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FIRE DEPARTMENT SEEKS REGIONAL DANGEROUS GOODS RESPONSE

The High Level Fire Department is aiming at becoming the response agency for dangerous goods incidents throughout the region. The initiative would establish a team able to respond to calls involving hazardous materials across the MD of Mackenzie. Recently, members from both High Level and Fort Vermilion Fire Departments completed a Dangerous Goods Operations course put on by the Alberta Fire Training School. Topics covered in the five day course included identifying hazardous materials, planning an appropriate level of response, containing dangerous goods releases, decontamination and clean up procedures.

"Most Fire Departments, ourselves included, are grossly under-equipped to properly deal with a dangerous goods incident" noted Fire Chief Rodney Schmidt, "this course re-affirmed that for us. We have an immediate need for the special encapsulated suits, containment equipment and gear that are necessary to safely manage a chemical spill."

Schmidt went on to say that it makes sense to use High Level as the response base for the region. "We have a major highway and a rail line, most of the traffic bound for other communities passes through the town. High Level is a regional hub, plus our Fire Department is the largest in the region." According to the Alberta Government Vehicle Inspection Services, roughly sixty per cent of the transport trucks that travel in the region are carrying dangerous goods.

"The drawback of ambitious projects like this, is that it can get rather expensive. Municipalities alone cannot afford to pay for service expansions", commented Deputy Fire Chief Mark Andrews. "A large portion has to come from either grants or corporate underwriting." At the present time, the nearest response team is the Peace River Fire Department. Site clean ups are handled by private companies out of Edmonton.

PHOTO CAPTION

- 1) Firefighters wearing encapsulated suits approach a simulated chemical leak from a truck
- 2) Firefighters are decontaminated in showers after containing a simulated chemical leak