

# Pilot Project Executive Summary



Through its Aboriginal Inclusion Initiative, the Calgary Fire Department is leveraging its experience and expertise to build a network of government, industry and social stakeholders to assist Aboriginal communities across Alberta with improving the safety and protection of their people and local environments. By providing training and education, the Initiative supports Aboriginal communities in responding to emergency incidents on or near their lands and helps reduce the higher risk of accidental injury and death among their children and families.

The Aboriginal Inclusion Initiative focuses on three key elements:

1. Education, community capacity and awareness
2. Training and skills enhancement
3. Employment in the emergency response field





## The Alexander First Nation pilot

Between October 2013 and June 2014, the Calgary Fire Department and leaders and educators from the Alexander First Nation in northern Alberta worked to develop and deliver fire and safety education, training and recruitment activities for Nation members.

The pilot encompassed all aspects of the Aboriginal Inclusion Initiative, from introduction of the concept to communities through to completion of training for community members.

### **1. Engagement, information sharing and communications:**

Several communications and engagement tools and approaches were developed and tested with government, industry and community stakeholder groups, including the Alexander First Nation, to encourage participation in the Initiative.

**2. Funding:** Implementation of the Aboriginal Inclusion Initiative in communities relies on the financial support of government and private industry to cover training, equipment and education costs. The Alexander First Nation pilot was possible thanks to generous financial support provided by Cenovus and Northern Gateway, both companies with ties in Alberta's oil and gas industry and interests in strengthening Aboriginal communities and emergency response capabilities in the province.

**3. Relationship building:** Targeted meetings and conversations were held with Aboriginal leaders and decision makers to gain a full understanding of local realities, challenges and opportunities, and establish the relationships needed to design and deliver the pilot project. The result was a customized education and training plan for the Alexander First Nation based on their specific concerns and issues.

### **4. Education, community capacity and awareness:**

In cooperation with the Alexander First Nation community, the Calgary Fire Department launched the educational component of the pilot project using the Getting to Know Fire program. Delivered through a series of short modules, the Getting to Know Fire curriculum is customized to address the learning abilities and safety needs of children in kindergarten through to grade three. To kick off the program, members from both the Calgary Fire Department and Alexander Fire Department met with students and provided opportunities for the children to interact with firefighters, apparatus and equipment. In recognition of the importance of history and tradition, an elder spoke to the importance of fire and smoke in the Alexander culture as well as the safety risks they pose.







**5. Training and skills enhancement:** In partnership with the Alexander First Nation community, the Fire Department adapted its world-class training program for delivery to a group of Aboriginal members interested in pursuing a firefighting career. These members received training to certify them at the National Fire Protection Association 1001 Professional Firefighter level, the standard to which members of major fire departments, like the Calgary Fire Department, are trained. Participants completed a series of modules on basic and advanced firefighting skills, hazardous materials management, first aid and CPR.

**6. Selection and deployment:** Following the completion of training, the successful certified firefighters were selected for employment with the Alexander First Nation Fire Department. They were also provided with the option to apply to the Calgary Fire Department and receive mentoring to assist in the application and interview process, but all of the trained individuals elected to remain in their community to provide fire protection and prevention service.

## A safety success: pilot project outcomes

As a result of the pilot, Alexander First Nation has enhanced its emergency planning, preparedness and response capabilities, helping to ensure the protection of its land and people. Specifically, the pilot project with Alexander First Nation resulted in:

- A range of stakeholders across government, business and community sectors engaged in testing the Initiative, identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement and validating the viability of the Initiative;
- Aboriginal firefighters trained to the professional firefighter standard required by most major fire departments in North America for employment and now providing fire prevention and protection service in their community;
- Students and their families educated in fire prevention, injury avoidance and hazard awareness to help combat higher than average fire, injury and death rates in Aboriginal communities;
- A team of Alexander First Nation school teachers certified to train their peers on delivering the Getting to Know Fire education program; and
- Identification of new forums and opportunities for industry and Aboriginal community representatives to collaborate and address common concerns regarding local emergency response capacities.



