

OIL SANDS INDUSTRY LESSONS LEARNED DURING COVID-19





Introduction

Since the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the oil sands industry has been swift and aligned in its response, implementing and maintaining strict protocols to reduce COVID-19 exposure. Our response has been driven by two key priorities:

- Protecting the health, safety and well-being of our communities and workforce.
- As an essential industry that provides heat and power to our homes, industries, and fuel necessary for transportation, the oil sands industry has prioritized its role in supporting Alberta and Canada's longer-term economic recovery.

Who is OSCA?

The Oil Sands Community Alliance is a member based organization, operating in the Athabasca oil sands region with the mandate to enable shared value and healthy communities that allow sustainable development of Canada's oil sands in the region where we operate.

To slow the spread, companies implemented a number of strict measures, slowed operations, staggered work schedules and operated with mostly essential staff having other employees work from home. Examples of measures include:

- Implemented screening questionnaires and procedures, as well as contact tracing protocols.
- Stringent self-isolation protocols.
- Implemented physical distancing and face mask protocol in the workplace, project accommodations, on buses and flights.
- Accommodated work-from-home measures where possible.
- Enhanced sanitation, workplace hygiene and cleaning.

Oil sands companies worked with Alberta Health Services (AHS) closely and other stakeholders, to implement and build upon the measures in place, based on AHS guidance.

Scope

To support future coordinated response and management, the Oil Sands Community Alliance (OSCA) conducted a lessons learned session on COVID-19. Through the pandemic, several stakeholders, governments and organizations played a pivotal role, however, the scope of this report is focused on the key challenges and successes that were experienced from an industry perspective.

The purpose of this report is to develop timely and valuable learnings and precedence for how industry and other stakeholders can work together and respond in the future. Common findings were grouped into themes that highlight key opportunities to improve emergency response and management from a health crisis perspective, including:

- Industry's collective COVID-19 response, management and knowledge sharing.
- Supply Chain.
- External and internal communication.
- Engagement/Collaboration with AHS, other Government of Alberta (GoA) departments, municipalities and other stakeholders.

Lessons Learned

Industry Response and Management

The oil sands industry has a strong safety culture, commitment to worker safety, robust pandemic procedures and emergency response plans as mandated by Occupational Health and Safety. Due to this, companies had the ability to rapidly update plans, and implement measures to address health and safety of staff while maintaining operations during COVID-19. The oil sands industry response has been swift and aligned, collaboration amongst OSCA members and other stakeholders was key to coordinate response and management, share information and ensure there was no redundancy in the work. Working in a trusting, lean and agile manner was key to strong collaboration not just amongst industry but with external stakeholders as well.

Supply Chain Requirements

With states of emergency declared at the provincial and municipal level at the onset of the pandemic, there were supply chain disruptions.

- Due to shortages at the onset of the pandemic, some members faced delays, challenges with respect to sourcing personal protective equipment (PPE) for sites workforce.
- Members were able to adjust policies/ protocols and move away from regular procurement practices in order to source appropriate supplies and reduce supply chain disruptions.

While members experienced supply chain distributions, they were able to ensure access to critical products for communities and the health care industry when resources were limited.

Engagement and Collaboration with External Stakeholders

The health and safety of our communities is a fundamental shared value. Companies had a role to play in effective management of COVID-19 by listening to community concerns and adapt where needed. This was done by working in collaboration with The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB), AHS and releasing media statements, participating in community town halls, etc. Companies also stepped in and donated PPE, shared COVID-19 protocols, and participated in rapid testing pilot projects with local communities.

Through this pandemic it is evident that companies, Governments and communities must work in collaboration to aid emergency response and recovery efforts. An established/ enhanced working relationship with AHS and Public Health was instrumental to ensure the effective management of the COVID-19. Working through AHS guidance, members were able to continuously improve procedures, protocols and plans and implement new testing methods which allowed for safer workforce planning and management of exposure.

- Recognizing the fluidity of the situation, constantly changing protocols and health guidance proved challenging from an execution point of view. There is an opportunity for AHS to provide notes in the updated documents highlighting these changes. For planning and implementation purposes, it is helpful to build in flexibility for rules, guidance and exemptions while still planning ahead.
- Given the constantly changing situation at the onset of the pandemic, clear recommendations regarding endorsement of the use of face

masks, type and effectiveness to reduce COVID-19 transmission were challenging, which impacted the timely procurement of masks. It should be noted that this lack of clarity was not unique to Alberta and Canada as health agencies across the world faced similar challenges in a dynamic situation.

- The ability to partner with AHS for testing on site made a significant impact in contact tracing and managing spread. Oil sands companies have on-site resources, professionals, medical clinics and supplies to support AHS and minimize the burden on the local health system. There is an opportunity to utilize these resources in the future as well as assist with vaccination rollout when it becomes available to the wider population.
- This pandemic had several layers, and required not only a health but an emergency response at the municipal and provincial level. In past emergencies, an industry role or tie back to the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) has proved to be a useful conduit of information between Government agencies and industry, in addition to providing valuable industry expertise in emergency management.

Internal and External Communications

The global pandemic has led to redefined focus on communication and collaboration. This is a positive outcome from this pandemic, and should be maintained going forward. It was key for COVID-19 response management to have established and regular communication channels (both internally and externally) to discuss and respond to rapidly changing conditions. For companies, open lines of communication were instrumental in educating staff with updated information and managing exceptions.

Opportunities/Recommendations for Future Response

1. Work with AHS to develop a formal structure, point of contact and a comprehensive up-to-date list of key health-related emergency response/ stakeholder contacts along with an active map of critical infrastructure to aid in future collaboration and information sharing.

3. Companies to work with their internal supply chain departments to ensure supply chain resilience by strategically defining emergency response planning and approaches. This could include developing contingency plans that anticipate areas at risk for supply chain disruptions and consider and assess PPE for future emergencies.

2. Work with the Government of Alberta to establish an oil sands industry seat at the Provincial Emergency Operations Center. This will help streamline the communication process amongst oil sands companies and the Government.

4. Develop an emergency response plan and structural protocol for OSCA and its members, including communications and information sharing protocols. This will help pull together all the supporting groups and stakeholders at the beginning of an incident to ensure clear accountabilities, roles and responsibilities.



OSCA COVID-19 Communications

↔ Compilation of COVID-19 media statements