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### COMPANIES AIRLIFT FORT MCMURRAY OILSANDS WORKERS UNDER NEW FIRE THREAT

Fort McMurray fire destroys one oil camp, threatens others

The fire that destroyed one work camp north of Fort McMurray has spared another — but remains a looming risk to oil sites and workers left behind. Flames razed Blacksand Executive Lodge and burned at the edges of nearby Noralta Lodge. A crew of provincial and privately hired firefighters held back the fire. The company reported no structural damage, but said the facility, which provided temporary housing for oil workers, is still "at risk." That fire on the west side of town also roared eastward across Highway 63 and up to the Northlands Sawmill. The mill sits roughly 20 kilometres north of the Fort McMurray townsite, on the east side of the highway. Mill director David Harman, who helped beat back the blaze, confirmed that provincial firefighters and helicopters helped hold back the fire after it crossed the road and burned up to the southern edge of the mill site. Fires surrounding

Fort McMurray flared up, sweeping northeast and toward the highway. In a news conference, Premier Rachel Notley said the fire had not jumped Highway 63. Obtained photos taken about a half kilometre south of the Parsons Creek gravel pit that show firefighters dousing flames metres from the highway shoulder. But with smoky and dangerous conditions, the full scope remains difficult to track. "There were natural barriers in the way that were slowing the wildfire down," wrote government spokesman John Archer in an email, explaining the fire was reportedly 400 metres from the highway. "Visibility is very poor due to heavy smoke and it has been difficult for firefighters to assess." Alberta wildfire manager Chad Morrison said that fires "burned vegetation at the edges" of the Syncrude and Suncor oilfields. Neither company has reported damage to production facilities. As the fire moved farther eastward, energy companies that brought employees back to work during the past week quickly moved to get them out again. Officials confirm that 2,700 oil workers were flown out overnight. Suncor employee Russell Gavelin was among them. He first left his

work camp on the weekend of May 7 when the area north of the city was evacuated — and was brought back to camp to start work again on May 16. "As we got closer and closer to Suncor, it just started getting darker and redder," he said of his return to the northern site. "Finally to the point where it's 2:30 in the afternoon and I can barely see my hand in front of my face on the bus." The provincial government issued new mandatory evacuation orders that afternoon, which affected an estimated 8,000 people north of Fort McMurray. Gavelin and many others did not get back to work. Instead, most were taken by bus to oil lodges farther north, outside the evacuation zone: Wapasu Creek Lodge, McLelland Lake Lodge and Grey Wolf Lodge. "No one could have predicted what happened," Gavelin said. "The fire was considered to be far enough from operations that we would have been OK. I might have questioned that, but I was really quite eager to go back to work." The mandatory evacuation order issued this week applies to 19 oil facilities from Aostra Road to just south of Fort McKay. Syncrude and Suncor's production plants, as well as several of the lodges where those workers stay, are part of that list. Syncrude spokesman Will Gibson said his company made the decision to initiate a total shutdown of operations on May 7. They moved all staff out of the area during precautionary evacuations of regions north of Fort McMurray that weekend. He said some 500 workers had returned by the time the new evacuation order was issued this week. About 400 of those workers were taken by bus south out of Fort McMurray by Tuesday morning, he said. Roughly 100 essential or emergency staff have stayed on to watch over Syncrude's Mildred Lake and Aurora facilities. "We wanted to ensure safety of our people out there," Gibson said. Gibson said he's confident tailings ponds at the south end of the Syncrude site will work like a fire break. "They would not catch on fire, because it's largely water," he said. "The tailings ponds contain only trace amounts of bitumen." He estimated the size of the Syncrude oilsands mine closest to that northwestern tongue of the fire,

called Mildred Lake, is about 35,000 hectares in size. Suncor's executive vice-president Mark Little has similarly announced plans to move all staff except critical emergency personnel out of the area — by road or by air. "We were confident that the fire was under control on the west side of the river before we started putting people back into our operations," wrote Little in a post on the company's Facebook page, dated May 17 at 10:30 p.m. "Unfortunately, due to rapidly changing events (the fire travelled approximately 30 km in one day), we had to step back and shut in our base plant facility." Little encouraged employees to leave their personal vehicles behind and take company-sponsored buses in RCMP-controlled convoys straight to a private airport nearby. Calls to Suncor requesting an interview were not returned. The fire had consumed an estimated 423,000 hectares by Wednesday morning. Wednesday's forecast called for gusting winds and warm temperatures throughout the day. Notley said on Wednesday that Shell and CNRL, two other major oil producers located north of Fort McMurray, whose facilities are situated further from the fires, have operated without interruption since the fires began. It is estimated that a total of 11,000 workers remained in the northern work camps as of Wednesday afternoon.

### FORT MCMURRAY FIRE GROWS TO 423,000 HECTARES, CONTINUES TO THREATEN OILSANDS SITES

Wildfire stalls near Saskatchewan border but continues spread north to oilsands facilities

The Fort McMurray wildfire in northern Alberta is carving a new path of destruction, destroying an oilsands camp while racing eastward toward more industry sites. The fire, which has become known as "the beast," has grown by a staggering 57,000 hectares in the last 24 hours, consuming 423,000 hectares of boreal forest as of Wednesday morning. Wildfire information officer Travis Fairweather attributes the "pretty significant" growth to "extreme fire conditions." "It's really being burning intensely



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and the winds have been carrying it," he said Wednesday. The fire forced 8,000 non-essential workers to flee the area Monday night, and a mandatory evacuation order remains in place for all work camps north of the city. The majority were sent by ground to work camps near Fort MacKay, about 53 kilometres to the north. But some were also bused, or later flown, south to Edmonton and Calgary. By Tuesday morning, the flames had made their way to the Blacksand Executive Lodge, which provides accommodations to hundreds of workers in the area. The building's sprinkler system was no match for the raging inferno, and all 665 units of the building were consumed by the fire. Within hours, the flames had spread east, threatening the Noralta Lodge Fort McMurray Village, a facility that can house more than 3,000 people, and Horizon North's Birch Mountain, a 540-unit facility. Noralta officials took to social media Tuesday night to say the fire had been held back, but the site was still at risk and crews would be working through the night to protect the facility. Six kilometres away from the Blacksand Lodge, the Birch Mountain Lodge, also owned by Horizon North, remains in the path of the fire. "We've got eight camps in a perimeter around Fort McMurray, out of seven which have been evacuated," Rod Graham, president and CEO of Horizon North, said. "We have not sent any of our people into harm's way, but from unconfirmed reports we've had, our Birch property is still standing." The wind was also expected to push the fire towards the Suncor and Syncrude

oil sands facilities, but the province said both are highly resilient to fire. Each site is surrounded by wide barriers of cleared firebreak and gravel and are guarded by their own firefighting crews. However, only essential personnel remain at both plants. Crews in the area continue to work around the clock to douse the flames and create firebreaks around critical infrastructure, but the fire has become increasingly volatile amid high winds and tinder-dry conditions. "Over the last 48 hours it has certainly grown significantly, particularly along the eastern edge, growing toward the Saskatchewan border, but also growing north toward the oil sands facilities," said Bruce Macnab, with the Northern Forestry Centre in Edmonton. "In these kind of conditions, the fire crews will be doing their best to fight the sides of the fire when conditions allow, but that's very much weather dependent." By noon Wednesday, the eastern front of the fire appeared to be stalled about five kilometres from the Saskatchewan border. The government there has established a wildfire base camp in the small community of Buffalo Narrows to use air tankers and helicopters along the eastern edge of the massive fire. But Duane McKay, Saskatchewan's commissioner of emergency and fire safety, said smoke is the biggest concern for residents of the nearest community, La Loche, which is about 20 kilometres from the border. The fire itself poses no current threat to the town or any other Saskatchewan communities, McKay said. He said the wind is expected to shift directions later



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today and could blow the fire back on itself. "We don't anticipate it crossing the border in the near future," he said. But he cautioned that the fire "obviously has a mind of its own in terms of where it wants to go."

### ONTARIO'S MOVE AWAY FROM NATURAL GAS WOULD HIT ALBERTA PRODUCERS

10% of Alberta's natural gas production flows to Ontario

At first, it feels like another nail in the coffin for Alberta natural gas producers. Ontario, with its pending climate change plan, looks set to turn away from natural gas for home heating. Ontario is still working on the plan, but in a leak of the draft version obtained by the Globe and Mail, the province wants to phase out natural gas for residential heating in favour of electric and geothermal sources. Aside from what this could mean for heating bills in Ontario, it would be a blow to natural gas producers in Alberta. In Ontario, 76 per cent of homes use gas for heat, and producers in Western Canada are suffering from persistently low prices and more competition from U.S. shale gas producers. According to Statistics Canada, in 2013, the average Ontario household used 91 gigajoules of natural gas in a year. Blake Shaffer, an energy researcher at the University of Calgary, did the rough math, assuming most of that natural gas use was for heating, and figured that Ontario uses roughly one billion cubic feet of natural gas a day to heat residences. "Coincidentally," said Shaffer, "that's roughly what's

still flowing on the TransCanada mainline from Alberta to Ontario." Alberta has lost market share in Ontario to U.S. producers in the northern states, who have increased production of shale gas. While the gas is as inexpensive in Alberta as it is in Pennsylvania, the shipping costs are higher from the west. "They've basically pushed out our gas," said Shaffer. "And if this one billion drop in demand was there, we're the marginal supplier, so you can imagine it's threatening what remains of the great national unifier of west to east gas flow." Alberta produces approximately 10 billion cubic feet of natural gas a day, half of which it uses in the province for home and commercial heating, as well as industrial use in the oil sands and elsewhere, and to generate power. If Ontario is receiving a billion cubic feet a day from Alberta on TransCanada's main pipeline, that's a tenth of the province's production. Not all of that is at risk, of course, since Ontario's industries use more gas than homeowners do. But it does mean Alberta needs to find new markets. "Losing more of Eastern Canada as a market would be very problematic, if another outlet for selling natural gas isn't opened up," said Judith Dworkin, an energy economist with RS Energy Group. The easiest market for Alberta would be itself, as the province shifts from coal-fired power plants to natural gas and renewable energy. "If we were to replace all 6,000 megawatts of coal with gas and leave all the growth to be met by renewables, 6,000 megawatts of gas plants is just under a billion cubic feet a

day," said Shaffer. Oilpatch historian David Finch thinks there will be a future for natural gas, even if Ontario phases out its use in homes. "The history of fuels is that they get repurposed and used in a different way," Ontario Environment Minister Glen Murray said the province is not banning natural gas, which would continue to play a critical role in the province's energy mix. Dwarkin hopes that is the case. "Alberta is already under siege from a natural disaster and this is threatening an unnatural disaster to an already struggling natural gas sector."

### HALIFAX MAN USES NALOXONE TO SAVE FRIEND FROM OVERDOSE

'I'm happy he's alive,' says Rick Marshall, who used the take-home kit. Rick Marshall is on an incredible high, but not from a drug. On Wednesday, he saved the life of a close friend in Halifax. He injected the man with the opiate overdose antidote drug, naloxone. "The guy's alive today, let's be grateful," Marshall said proudly. He was trained how to spot signs of an overdose and how to administer the drug. He was among the first to receive the instruction in February at Direction 180, the city's methadone clinic. Marshall, 60, was sent home with a kit including two vials of the drug and syringes, and put them to use on a friend. He's believed to be the first success story of the Nova Scotia pilot program. "I'm happy he's alive," he said during an interview in a parking lot behind the clinic. Marshall says he prayed he'd never have to put the new skills to use. "It's hard, you see someone that's dying, it's not pretty," he said.

Marshall says he was on Gottingen Street and realized he hadn't seen his friend recently. He learned his friend was last seen two days ago lying on a table in a rooming house.

He said he's seen his friend, who's in his late 30s or early 40s, abuse opiates like Dilaudid, as well as crack cocaine and benzodiazepenes. Marshall says he jumped on his bike, dashed home, grabbed his kit and headed for the rooming house. He says he found his friend lying on a bed and called his friend's name. The man's lips were blue, his breathing was slow and he was in a confused state, the telltale symptoms of an opiate overdose. "I'm slapping the guy, I'm shaking him, right," said Marshall. Marshall said he rolled his friend over, filled the syringe with naloxone, jabbed the needle into his friend's backside and then started chest compressions. Soon, his friend started to snap awake. During training, he learned that drug users often react violently when they emerge from an overdose. "I backed up and said 'It's Rick, it's Big Rick,'" he said. "Listen buddy, I saved your life, you were going." The whole episode only lasted a couple of minutes, Marshall estimates. He says his friend thanked him and seemed embarrassed. After he was sure his friend was going to be fine, he chose not to call 911 because it could cause problems, which is something he described to CBC News last fall. Marshall then went to Direction 180, where staff discussed the naloxone experience with him. "It's cause for celebration, but not celebration without thinking about all of the lives that we could have saved," said Cindy MacIsaac, the clinic's executive director. She

says she started lobbying the province three years ago to fund a naloxone take-home kit program.

So far, the clinic has distributed about 90 kits and 140 people have been trained. MacIsaac's goal is to increase access to naloxone, and to expand access to methadone and Suboxone treatment for opiate addiction. Marshall is one of Direction 180's methadone treatment clients. He received a new replacement kit, just in case. "As far as I'm concerned we have hope to save people. You know why we have hope? I proved it today," said Marshall.

### SUNCOR WINS LATEST ROUND IN BATTLE OVER RANDOM DRUG TESTS

Company says tests aim to protect the safety of the public, workers and the environment.

Oilsands giant Suncor Energy has won the latest round in its push to randomly test thousands of workers for drugs and alcohol in Alberta. A Court of Queen's Bench judge has quashed a 2014 arbitration panel ruling that determined the proposed testing plan would violate the privacy of union workers represented by Unifor. Justice Blair Nixon said the panel should have considered evidence about alcohol and drug incidents involving all workers at Suncor, including non-union contract employees. "By focusing only on the bargaining unit, the majority (of the panel) expressly excluded consideration of relevant evidence," Nixon wrote. "The majority ignored evidence pertaining to some two-thirds of the individuals working in the oilsands operation." Nixon said a new arbitration panel should

review the company's random testing plan, which Suncor first announced in 2012. Suncor had presented evidence of 2,276 drug and alcohol "security incidents" recorded between 2004 and 2013. Unifor, which has been challenging the random drug testing proposal, took the position that only 12 of the incidents involved union members. Suncor Energy spokeswoman Sneha Seetal said the company is pleased with Nixon's ruling. She said random testing aims to protect the safety of the public, workers and the environment. "What is important for Suncor is really looking at the driver behind our desire to include random testing in our already comprehensive safety program," she said. "We wouldn't be pursuing this if we didn't feel it was absolutely necessary." Unifor spokesman Dave Moffat said the union will appeal the judge's decision and maintains that random testing violates the basic rights of union members. "We are disappointed but we will proceed through the system and hope for a satisfactory result," he said. "It is important to all Canadians that the randomness of this kind of personal invasion is something that we have to make sure gets vetted through our system and that everybody understands its seriousness and its implications."

The union, which represents about 3,800 workers at Suncor, said the company already has a comprehensive drug and alcohol policy that includes post-incident and reasonable cause testing. It said that policy is not affected by the ongoing litigation over the random testing plan.

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