

Hosting Evacuees

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly Things We Learned

Emergency Management Stakeholder Summit 2020

Kathleen Turner and Jennifer Wood
Grande Prairie Regional Emergency Partnership



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The Grande Prairie Regional Emergency Partnership is...

- ▶ Formal emergency management partnership between six municipalities:
 - ▶ City of Grande Prairie
 - ▶ County of Grande Prairie
 - ▶ Towns of Beaverlodge, Sexsmith, Wembley and
 - ▶ Village of Hythe
- ▶ We all work together to prepare for and respond to large scale emergencies and disasters
- ▶ We have two ECCs - City of Grande Prairie and County of Grande Prairie

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It all began.....




- ▶ May 20th (holiday Monday) received call from PESS requesting we take evacuees
- ▶ Emergency Coordination Centre and Emergency Social Services activated

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Timeline

- ▶ First day
 - ▶ Reception Centre set up at Grande Prairie Regional College
 - ▶ Decision to use Registration And Reception Center Program (RRCP)
 - ▶ Decision made to house evacuees in hotels
- ▶ Over the next 4 weeks, various communities were evacuated (and returned home)
- ▶ Third week - virtual ECC attempted
- ▶ Fourth week - Call to Province for help (and PESS arrives)
- ▶ June 21st response stood down
- ▶ Clean up commenced


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Based on our experience
here are things to
consider and what
worked for us

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Reception Centre Location

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- ▶ Easy to find
 - ▶ Parking
 - ▶ Hours of operation
 - ▶ Accessible for mobility challenges
 - ▶ Other services provided from the same location
 - ▶ Ability to lock up the space
 - ▶ Should it be at the same location as lodging?
 - ▶ Will it potentially be a financial aid distribution location?

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Registering and identifying evacuees

- ▶ Registration and Reception Centre Program (electronic registration)
 - ▶ Access to laptops
 - ▶ Training - before and during the incident
 - ▶ What questions are you going to ask? (i.e. insurance)
 - ▶ Evacuees arriving outside of Reception Centre hours
- ▶ Identifying Evacuees
 - ▶ Wrist bands - color coded at first - then went to one color
 - ▶ Evacuees without ID or fixed address
 - ▶ Evacuees whose mailing address is different than residential address
 - ▶ Seasonal residents

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Keeping track of the evacuation area

- ▶ Changing evacuation areas
- ▶ Difficulty tracking changes especially in rural areas
 - ▶ No maps of the counties, municipal districts that were affected
- ▶ Determining evacuees from mandatory zones vs voluntary evacuees
- ▶ Notification delays, learn of changes on the websites

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Level of service you will provide

- ▶ Lodging only
- ▶ Food services - prepared meals, restaurants, vouchers, snacks, dietary restrictions
- ▶ Access to recreation, transit
- ▶ Will you use donations (donation management)
- ▶ Transportation - shuttle, gas money
- ▶ What does the hotel stay include - room service, movies, etc.

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Group Lodging vs Hotels

- ▶ **Group Lodging**
 - ▶ What facilities are available
 - ▶ Size and location
 - ▶ Access to other services/resources
 - ▶ Other events happening at the same time
- ▶ **Hotels**
 - ▶ One or many
 - ▶ Convenient location
 - ▶ Food services on site
 - ▶ Pets allowed?
 - ▶ Agreement with the hotel(s) on the rate
 - ▶ Match with the population demographics

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If using hotels... how will food be provided?

- ▶ Restaurant vs buffet
- ▶ Ordering off restaurant menu - limits to meal costs
- ▶ Repetitive menus both restaurant and buffet service
- ▶ Special diet menus/needs
- ▶ Snacks
- ▶ If no restaurant on site how to get them to where there is food service
- ▶ How to identify evacuees as eligible for food service

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Hotel Liaison

- ▶ Direct liaison with hotel management
- ▶ Invaluable asset
- ▶ Was able to get exact number of rooms occupied and who was in each.
- ▶ Hotels felt heard and responded to.
- ▶ Liaised with evacuee groups - designated person (when identified)

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Pets

- ▶ Hotels allowed small pets in the rooms
- ▶ Larger pets went to shelter - quickly drew up an agreement
- ▶ Large animals - horses - rodeo grounds
- ▶ Large number of pets were rescued from an evacuated community
- ▶ Placed in the shelter
- ▶ No way of knowing who they belonged to
- ▶ How would we deal with them after evacuation was lifted?

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Social supports

- ▶ Friendship Centre
 - ▶ Distribution centre
 - ▶ Cultural supports and activities
 - ▶ Shuttle for food services
 - ▶ Great partnership
- ▶ Therapy Dogs at Reception Centre during the financial aid distribution
- ▶ Alberta Supports, Service Canada, AHS, FNIHB on site at Reception Centre

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Social issues

- ▶ Domestic violence
- ▶ Drug and Alcohol Use
- ▶ Hotel evictions
- ▶ Increased security required
- ▶ RCMP support

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Communicating with Evacuees

- ▶ Establish your communication objectives early on
- ▶ Communicating what services were available
 - ▶ Social media - Facebook, twitter
 - ▶ GPREP website
 - ▶ Daily newsletter - printed and delivered to hotels, reception centre
- ▶ Call line set up - could only address what services we could offer - no information on the order or what provincial resources were being offered

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Evacuee Migration or Tourism

- ▶ Evacuation order to one community, but then moving to another
- ▶ Reasons for moving around - different services, hotels vs cots, family, friends in a different community, etc.
- ▶ How can you turn them away?
- ▶ The fact there were multiple evacuation orders, each slightly different, made this a challenge

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Consider your capacity to respond

- ▶ Do this early and often!
- ▶ Staffing availability (ECC and RC)
 - ▶ May be a lot of people but what is the depth of experience
- ▶ Staff burn out
 - ▶ Monitor staff for compassion fatigue
 - ▶ Ensure days off are given/taken
- ▶ When are you full?
- ▶ What about regular duties - how long can staff be away
- ▶ Utilize neighboring municipal resources; how do you integrate this help?

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Set some trigger points

- ▶ Determine capacity ahead of time! Whether its number of available hotel rooms, number of evacuees or number of days/weeks
- ▶ Be cautious of “just one more day, or one more weekend” - there’s always something that will challenge your decision
- ▶ When triggers are imminent start the transition process early
- ▶ Allow time for Provincial Emergency Social Services to recruit replacement workers and support from resources across the province

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Demobilization - Helping Evacuees Get Home

- ▶ The all clear has been sounded - now what?
- ▶ Transportation - who needs it and how will you know?
 - ▶ Evacuees were asked to identify if they needed transportation.
 - ▶ Hotel Liaison helped with this - love this position
 - ▶ Bus scheduled to stop at all hotels
 - ▶ Staff at each hotel and on the bus to ensure everyone got on.
 - ▶ Provided snacks for on the bus
- ▶ Gas to return - home fill ups offered at a specific gas station for a limited time (only if they identified - not advertised).
- ▶ Have security at hotels where you anticipate any issues

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Demobilizing Our Response

- ▶ Returning resources to their rightful homes - track everything (laptops, phones, printers)
- ▶ Gathering all the documentation
- ▶ Debriefing staff - How? When?
- ▶ Offering EAP and other CISM services
- ▶ THANK STAFF FOR THEIR GREAT WORK! - privately, publicly
- ▶ THANK HOTELS, PARTNERS FOR THEIR GREAT WORK! - privately and publicly

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Tracking costs and keeping invoices/receipts.

- ▶ Finance function in ECC is critical from the very beginning
 - ▶ Develop a tracking system
 - ▶ We used a resource request form which worked well
- ▶ Store receipts/invoices in one place at RC and send to ECC regularly.
 - ▶ Scribe can note in log receipts/invoices for what services. Shouldn't be many as most requests were managed by ECC.
- ▶ Log in/out timesheets
 - ▶ Identify regular hours and OT hours - which were for response - develop special time sheets for this
- ▶ Reach out to Disaster Recovery Program early

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The Good - Nailed it!

- ▶ Using hotels was the right decision for us
- ▶ Hotel staff were amazing despite challenges
- ▶ College as RC worked well
- ▶ Friendship Centre partnership
- ▶ Donations management - registry
- ▶ Hotel liaison
- ▶ Largest, longest activation GPREP has had - involved multiple departments, created an excitement to be involved.
- ▶ Animal shelter partnership
- ▶ PESS support when needed
- ▶ Daily conference calls with PESS and other Reception Centres

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The Bad - Challenges

- ▶ Housing
 - ▶ Finding rooms for individuals with mobility limitations
 - ▶ Matching the room to the individual/family
 - ▶ Housing individuals after domestic violence incidents - moving hotels
 - ▶ Hotel evictions - how many chances do you give someone
 - ▶ Damages to rooms and common areas
- ▶ Tracking 1000 people! Duplicate registrations.
- ▶ Financial aid distribution at reception centre.
- ▶ Culture shock issues
- ▶ Strange but true stories!

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We are still learning

- ▶ A debrief session was held with all responders to identify what went well, where we could improve and recommendations for the future. We are currently reviewing this to identify priorities and implement changes.

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Final Thought

Although there were some negative experiences and incidents, overall the majority of evacuees were great and appreciative of our efforts. We recognized that evacuees were under a great deal of stress and living in a hotel, even if it is better than a cot, is not an ideal situation.

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Questions?



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