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LOCAL AGENCIES GATHER FOR DISASTER PLANNING

Emergency response groups from across the region joined forces last week for a three day course on Emergency Site Management. The program was hosted by the High Level Fire Department, and facilitated by the Alberta Fire Training School. The course is designed to improve an agency's ability to co-ordinate the combined operations that occur at a disaster site by learning the functions and responsibilities of the various emergency services involved.

As George Roddick, Emergency Preparedness Manager for the AFTS, explained, "we know how our own departments work, but we don't know how to communicate with other agencies or what the responsibilities are in a disaster. Emergency Site Management courses bring these groups together to learn how to work in unison on a large scale under less than ideal conditions".

"The Town of High Level's disaster plan has not been practiced for several years", noted Fire Chief Rodney Schmidt, "many people assume that the Fire Department will take care of everything . Disaster planning is something that involves several diverse agencies, all of whom have a role during a major incident, and we all need to sit down to prepare a plan together".

One of the concepts looked at in the course was risk assesment - examining the potential threats within your community and how you would respond to that type of incident. "Disaster planning isn't only about catastrophic events such as airplane crashes, it also includes things like prolonged power outages or major snowfalls", said Schmidt.

Participants in the course included the RCMP, Fire Departments from High Level, Rainbow Lake, La Crete, and North Peace Tribal Council, Emergency Medical Services from High Level, Rainbow Lake, and La Crete, Northwestern Health Services Region, Tolko, Footner Forest Products, and the Town of High Level. Funding for the course came from a grant application by the High Level Fire Department under the Municipal 2000 program.

PHOTO CAPTION:

Participants in the Emergency Site Management course conducted table-top disaster simulations to practice inter-agency co-operation.