

# Residents look to improve emergency communication

## Foothills: April 17 fire sparks community meeting

By Roxanne Blackwell  
Staff Reporter

Emergency services personnel had an opportunity to sit down with residents to dissect the most recent emergency in the MD to analyze what worked, what didn't, and what needs to be fixed before the next one occurs.

On April 17 a wildfire burned more than 125 acres near the Quirk Creek Gas Plant and required 60 fire fighters and three helicopters to extinguish.

More than 50 residents showed up to a meeting on May 22 at the Millarville Race Track where the Turner Valley RCMP, the MD of Foothills Fire Department, Foothills Regional Emergency Services staff, Alberta Environment officials and MD staff and councillors all took time to discuss the event.

Brenda Fenwick with Foothills Regional Emergency Services explained that they first received the call in the afternoon from the two men who accidentally started the blaze while shooting firearms recreationally.

"It was reported as a very small grass fire, they were target practicing and the shooting started a fire," she



WHEEL FILE PHOTO

Fire crews battle the blaze on April 17 when a wildfire burned more than 125 acres near the Quirk Creek Gas Plant.

told the room. "They tried to put it out and needed help, it sounded minimal. We can only go with what people tell us, but when (the fire department) came on scene they discovered it was much bigger, and then began calling for more resources."

Many residents angrily questioned why no charges were laid against the individuals, but RCMP explained that the firearms were discharged legally, and

despite the fact that there was a fire ban at the time, shooting is still allowed and investigators determined there was no intent to actually cause a fire.

Once the conversation shifted away from the cause of the fire, many residents were concerned with how communication was handled during the blaze as six homes were evacuated early on. One resident explained that she left work early and raced to

her Millarville area home after receiving the MD of Foothills Emergency Alert notification, as she was unable to determine how close the blaze was to her home.

Donna Hanson, who lives west of Millarville, said she had similar issues during the fire in that she was unsure of what she should be doing to prepare as she wasn't sure if the fire was headed her way.

"I was worried because

first of all the winds, which direction the fire was going, and I have some animals and I wanted to make sure that I would be able to get my animals out in time so consequently I need time to do that," she said. "I wasn't sure what I should be doing, should I be just sitting here waiting for somebody to talk to me? Should I be taking preliminary action here now? And then the other part of it was after it went on for some time was

knowing when you could stand down when it was it safe enough to sort of say 'Ok, I can relax here.'"

Hanson said while she is signed up for the emergency notification system, she was concerned that there isn't enough detail in it to accurately inform residents about what is going on in emergency situations.

"I thought it was good in the sense that it certainly lets you know there's a problem, but because it has such a short message it really just posed more questions," she said.

Clayton Terletski, director of emergency management for the MD said he's taking the feedback from the meeting and is hoping to make some improvements to the system.

"We've got to be really conscious of the information we're putting out and how they can access information, and we're going to try to see if we can talk to the company that supplies our MD alert to see if we can make that message a little bigger," Terletski said.

"The unfortunate part is if people don't have the means to get electronic stuff other than a phone call it's hard to get a hold of people, so that's a challenge."

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# Federal minister touts government's record

*High River: Michelle Rempel discusses economy with locals*

**By Roxanne Blackwell**  
Staff Reporter

As businesses and families in the foothills continue to rebound from the 2013 flood, the federal government will be there to support them – that was the message from Michelle Rempel, minister of State for Western Diversification, as she spoke in High River on May 22.

At the event, Rempel spoke to the strength of the Canadian economy, and detailed the steps the government has taken to get to a position where businesses are able to successfully thrive or, in High River's case, rebuild.

"I think the most significant thing, that we've done is we've significantly and consistently reduced the small business tax rate," Rempel said, pointing out that in the most recent budget the rate dropped from 12 to 11 per cent.

"First of all, we increased the limit in terms of income that qualifies you as a small business, now \$500,000 dollars. I'm so proud of this.... small businesses in Canada now pay 44 per cent less taxes than when we came into office in 2006. That's very significant."



JORDAN VERLAGE/OWW

Calgary Centre North member of parliament and Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification, Michelle Rempel, speaks about the impact of the federal budget to members of the business community at the Highwood Memorial Centre on May 22.

Rempel also said the federal government has equally worked to lower the corporate tax rate, which she pointed out can draw criticism from some people.

"I'll be asked, 'why should we have a low corporate tax rate?' somehow implying that if companies have cash it's not helping the economy. For those of you who own a business regardless of size, you know that if you're liquid, if you have some liquidity in your company, you

can take risks," Rempel explained. "You can hold on to that employee, have another employee come on, take that market risk in launching another product...that liquidity allows you to absorb some of that risk and also take risk in growing your company."

Rempel took the time to outline some of the new projects and funds that could help local businesses in the foothills get back on their feet. In 2013, Western Economic Diversification

Canada launched a new program called the Western Innovation Initiative, something Rempel said has been successful in taking local businesses to the next level.

"It was \$100 million allocated over five years for small and medium size enterprise in the form of a repayable interest free loan... That is for prototype development, product testing... how do you get funding for that? That's what the WIN program is

designed to do," she said. "I can not even tell you the quality of proposals that came in...the program is new but in the next six months we should be able to talk about product success stories that have come out of this."

Rempel said they will be continuing to do intakes for the program.

This is something Community Futures Highwood general manager John Lockhart was pleased to hear.

"A lot of our clients in this area actually made use of that program and it is a fabulous program and it's nice to hear her talk about it's in the plans to be renewed and see more opportunities," he said. "It's just great when a federal minister takes the time and finds her way into our region... it's nice to see someone who actually can relate to our rural community. We always think of Ottawa and ministers being in these big towers and really don't understand us but she has a good sense of really what our needs are."

MacLeod MP John Barlow helped organize the event, which was hosted by the High River Chamber of Commerce, and said he felt it was important to have Rempel come to the area and reiterate the federal government's support.

"With the business community here in High River trying to get back up on its feet I thought this was a great opportunity to have Minister Rempel here," he said. "Just to talk to the business owners to say 'these are some of the programs that are available to you,' just to show some federal support to what's going on."

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Terletski said the bigger issue is the lack of people who have made the effort to sign up for the alert system, with only about 10 per cent of residents receiving the notifications.

"Sign up for the alert system, it's a way to notify you that there's something going on, and then follow those links to go to the sites where you've got some more information on there and you can educate yourself on what you need to do," he said.

As a last resort, Terletski pointed out that residents who need to evacuate will be notified in person.

MD of Foothills Coun. Suzanne Oel said overall the

meeting was a great opportunity for the emergency staff to collect feedback on how to improve, and was a good way to let residents know where they can find information in those situations.

**"When that fire is over your hill that's when it hits home..."**

Suzanne Oel  
MD of Foothills Coun.

"(The alert system) is voluntary, so how do we show people it's important? Until

you have an event like this, it really hits home," she said.

"When that fire is over your hill that's when it hits home to you that I really need to know how to deal with that if it ever comes my way again. That's a reality check."

The MD reminds residents to check the website at [mdfoothills.com](http://mdfoothills.com) in an emergency situation, contact the media, or call the non emergency line at any fire or RCMP station for information.

To sign up for the MD of Foothills Emergency Alert Notification System, visit the MD's website or call the office for assistance to help get set up for the service.

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