

## **October 29, 2014 Mayor's blog: Emergency Notification**

The fire of 2011 was something that had a significant impact on this community to say the least. Following that event we made some changes to the way our organization operates. One of the areas we looked at was how to improve emergency communications and emergency response in the future. We looked at a variety of things and made some changes to our planning processes, we incorporated FireSmart, we updated our emergency response plan, created alternate emergency escape routes. We added backup generation to some of our own facilities as well as to others such as the radio station. We are adding areas in the region that have additional ability for broadcasting so that the radio station could broadcast from another area if needed. We have purchased additional equipment, and improved training.

One of the other pieces is about communication, how do we get the message out? Over my short time as Mayor, one of my focuses has been to improve communication. I think we have made vast improvements but I am also aware there is always more to do. What I have learned as a definite is there is no one use that communicates with all. As a result we need to make sure there are multiple ways to communicate. We have created a new website in recent years and have brought on a communication person who's job is to make sure the content on that is fresh, updated and pertinent. We have engaged in the use of social media and between the Town of Slave Lake page, my own and my fellow council, there is also a wealth of information out there. We have had good strong communication with the radio stations and our emergency services about how to deal with such an event in the future. We have also been promoting the use of the Alberta Alert system which is a fantastic tool initiated by the province and has a role to play as well.

So what's next. All these things are great but there was another piece of equipment that was debated by the elected officials at the time and the consensus was to incorporate the use of a siren. Siren's were quite popular in the past and although many communities believe they have outlived their purpose, other communities who have suffered from disasters are bringing them back in. High River is a most recent example. Along those lines, we're adding to our communication capability by installing one as well. The equipment has been installed and you can see the post and siren on a pole in the northwest corner of the Town office site.

So how does it work? Over the next few weeks you will start to hear this siren going off. Once it's through the testing stage there will be a monthly 20 second test. This will be done at 12 noon on the second Thursday of each month. Outside of that it will be used for emergencies only. So when it goes off what do you do? It means get additional information. Turn on your radio, go to your Facebook or twitter, and tune in the Town website for up to date accurate info.

Over the next few weeks we will have staff visiting the schools and seniors facilities to help educate people on this new process. Additionally to this you will see a tonne of information in print throughout the community and hear messaging on the radio. The siren won't fix everything, and definitely isn't the entire answer but it is one more piece in helping make our community safer.