

MPPAC's Intervention In The Fort McMurray Wildfires Leads To Enhanced Member Healthcare

As many of you are aware, MPPAC raised attention last week to the fact that many of the RCMP first responders sent to the Fort McMurray wildfires were not provided with adequate protection from fire, smoke, debris and airborne particles.

Since last week, we have heard from numerous members deployed to the Fort McMurray wildfires, as well as the Slave Lake (2011) and Kelowna wildfires (2003). They have shared their stories with MPPAC. Some members deployed to the Fort McMurray wildfires informed MPPAC they went a number of days before receiving any masks. They were then issued masks that were not the appropriate equipment given the conditions that the members faced. Members who had been deployed to the Slave Lake and Kelowna fires shared their experiences and the dire consequences of being improperly equipped. Contrary to what members have been advised by other groups on social media, as well as RCMP senior management, members on the ground in Fort McMurray advised MPPAC that they were not properly equipped, nor did they receive proper medical evaluations.

Videos from the wildfires clearly confirm RCMP members without masks or with masks that do not offer the proper protection. In addition, these members were also not wearing any fire retardant apparel.

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ieTQvldG-Vo> (RCMP members at 1:37)
2. (CBC video RCMP members 1:17, 2:37, 18:16)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xn2ydiQctus>

Below are testimonials MPPAC received from RCMP members working at the wildfires:

Member:

"I am a Constable with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, currently posted to Fort McMurray, Alberta. I was present during the wildfires and was called in on overtime to assist evacuating the city while on Regular Time Off... On the subject of proper equipment, it goes without saying that as a member of the National Police Force of Canada, I like all of my co-workers was trained in CBRN response and equipment. This equipment was not available to us. Many of us went without masks to provide proper clean air to breath without the added ash and smoke caused by the fires. I myself purchased a

multi-purpose respirator prior to the local Canadian tire closing for the evacuation. My partner and I also purchased our own water and filters for the incident. Paper N95 masks were eventually distributed, however, did not provide adequate filtration of the air, which according to the air quality index was at an extremely hazardous level. I continued to cough and wheeze for weeks after the incident and being relieved. It should be noted that while in training we were advised we would all have access to the proper equipment including gas masks and respirators with proper filters.”

Member:

“I have no problem with my story going out if it can help educate our members and keep them safe. The Force didn’t then, (Kelowna wildfires 2003) and still apparently doesn’t have any clue as to the number of toxic, carcinogenic compounds that are released during an Interface Wildfire...our members need to know about the toxins, and heavy metals that come from not just the fire, and smoke...It was nice to see at least some of the members had at least an N95 filter, but that isn’t even enough. Many of the most toxic substances found around these fires can be absorbed by the skin, not just breathing...How many times do members have to stick their faces into burnt out cars, looking for evidence, after standing in the smoke while the firefighters in full Scott packs put out the fire? There’s a reason the firefighters that were involved have been medically checked for a baseline, and will be followed for at least the next few years to see what the effects on their health are.”

<http://mppac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Member-Testimonial-Kelowna-Wildfire.pdf>

Member:

“I was present in Fort McMurray from the beginning of the fire. During this time I was repeatedly exposed to the fire and the associated smoke from burning trees, structures and vehicles, etc. At the start of the evacuation when the members were placed in the most danger, we were not issued any safety equipment whatsoever...Around the 48 hour mark we were advised by supervision that masks had been ordered but had not arrived yet so to do our best to stay away from the most hazardous areas. This proved an impossible task as the smoke from the fire was everywhere and constantly shifting.”

<http://mppac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Member-Testimonial-Fort-McMurray.pdf>

Member:

“Good day, I wanted to advise you of my situation in case it helps with the battle to support members who were/are/will be in Fort McMurray. I was seconded to Slave Lake during their fire evacuation. We were given masks however they did little to protect us and to the best of my knowledge were not designed or approved for smoke exposure. I was later diagnosed with, and treated for, an upper respiratory track infection. I have no doubt that it was caused by exposure to smoke and soot.

Despite many courses of treatment the infection attacked my sinuses and ears until doctors finally had to surgically remove the necrotic tissue and several sinus bones in order to eliminate the infection. Unfortunately during those months the infection killed

one of my vestibular nerves, the nerve that carries balance information from the inner ear to the brain. I now suffer from chronic incurable vertigo. After reading a news article about MPPAC alleging that members have not been appropriately protected in Fort McMurray I feel that members like me can lend credibility to the assertion that these kinds of duties, with the substandard equipment provided by the RCMP, are causing long term injuries and illnesses.”

As a result of MPPAC’s early intervention, a directive was finally issued by K Division.

<http://mppac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/K-Division-Directive.pdf>

This directive requires all members who were exposed to the wildfires to seek respiratory testing. There is nothing more important than the health and safety of our members. MPPAC will continue to hold management accountable for the safety and well being of all RCMP members.

LET US BE YOUR ADVOCATE

The Mounted Police Professional Association of Canada (MPPAC) aims to become the independent labour representative for all non-commissioned RCMP members. MPPAC was established in 2010 to fight for the right to engage in collective bargaining through an independent association on behalf of RCMP regular and civilian members across Canada. We strive for excellence in our conduct and obligations. We provide leadership to all of our membership, on justice issues which affect the quality of life of all Canadians. The Association does not seek or support the right to strike. To learn more, visit www.mppac.ca.

Become a member today and let’s put forward a collective voice on work issues that concern us all. Please forward this message to your RCMP colleagues who are not yet members of MPPAC.

MPPAC | Mounted Police Professional Association of Canada
ACPMP | Association Canadienne de la Police Montée Professionnelle

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