

MELVILLE AND DISTRICT HEALTH CENTRE FULLY PREPARED FOR CLIMATE-RELATED EVENTS

Massive volunteer effort helps in evacuation as floodwaters threaten rural Saskatchewan health centre.

INTRODUCTION

The Melville and District Health Centre is a combined care facility consisting of St. Peter's Hospital, a 30 bed acute care facility and the St. Paul Lutheran Home with 128 bed long-term care (LTC) beds. Numerous outpatient services are also offered including a home care treatment centre, public health, physical and occupational therapy, and addiction and mental health services. Satellite chemotherapy services are also provided.

On June 30, 2014 the area had received well over 19 cm of rain over a 72 hour period and there was no sign of it stopping. Social media (Facebook) started to roll with gossip stating the reservoir dam, approximately 5 kms north of the hospital, was about to breach which would bring a wave of water towards the hospital. In contact with the City of Melville throughout the day and into the evening, it was determined that the reservoir was not going to breach and was in fact quite solid. It was noted though that the water was approximately 45 cm from overflowing.

At 3:18 a.m. on July 1, the Emergency Preparedness Officer (EPO) for Sunrise Health Region was notified by city officials that water had breached the access road and was flowing quite quickly towards the facility. Upon the EPOs arrival, the city was in the process of removing an approach which should have allowed the water to bypass the facility. Unfortunately, this did not happen as planned and the water still flowed towards the health centre.

IMPACTS

The risk of flooding was significant and staff were concerned that water entering the crawl space could have set off an electrical explosion that would have certainly destroyed the facility. As well, the access road to the hospital was being compromised by the minute and soon would not be passable by vehicles.



By 4:17 a.m. the decision had been made to evacuate the entire building. City workers felt they were not going to be able to save the building and the organisation's evacuation plan was immediately put in place.

At the time of evacuation, there were 24 patients in hospital and 128 residents in the nursing home. Nine patients were discharged from hospital to go home and 15 patients were transferred to other facilities. Four patients went to the Yorkton Regional Health Centre, nine went to St. Anthony's Hospital in Esterhazy and two patients were returned to their nursing home in Ituna. All patients were transported by EMS teams.

A total of 117 residents from the nursing home were evacuated to the Horizon Credit Union Centre (HCUC) in Melville to stage until space can be found in other facilities in and outside the region. All residents and patients had been evacuated from the facility by 8:05 a.m.

"The response from the community was unbelievable," says EMS Director Derek Keller. "During the evacuation, we had over 60 volunteers show up to lend a hand placing almost 25,000 sandbags around the building. Without them, we certainly would have had significant damage to the facility."

As they were able to move beds and much of the equipment to the HCUC, the decision was made to hold all the nursing home residents in the HCUC overnight. By this time, the water was receding and it appeared they would be able to return to the facility the next day.

The water started to recede by the afternoon of July 1. A decision was made on July 2 to stay another night at HCUC. This decision was based on feedback from the city which indicated there was still a significant amount of water west of the city that needed to disperse.

All residents and acute care patients were returned by handibus and ambulance to the facility on July 3. It should be noted that many families chose to take their loved ones home to stay with them during the evacuation as opposed to having them spend the nights at HCUC.

KEY VULNERABILITIES

Due to the quick response and hard work of the volunteers and City of Melville employees there was no actual damage to the facility. Business as usual was, however, curtailed.

Emergency Room services were closed during the evacuation. The public was directed to seek emergency room services in Yorkton. With the closures of many roads and highways, EMS travel was challenged but there were no major delays or adverse outcomes because of these road closures.

Several chemotherapy treatments were delayed by one day and all surgeries were cancelled. As the storm had occurred on a holiday this minimized the impact to most outpatient services.

With all patients and clients safely back in the Centre, staff returned to their normal daily duties. However, with an eye towards the unexpected, the sandbags and berms, which had been installed to protect the facility from the flood waters, were left in place for several additional weeks.

Contact information:

Kent Waddington, Communications Director
Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care
kent@greenhealthcare.ca

<http://greenhealthcare.ca/climateresilienthealthcare>

CCGHC-RP-04E, Feb 19, 2015



The Melville and District Health Centre was spared by the floodwaters but neighbouring properties were not so lucky.

PLANNING FOR RESILIENCY

During the debriefing with staff and city officials, the following recommendations were put forth to better prepare for future events:

1. Revise fan out lists to ensure all appropriate staff are included on the lists (Community Services)
2. Change process on fan outs to have one person designated to call everyone needed
3. Include out of town supervisors on fan out lists (Public Health)
4. Develop Policy/Procedures on what happens with the Patient File upon Evacuation
5. Develop a policy and procedure to be attached to Code Green on facilities receiving patients from an evacuation
6. Create standard scripts for notifications of family in the event of an evacuation
7. Have white boards for communications at reception centres
8. Have communications go to person at the reception sites for all public and staff information
9. Establish a list of trucking resources
10. Develop a process for testing phone fan out lists

To date, most of the recommendations have been implemented and the site hopes to have all firmly in place by spring 2015.

The City of Melville is working on a flood plan for the city which will also include additional protection of the hospital property. Further, a main water line that run underneath the hospital will be relocated to run underground south of the hospital building to mitigate any risk of a pipe rupture and a subsequent flood that may occur in the crawl space.

Thank you to Derek Keller for photographs and technical input in developing this profile.

This project made possible by financial support from Health Canada.