

WILDFIRES

Last year, British Columbia faced a tremendously challenging wildfire season. The historic “heat dome” brought record-breaking temperatures in late June and early July, which dried fuels and lowered humidity to dangerous levels. These conditions resulted in a high number of large, active wildfires in B.C. and other parts of western Canada and the United States. At the height of the wildfire season, there were over 300 active wildfires in B.C., including 67 wildfires of note.



Wildfires can affect mining operations in several ways:

- Impact mine staff whose homes are damaged by wildfire or are located within evacuation order areas.
- Mine sites can fall within evacuation order areas and may have to be evacuated on short notice.
- Ponds and tailings facilities may be used for fire suppression activities in nearby areas.
- Parts of mines may be surrendered to the wildfire branch for fire suppression and staging activities.
- Mines or parts of mines may be threatened or damaged by wildfires.

To prepare for the upcoming wildfire season, mine managers should take the time to review and update their site’s Mine Emergency Response Plan (MERP). Consider the following points when developing or updating a MERP:

- What needs to happen in case a wildfire threatens the site?
- How will the mine secure the site in the event of an evacuation?
- Does the site have secondary egress paths if main access/egress is threatened by wildfire?
- Are there potential impacts to on-site water management if ponds are used for fire suppression?
- Are there provisions in place to secure explosives magazines, including the emergency removal and relocation of explosives?

Mine managers must ensure staff understand what to do in case of a wildfire, including activating the MERP. Consider training mine workers in basic wildfire response and fire suppression. Additionally, to ensure mines are prepared for the upcoming wildfire season, mines are encouraged to make early contact with their regional fire center for coordination, education, and resourcing information. To find current information for your region, please visit B.C. Wildfire Service to access fire danger ratings and current conditions <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status>.

REMINDER: If a serious incident occurs at the mine site, or if there is the potential of a serious incident occurring which could cause injury to personnel or other significant damage to property or the environment, it must be reported to the ministry by calling the Mine Incident Reporting Line toll-free number at 1-888-348-0299 or by email mineincidents@gov.bc.ca.