Say it Loud and Clear: Understanding Risk Communication in Alberta’s Municipalities

This study intends to make a key contribution to evidence-based policy development to bolster risk knowledge — and its effective communication — to Albertans.

About the Project
Led by Dr. Sandeep Agrawal, this project aims to:

- Understand the nature and state of risk knowledge that stakeholders have concerning new and existing developments in risk-prone areas;
- Identify the ways in which risk knowledge is communicated and;
- Recommend guidelines for effective risk communication

Five Case Studies
The team selected five case studies based on municipal size, known risk to natural hazards, and recent major disaster events.

1. Canmore
   - Southern Alberta floods (June 2013)

2. Calgary
   - Southern Alberta floods (June 2013)

3. High River
   - Southern Alberta floods (June 2013)

4. Fort Vermilion
   - Peace River Ice-Jam/Flood (April 2020)
   - Floods (July 2011)

5. Fort McMurray
   - Fort McMurray wildfires (May 2016)
   - Floods (June 2013; July 2016; April-May 2020)

Key Approaches to Risk Communication

Public Events
- Workshops
- Presentations
- Advocacy
- Education Campaigns

Policy
- Updated development by-laws
- Defined hazards and risks
- Updated development applications

Media Marketing
- Social media
- Print media
- Broadcast media

Strategic Planning
- Public education
- Mitigation infrastructure
- Risk management plans

Preliminary Findings

- Disasters provide a ‘window of opportunity’ for reviewing existing risk information — and its communication — and building trust between communities and institutions

- Risk communication is a layered process involving a wide range of actors at the provincial and local level, though only some are fully aware of risks — knowingly or unknowingly.

- Risk communication takes three forms: emergency communication (via social media, mass media); short term communication (public engagement, signage, enforcement); and long term communication (education, regulation, and enforcement)

- Risk communication is a technical as well as a political process that determines who knows what and how much is known.

- Risks are forgotten with time, and, therefore, public and institutional memory are key factors in anchoring risk communication.

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