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MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Information about the Professional Fire Fighter Joint Program with Lakeland College

The Professional Fire Fighter Program based at Emergency Services Academy Ltd. (ESA) in Sherwood Park is offered jointly with Lakeland College in Vermilion, Alberta. Students are registered in both post-secondary institutions. The program is eligible for student funding and students receive 23 post-secondary credits upon successful completion.

This program is designed to provide fire fighter training and education to individuals interested in a career related to fire fighting, such as employment with municipal or industrial fire services.

The program is full-time over 12 weeks. Instructors are ESA employees. The theory portion of the program is presented at the ESA campus in Sherwood Park. The main practical portions are taken on the fire training grounds of Lakeland College Emergency Training Centre, one of the most highly regarded fire training grounds in North America. Exercises are conducted on fire towers and industrial props such as refineries, train cars, automobiles and trenches. Fire suppression training is done in an environment using controlled “live burns”.

Safety

During the practical portions of the Professional Fire Fighter Program, safety is a top priority. Students are provided with bunker gear, breathing apparatus, and other personal protective equipment. Assorted fire apparatus and all necessary fire suppression and rescue equipment are utilized during the course.

Program Accreditation

The Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) holds the accreditation for fire fighter training in the province of Alberta. Examinations and certifications are provided by AEMA. All students successfully completing the ESA/ Lakeland College Professional Fire Fighter Program are eligible for certification from the Information Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) and the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications (ProBoard) from AEMA.

This standard of fire training is a prerequisite for employment applications with many fire services throughout Alberta and across Canada.

Alberta Fire Statistics

According to *Alberta On Scene,* a publication produced by the Alberta Government, in 2008 there were 5,690 fires reported to the Fire Commissioner. These fires resulted in 33 deaths, 243 injuries and $390 million dollars in direct property losses.

Between 1999 and 2008, on average there were 1.1 fire deaths per 100,000 population in Alberta. Most fire deaths and injuries took place where most Albertans feel the safest: their homes.

Facts about Dangerous Building Materials in Most Modern Construction

Over the past decades there have been a number of societal and technological changes in home-building. These changes have had impacts on exterior fire spread. Some of these changes include the following:

- **Increased density of housing** increases the risk for a High Intensity Residential Fire, which is a fire that rapidly develops within a single family dwelling and extends to an adjacent structure or structures, as was the case in the 2007 MacEwan Green fire in Edmonton.
- **Siding materials (such as pre-formed vinyl) that have limited or no resistance to the effects of the radiant heat generated by fire.** Aluminum siding, which was popular in the 1970s, offers far better resistance.
- **Sheathing under the cladding material has changed from shiplap lumber to oriented strand board (OSB)**, which is made of wood chips and resins under heat and pressure. When used and applied like plywood, OSB has a rougher surface than plywood. This gives it a greater propensity for flame and heat to “catch” on the surface, which makes it far more combustible.
- **Lighter weight construction, particularly in flooring systems, can also result in more rapid fire developments,** especially in basements where lightweight wooden trusses or OSB I beams are exposed.
- **Even furniture is a higher risk**, due to the higher petroleum-based manufacturing of everything from fabric and upholstery to foam cushioning and mattresses to the glues used in many “wooden” cabinets. The heat release in these materials can be up to four times higher than the same items constructed out of natural sources.
- **The width of streets in residential subdivisions has also decreased over time.** This can slow the response of fire suppression crews.

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