex in the planning stages, and will treat some Mountain Pine Beetle affected forest with their first phase of a multi-year treatment plan that was approved in 2007.

The Coastal Fire Centre has an team of 4 staff that will be marketing and assisting local municipalities with their CWPP's and potential treatment plans over the winter—one more staff than was available in the winter of 2008. The UBCM ratio of funding from 50/50 percent to 75/25 percent has reduced costs to the community, and will hopefully encourage more communities to take advantage of available funding.

The Fuels Management team will provide expertise in fuel management within interface zones and support communities in developing specific mitigation projects. There have been 41 CWPPs approved to date within the Coastal Fire Centre.

Fuels Drying

The Fire Danger Rating has rebounded slightly due to the dry weather in the last week.

The southern part of Vancouver Island from Union Bay to Victoria is in Moderate fire danger, with a pocket of High near Nanaimo.

On the mainland, there are pockets of Moderate fire danger near Chilliwack and Whistler.

People choosing to undertake burning should be cautious, and understand their obligations. Despite the low daytime temperatures, fuels are dry enough to require any burning be undertaken with care.

Please check with local authorities to ensure there is not a local burning bylaw that could impact your ability to burn. Ensure the burn is conducted in a safe manner, with adequate equipment and personnel on site to prevent escapes.

The forecast is for predominately sunny and dry weather through the weekend, with temperate in the low teens during the day. There is a potential for wind, and people undertaking burning should be prepared to extinguish their fires should wind create a risk of escapes.