

Huge Wildfire in Canada's Alberta Could Burn for Months



Edmonton, May 9 (RHC)-- Officials in Canada's Alberta province say they expect a huge wildfire in the oil sands area to continue burning for months to come. The provincial government said over the weekend that the massive blaze will torch a vast area covering over 2,000 square kilometers in the next several days and get even worse because of continued high temperatures, low humidity and strong winds.

Chad Morrison, Alberta's manager of wildfire prevention, said fighting such an inferno in heavily forested areas could take months. There is fear the growing wildfire could double in size and reach a major oil sands mine and even the neighboring province of Saskatchewan.

The fire and mass evacuations have forced a quarter or more of Canada's oil output offline and is expected to impact an economy already hurt by the fall in the prices of oil. The Alberta oil sands have the third-largest reserves of oil in the world behind Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. Its workers largely live in Fort McMurray, where some neighborhoods have been destroyed.

More than 80,000 people have left Fort McMurray in the heart of Canada's oil sands, where the fire has torched 1,600 homes and other buildings. Gas has been turned off, the power grid is damaged and water is not drinkable. Officials said there is no timeline to return residents to the city, but the Alberta government has begun preliminary planning, though it stresses fighting the fire is still the first priority.

The cause of the fire has not been determined; it is said that it started a week ago in a remote forested area and could have been ignited by lightning.

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