

Best Practice

Oil Spill and Water Crisis Response

CONTACT

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THE PRACTICE

In July 2016, a ruptured pipeline released approximately 250,000 litres of crude oil and other chemicals into the North Saskatchewan River about 380 kilometres upstream from the City of Prince Albert. All potable water for the city, and surrounding municipalities, comes from the river where the city's water intake is located. In response, the City of Prince Albert activated an emergency operations centre (EOC).

THE PROCESS

The city activated the EOC July 23, 2016. Made up by staff, the EOC was on call 24-hours a day and met twice daily for the first week following the spill to create innovative solutions to challenges, such as how to protect the intake in the North Saskatchewan River and prevent hydrocarbons from entering the city's water treatment plant and getting into the water system. Each member of the EOC had a specific role, from devising plans for water conservation to communicating with key stakeholders. The EOC mobilized hundreds of people to implement their action plan in a short time frame. Public works staff helped create a 31 kilometre pipeline from the South Saskatchewan River and a six kilometre line Little Red River Park, and park and playground staff went door to door to every residence in the city to educate residents on water conservation. City staff, community members and businesses worked together to conserve water and create solutions.

THE RESULTS

With the immediate response, the City of Prince Albert was able to provide potable water to citizens. Citizens also responded to the call to conserve, and water consumption dropped to approximately 11,000 cubic metres per day.

LESSONS LEARNED

The emergency response highlights the importance of being prepared with pre-written plans and procedures. High level planning is essential and crucial to effectively manage an emergency, and plans need to be flexible in design and capable of adapting to the specific nuances of a situation.

Communication is also critical. Not only does council need to be kept informed, but timely and accurate communication with the public is also important. With widespread usage of social media, a message can become lost or buried by inaccurate and misleading information. Communication must be a priority for an EOC.

As EOC operations can be long and mentally draining, it is equally important that the health and wellness of members be constantly monitored.