Communicating at the speed of crisis

Emergency public communications in 2016 and beyond

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When will you have the complete picture of the situation?

How quickly will it take your agency to be behind the 8 ball?
Bio

BCWS Info Program

What’s our role?

Joint Information

Social Media

Takeaways

Q&A
• Five years with BC Wildfire Service
• Chief Fire Information Officer since 2014
• ICS and media relations instructor
• Gaps identified in 2003 Filmon Report
• Only arm of B.C. government with public communications mandate
• Work at the Coordination Centre (provincial / regional) and Incident level
**Provincial Coordination Centre**

*Kamloops*

Situational Awareness / Liaison for broader government (elected officials, Emergency Management BC, Government Communications), Social Media Management, Support & Coordination, Provincial / National Media lead.

**Regional Coordination Centres**

*Parksville, Kamloops, Castlegar, Williams Lake, Prince George, Smithers*

Media and public point of contact, stakeholder & local government liaison, response coordination.

**Incident Management Teams**

*Site-Level*

Public, media, stakeholder and internal communications lead for specific incident / complex.
Media interviews by BCWS staff:

- 2015 total: over 3000
- 2016 to-date: over 1500
What’s our role?

- On consequential incidents, we’re not the lead agency on the human impacts (usually).
- Larger organizations tend to be more risk-averse and open to litigation.
- We understand the wildland fire response regime – the public (and our stakeholders) don’t.
What's our role?

Challenges ahead:

- **Increase** in major fires (expanding WUI)
- **Increase** in expectations for information
- **Increase** in incident complexity
- How will wildland agencies adapt?
Joint Information

• Multi-jurisdiction
• Multi-agency
• “JIC” and “JIS”
• In most cases: interface wildfires, any wildfires burning across regional / provincial / international / boundaries
Relationships

- An emergency is not a time to make new friends
- An emergency should feel like “getting the band back together”
Case Study: Central Okanagan RD
Case Study:
Central Okanagan RD

• High-risk interface wildfire area
• Growing population
• Economic driver
• Politically sensitive
Case Study: Central Okanagan RD

Two recent interface wildfires:

• Trepanier (Peachland) 2012 - ~1500 people evacuated
• Smith Creek (West Kelowna) 2014
• ~2500 people evacuated
Case Study: Central Okanagan RD

• CORD has purpose-built EOC facility at Kelowna Fire Hall #1
• BCWS Information Officers working both on site and at EOC
• Working in tandem on media relations and information dissemination
Case Study: Central Okanagan RD

- JIC within EOC allowed for real-time intelligence sharing and leveraging of different platforms / channels
- Reduced misinformation and rumours
- Blended messaging helped address the “big picture”
Case Study:
Peace River RD
Case Study: Peace River RD

- Based in Fort St. John
- Rocked with wildfires and floods in spring 2016
- April 18: extraordinary weather system leads to 40+ new fires in a single afternoon
Case Study: Peace River RD

- Not feasible to establish JIC due to capacity, locations, etc.
- Formed strong JIS network between BCWS, PRRD, agencies (EMBC), Alberta Wildfire
- Utilized daily teleconferences
Social Media

• It’s not a silver bullet
• It needs to be cohesive with the rest of your communications
• It needs to be integrated with your operational needs
Social Media

4 million (42% mobile)
Visits to bcwildfire.ca

26 million
Hits on the interactive Active Wildfires Map

46 million
Facebook Impressions
BC Wildfire Service

URGENT: Fire aircraft were just grounded at Testalinden fire due to a drone in our airspace #OliverBC #BCWildfire

36,932 Impressions made
URGENT. Water skimming airtankers and helicopters are on site at the Cinnabar Creek wildfire on Okanagan Lake. Boaters in the area - please stay out of the way during fire operations.

An Evacuation Alert has been put in place by the Central Okanagan Emergency Operations Centre. Info here: https://www.emergencyinfobc.gov.bc.ca/evacuation-alert-ci/.../
We sign off with heavy hearts tonight. We were saddened to learn that a contract tree faller working with us on the Old Sechelt Mine fire suffered a fatal injury while felling a danger tree earlier today. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his friends, family and co-workers.

This is a tragic reminder of the dangerous work being done by personnel across the province to respond to wildfires.

We’ll be back tomorrow morning – if there are any major developments in wildfire activity over the course of the night, we will post updates as soon as information becomes available.
Takeaways:

• Set the team up for success – logistics, “the little things”

• Outside perspectives are good – we all live in silos. Share as much as possible.

• Who is best situated to get this information out?
Takeaways:

- Recovery matters
- Force Multipliers
- What does the future hold?
- There will be an information vacuum – if we don’t fill it, someone else will
Thank you!

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BC Wildfire Service

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