

# RM of Lakeland - Lakeland Subdivisions

# FireSmart Community Assessment Report

Assessment Completed by:

Camille Harris, Michael Springinotic and Mike McColgan: Wildfire Prevention & Mitigation Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency

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## Introduction

The FireSmart Canada Neighbourhood Recognition Program is designed to provide an effective management approach for preserving wildland living aesthetics while reducing community ignition potential. The program can be tailored for adoption by any community and/or neighborhood association that is committed to ensuring its citizens have maximum protection from wildland fire. The following report is intended as a resource to be used by residents for creating a FireSmart Neighbourhood Plan. The plan developed from this information should be implemented in a collaborative manner and modified as needed.

The neighbourhood wildfire hazard assessment was performed by Camille Harris, Mike McColgan and Michael Springinotic who are employed by the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency.

This assessment examines the area's exposure to wildfire as it relates to ignition potential and looks at the community's ability to respond to a wildfire incident. The assessment does not focus on specific homes but examines the neighborhood as a whole.

## Definition of the Ignition Zone

A structure will burn because of its relationship with everything in its surrounding ignition zone – the house and its immediate surroundings. It is important to note that over 50% of homes that are destroyed by wildfire are ignited by embers, not by direct flame contact. To reduce the chance of a home ignition, a homeowner must create a fire resistant zone that includes the structure itself and the area 10 m out that immediately surrounds the structure. Treating this "home ignition zone" is an easy-to-accomplish task that will help to prevent structure loss. To accomplish this, flammable items such as excessive vegetation must be removed from the area immediately around the structure along with any flammable sources on or attached to the structure itself.



This assessment is based on observations made while evaluating the area. The assessment helps to identify where and how structure ignitions may occur within the neighborhood and how these ignitions might be avoided with some mitigation actions undertaken by the residents. Residents can reduce the risk of structure loss during a wildfire by creating a fire resistant zone within their lot that includes the structures on it. If the majority of lot holders carry out this work the whole area links together to become a fire resistant zone.

# Description of the Severe Case Wildland Fire Characteristics that Could Threaten the Area

Fire intensity and spread rates are determined by the fuel type and fuel conditions, the weather conditions prior and during ignition, and the topography. It is important to note that we hold no control over the weather and topography but we can alter the fuels that are available to burn and therefor manage the type of fire that will occur.

- Fine fuels like dry grass ignite more easily and fire will spread faster than in coarser fuels like standing trees. For a given fuel, the more there is and the more continuous it is, the faster the fire spreads and the higher the intensities. Fine fuels take a shorter time to burn out than coarser fuels.
- The weather conditions affect the moisture content of the dead and live vegetative fuels. Fine fuel moisture content is highly dependent on the relative humidity and the degree of sun exposure. The lower the relative humidity and the greater the sun exposure, the lower the fuel moisture content. Lower fuel moistures allow fire to ignite easier, produce higher spread rates and higher fire intensities.
- Wind speed significantly influences the rate of fire spread and fire intensity. The higher the wind speed, the greater the spread rate, intensity, and ember transport distances.
- Topography influences fire behavior principally by the steepness of the slope. However, the configuration of the terrain such as narrow draws, saddles and alignment to the wind can influence fire spread and intensity. In general, the steeper the slope, the faster the uphill fire spread rate and intensity.

The treed areas surrounding the subdivisions are mixed wood of white spruce and aspen. Areas with higher concentration of conifers will carry a higher intensity wildfire. A mixed wood stand will also burn at high intensities during drought like conditions. Mixed forest stands during the summer, when they are in leaf, will have reduced fire spread, with maximum spread rates only one-fifth that of spring or fall fires under similar burning conditions.

## Assessment Process

Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (SPSA) staff evaluated the wildfire risk in the RM of Lakeland – Lakeland Subdivisions when they visited the community on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022. During the visit staff toured the area, evaluating the properties for wildfire hazards. The hazard assessment provides a written evaluation of the overall wildfire hazard, for example the condition of structures, adjacent vegetation and other factors affecting the status of the community.

## Observations and Primary Issues

A Community Wildfire Hazard Assessment begins with observations of the roofing assembly and roof cleanliness of its homes/cabins; work our way down the building's exterior which includes rating of the siding, windows, decks; ember accumulator features around the building; and location of nearby combustible materials around the structures. We also rate vegetation, topography, infrastructure, fire suppression capability, and the fire ignition potential surrounding the community.

Listed below are a number of comments for each subdivision and some photographic evidence that supports the observations.

### Subdivision Site Description

#### Aspen Ridge

The Aspen Ridge Subdivision is located on the eastern shore of Emma Lake and is administered by the RM of Lakeland. The subdivision is located approximately 55 kms north of Prince Albert.

The forest area within the subdivision is mixed wood dominated by hardwoods with pockets of softwoods. Fuels in the area include trembling aspen, popular, birch, spruce, and balsam fir.



 Structures should be labelled with individual signs identifying the property lot and block location for emergency purposes. Signs should be clearly visible from the road and use a consistent system that provides for sequenced or patterned naming conventions. All signs should be constructed of non-combustible material such as metal posts and reflective metal placards.



Figure 1: Above picture shows wooden non-reflective partially covered by vegetation.

II. There is one route of ingress and egress into the subdivision. There were reflective standard street signs throughout the subdivision. The road width in many locations is narrower than the recommend > 6.1 m. Many locations had no right of way maintained with trees growing along the shoulder. Road widths should allow for simultaneous evacuation and emergency response.



Figure 2: Picture shows metal reflective street signs at subdivision entrance. Right picture showing narrow road with unmaintained shoulder.

- III. Building exterior rating for the entire community is average. Most homes had vinyl or wood board siding. Vinyl or untreated shake siding provides no fire protection where stucco, metal, brick, rock or cement provide best protection for the building. Log or heavy timber provides more fire-resistant protection than normal wood board siding.
- IV. Roofing material in the subdivision was generally constructed from Type A materials like metal or asphalt. These materials are most fire resistant and remain effective under severe wildfire exposure. There were structures observed to have cedar shakes which is not recommended as cedar shake roofing provides little protection against fires. It is important that residents clean off all debris that accumulates on roof tops and within gutters.



Figure 3: Left picture showing a clean (no leaf litter) asphalt roof. Right picture showing cedar shake roof.

V. Combustible wood decks attached to dwellings that are not enclosed along with buildings themselves that are not skirted or closed in were noted within the subdivisions. Decks and homes should be closed in with minimum 12mm thick sheathing. These non-protected areas



serve as ember accumulators where new spot fires can easily ignite in the tinder dry fuels that can be found in these locations.

Figure 4: Picture on left show foundation that is not skirted.

VI. The forest stands in the area are mixed wood (aspen, popular, birch) with pockets of conifers (mainly spruce). Seasonal risk in the surface vegetation including standing dead and down woody debris will sustain a wildland fire. Dry surface fuels are a particular concern when vegetation is cured due to drought or seasonal effects. It is recommended that residents remove all dead trees and larger shrubs within their lot to not only to reduce their fire risk but the potential damage to structures and infrastructure if they were to break off or blow down.



Figure 5: Figures above – Mixed wood stand with dead conifers

- VII. Being in a lake community, many people have and enjoy the use of a fire pit. All fire pits should be screened with mesh not exceeding 12mm, located on clean rock, concrete, sand or mineral soil, and should have a minimum of 1 m non combustible area surrounding the fire pit. The pit is to be constructed of metal or concrete and in good condition with no rusting or breaks.
- VIII. The risk for accidental human caused fires is generally higher in populated areas. Accidental ignition includes fire pits, fireworks and improper disposal of smoking material. Overhead powerlines near vegetation and propane tanks amidst vegetation or adjacent to buildings are also ignition sources that are highly apparent.



Figure 6: Pruning and maintaining tress close to utility lines and power lines should be completed in areas.

XI. The pictures below show some examples of good FireSmart practices within the community.



Figure 7: Houses on left shown with clean asphalt, log construction, minimal vegetation against structure and gravel right up to the home.

#### Birch Bay

Birch Bay Subdivision is located on the eastern shore of Emma Lake and is administered by the RM of Lakeland. The subdivision is located approximately 55 kms north of Prince Albert.

The forest area within the subdivision is mixed wood with pockets of dense softwood. Fuels in the area include trembling aspen, popular, birch, spruce, and balsam fir.



I. Structures should be labelled with individual signs identifying the property lot and block location for emergency purposes. Signs should be clearly visible from the road and use a consistent system that provides for sequenced or patterned naming conventions. All signs

should be constructed of non-combustible material such as metal posts and reflective metal placards.



Figure 1: Above picture shows wooden non-reflective partially covered by vegetation.

II. There is one route of ingress and egress into the subdivision. There were reflective standard street signs throughout the subdivision. The road width in many locations is narrower than the recommend > 6.1 m. Many locations had no right of way maintained with trees growing along the shoulder. Road widths should allow for simultaneous evacuation and emergency response.



Figure 2: Picture shows metal reflective street signs at subdivision entrance.



Figure 3: Left picture showing narrow road driving surface and unmaintained shoulder. Right picture showing minimal available driving surface when vehicles parked on edge of road.

- III. Building exterior rating for the entire community average. Most homes had vinyl or wood board siding. Vinyl or untreated shake siding provides no fire protection where stucco, metal, brick, rock or cement provide best protection for the building. Log or heavy timber provides more fire-resistant protection than normal wood board siding.
- IV. Roofing material in the subdivision was generally constructed from Type A materials like metal or asphalt. These materials are most fire resistant and remain effective under severe wildfire exposure. There were structures observed to have cedar shakes which is not



recommended as cedar shake roofing provides little protection against fires. It is important that residents clean off all debris that accumulates on roof tops and within gutters.

Figure 4: Left picture showing a clean (no leaf litter) metal roof. Right picture showing cedar shake roof.

V. Combustible wood decks attached to dwellings that are not enclosed along with buildings themselves that are not skirted or closed in were noted within the subdivisions. Decks and homes should be closed in with minimum 12mm thick sheathing. These non-protected areas serve as ember accumulators where new spot fires can easily ignite in the tinder dry fuels that can be found in these locations.



Figure 5: Picture above show foundation that is not skirted. Picture below showing firewood stored underneath deck. Embers could enter and ignite dry leaf litter and firewood in these areas.

VI. Another area of concern was seasoned firewood or other wood combustibles piled directly against the home or other structures. These areas serve as locations where ignition can occur

from flying embers, even from a simple unattended nearby campfire. It is recommended that firewood be stored away from structures and the amount is limited to one years use. Fire wood that is stacked against live standing trees can act as ladder fuels for fire to reach the canopy and increase fire intensity.



Figure 6: Firewood and other combustibles stored between trees (ladder fuel) and too close to structures provide ignition points and fuel for wildfires.

VII. The forest stands in the area are mixed wood (aspen, popular, birch) with pockets of dense conifers (balsam fir and spruce). Seasonal risk in the surface vegetation including standing dead and down woody debris will sustain a wildland fire. Dry surface fuels are a particular concern when vegetation is cured due to drought or seasonal effects. It is recommended that residents remove all dead trees and larger shrubs within their lot to not only to reduce their fire risk but the potential damage to structures and infrastructure if they were to break off or blow down.





Figure 7: Figures above – thick conifer understory with dead standing and downed trees.



Figure 8: Example of a thinned & pruned conifer stand (Sled Lake – Winter 2022).

VIII. Being in a lake community, many people have and enjoy the use of a fire pit. All fire pits should be screened with mesh not exceeding 12mm, located on clean rock, concrete, sand or mineral soil, and should have a minimum of 1 m non combustible area surrounding the fire pit. The pit is to be constructed of metal or concrete and in good condition with no rusting or breaks.



Figure 9: Firepit surrounded by noncombustible material, however, recommend the use of mesh to control sparks.

IX. The risk for accidental human caused fires is generally higher in populated areas. Accidental ignition includes fire pits, fireworks and improper disposal of smoking material. Overhead powerlines near vegetation and propane tanks amidst vegetation or adjacent to buildings are also ignition sources that are highly apparent.



Figure 10: Pruning and maintaining tress close to utility lines and power lines should be completed in areas.

XI. The pictures below show some examples of good FireSmart practices within the community.



Figure 11: Houses on left shown with clean asphalt, minimal vegetation against structure. Right picturing showing pruned conifers.

#### McPhail Cove

McPhail Cove Subdivision is located on the eastern shore of Emma Lake and is administered by the RM of Lakeland. The subdivision is located approximately 55 kms north of Prince Albert.

The forest area within the subdivision is mixed wood with pockets of dense softwood. Fuels in the area include trembling aspen, popular, birch, spruce, and balsam fir.



 Structures should be labelled with individual signs identifying the property lot and block location for emergency purposes. Signs should be clearly visible from the road and use a consistent system that provides for sequenced or patterned naming conventions. All signs should be constructed of non-combustible material such as metal posts and reflective metal placards.



Figure 1: Above picture shows wooden non-reflective partially covered by vegetation.

II. There is one route of ingress and egress into the subdivision. There were reflective standard street signs throughout the subdivision. The road width in many locations is narrower than the recommend > 6.1 m. Many locations had no right of way maintained with trees growing along the shoulder. Road widths should allow for simultaneous evacuation and emergency response.



Figure 2: Picture shows metal reflective street signs in subdivision.



Figure 3: Left picture showing narrow road driving surface and unmaintained shoulder.

- III. Building exterior rating for the entire community average. Most homes had vinyl or wood board siding. Vinyl or untreated shake siding provides no fire protection where stucco, metal, brick, rock or cement provide best protection for the building. Log or heavy timber provides more fire-resistant protection than normal wood board siding.
- IV. Roofing material in the subdivision was generally constructed from Type A materials like metal or asphalt. These materials are most fire resistant and remain effective under severe wildfire exposure. There were structures observed to have cedar shakes which is not recommended as cedar shake roofing provides little protection against fires. It is important that residents clean off all debris that accumulates on roof tops and within gutters.



Figure 4: Left picture showing a clean (no leaf litter) asphalt roof. Right picture showing cedar shake roof covered in debris.

V. Combustible wood decks attached to dwellings that are not enclosed along with buildings themselves that are not skirted or closed in were noted within the subdivisions. Decks and homes should be closed in with minimum 12mm thick sheathing. These non-protected areas serve as ember accumulators where new spot fires can easily ignite in the tinder dry fuels that can be found in these locations.



Figure 5: Picture on left show foundation that is not skirted. Picture on right showing skirted in deck area.

VI. Another area of concern was seasoned firewood or other wood combustibles piled directly against the home or other structures. These areas serve as locations where ignition can occur

from flying embers, even from a simple unattended nearby campfire. It is recommended that firewood be stored away from structures and the amount is limited to one years use. Fire wood that is stacked against live standing trees can act as ladder fuels for fire to reach the canopy and increase fire intensity.



Figure 6: Firewood and other combustibles stored next to structures provide ignition points and fuel for wildfires.

- VII. The forest stands in the area are mixed wood (aspen, popular, birch) with pockets of dense conifers (balsam fir and spruce). Seasonal risk in the surface vegetation including standing dead and down woody debris will sustain a wildland fire. Dry surface fuels are a particular concern when vegetation is cured due to drought or seasonal effects. It is recommended that residents remove all dead trees and larger shrubs within their lot to not only to reduce their fire risk but the potential damage to structures and infrastructure if they were to break off or blow down.
- VIII. Being in a lake community, many people have and enjoy the use of a fire pit. All fire pits should be screened with mesh not exceeding 12mm, located on clean rock, concrete, sand or mineral soil, and should have a minimum of 1 m non combustible area surrounding the fire pit. The pit is to be constructed of metal or concrete and in good condition with no rusting or breaks.



Figure 7: Firepit made of steel mesh that should be moved off of deck to the gravel area before use and away from the structure.

IX. The risk for accidental human caused fires is generally higher in populated areas. Accidental ignition includes fire pits, fireworks and improper disposal of smoking material. Overhead powerlines near vegetation and propane tanks amidst vegetation or adjacent to buildings are also ignition sources that are highly apparent.



Figure 8: Pruning and maintaining tress close to utility lines and power lines should be completed in areas.

XI. The pictures below shows a good example of FireSmart practices within the subdivision.



Figure 9: Houses on left shown with clean gravel walkway, minimal vegetation against structure and skirted deck area.

#### Okema Beach

Okema Beach is in central Saskatchewan, approximately 47km north of the city of Prince Albert. Okema subdivision is 1km north of highway #952.

Areas with higher concentration of conifers will carry a higher intensity wildfire.



 Structures should be labelled with individual signs identifying the property lot and block location for emergency purposes. Signs should be clearly visible from the road and use a consistent system that provides for sequenced or patterned naming conventions. All signs should be constructed of non-combustible material such as metal posts and reflective metal placards.



Figure 1: Wooden signs nailed to trees, foliage blocking signs

- II. Building exterior rating for the entire subdivision was average. Most homes had vinyl or wood board siding. Vinyl or untreated shake siding provides no fire protection where stucco, metal, brick, rock or cement provide best protection for the building. Log or heavy timber provides more fire-resistant protection than normal wood board siding
- III. Roofing material in the subdivision was generally constructed from Type A materials like metal or asphalt. These materials are most fire resistant and remain effective under severe wildfire exposure. There were structures observed to have cedar shakes which is not recommended as cedar shake roofing provides little protection against fires. It is important that residents clean off all debris that accumulates on roof tops and within gutters.





Figure 2: Cedar shakes and accumulated debris on roof.

IV. Another area of concern was seasoned firewood or other wood combustibles piled directly against the home or other structures. These areas serve as locations where ignition can occur from flying embers, even from a simple unattended nearby campfire. It is recommended that firewood be stored away from structures and the amount is limited to one year's use. Firewood that is stacked against live standing trees can act as ladder fuels for fire to reach the canopy and increase fire intensity.



Figure 3: Firewood stored too close to structures provide ignition points and fuel for wildfires.

V. The forest stand in the area are primarily composed of white spruce, aspen, poplar, and shrubs. It's recommended keeping the first one to three meters around the base of your cabin and any outbuildings completely free of fuel for a fire.



Figure 4: Overgrown vegetation too close to structures.

VI. Width of road should allow for simultaneous and emergency response. Therefore, should be able to handle load of largest emergency fire apparatus typically used.



Figure 5: Road not wide enough for parking along roadway.

## Suppression and Response Capabilities

The Lakeland & District Fire Department is located in Christopher Lake is the closest responding agency and a mutual aid agreement is in place with the RM of Buckland. The RM of Lakeland has 3 Class A engines and 4 2000 gallon tankers Distances from each subdivision to the fire hall are as follows:

- Aspen Ridge 18 km
- Birch Bay 14 km
- Okema Beach 14 km
- McPhail Cove 13 km

Wildfires within the RM of Lakeland will be actioned by the Weyakwin Protection Area Type 1 Wildland Firefighters. Type II fire crews are also available to assist SPSA crews on fires surrounding this location.

## Recommendations

The FireSmart Canada Neighbourhood Recognition Program seeks to create a sustainable balance that will allow communities to live safely while maintaining environmental harmony in a wildland urban interface (WUI) setting. Residents within the subdivisions should focus attention on the structures and the surrounding area to create a fire-resistant zone. This can be accomplished by disconnecting the home from any high and/or low-intensity fire that could burn to it, and by being conscious of the potential ignition from wind-driven embers. The pictures below show some examples of good FireSmart practices within the community.

The following section of this report provides recommendations for consideration for the community FireSmart Board by listing wildfire safety issues that were identified in the subdivisions during the assessment.

- Establishment of a "fire free zone", allowing no fire to ignite or burn on or within 1.5 metres of a structure by removing easily ignited fuels located within this zone.
  - Keep roofs and rain gutters/eaves trough free from leaves, dried needles, and twigs. Incorporate yearly cleaning of gutters when performing spring yard cleaning.
  - If your cottage/home has non-treated cedar shakes, consider replacing with less flammable class A asphalt or metal roofing or setting up sprinkler heads on the roof that could be activated if a wildfire did occur.
  - Stacked firewood, bark mulch or wooden building material piled directly against home or under structures should be moved a minimum of 10 metres away or screened in to prevent ignitions.
- Remove hazardous fuels within the "home ignition zone". The home ignition zone includes the fire free zone and encompasses the area within 10 metres from the home or building structure. This includes 10 m from any flammable attached wooden decks. This would include the removal, thinning and pruning of spruce, pine and cedar trees and the removal of any brush, leaves and other debris within this area. Any remaining spruce and pine trees should be pruned to a height of 2 m if there is any flammable vegetation under them.
- Homes, decks, and other structures should be skirted in to prevent accumulations of dried fuels. These open areas allow embers to blow in and start spot fires under the structures. Make a point during spring yard cleaning to rake and remove any accumulations of fuels such as dried leaves, needles, and twigs from under wooden decks and structures. Best protection would be to screen decks and skirt all buildings with 3 mm wire mesh or minimum 12mm thick wood sheathing.
- Add 8 12 mm wire mesh screens for over fire pits and create a 1 m wide fire resistant strip around the fire pits.
- Fuel management options within the community could include the thinning and removal of any dead and down trees within the deciduous stands to further reduce the risk of fire. Also mowing and maintaining annual grasses to 10 cm or less would reduce the fine fuel build up.
- Local fire suppression equipment could be expanded to include water tanks on ATV trailers that can quickly and easily be maneuvered through the community.
- The Park should also keep continuing communication and cross train with the Local Fire Department and other responding agencies to ensure clear direction and cooperation should a fire event occur.
- Wildfire related training should be part of the capacity building package for the community. Having a representative or two from the community attend a Local FireSmart Representative Training Workshop that SPSA hosts annually would be a good start.

## Successful FireSmart Mitigations

When adequately prepared, a structure can likely withstand a wildfire without the intervention of the fire service. Further, a house and its surrounding community can be both FireSmart and compatible with the area's ecosystem. The FireSmart Neighbourhood Program is designed to enable communities to

achieve a high level of protection against wildfire loss even as a sustainable ecosystem balance is maintained.

Homeowners are reminded that proper attention to their home ignition zone can prevent ignitions in this area. They should identify the things that will ignite their homes and address those as priorities.

Lakeland area has a number of positive FireSmart examples already and the goal would be to keep improving as time goes on. Being recognized as a FireSmart Neighbourhood under this program does not necessarily mean that it is FireSmart. What it does mean is that the residents are aware of what needs to be done and are taking steps to become FireSmart.

### Next Steps

If the report and recommendations are accepted and the decision to pursue Neighbourhood FireSmart Recognition Status is made, then the RM of Lakeland will need to create a FireSmart Board and build an agreed-upon list of actions based on the recommendations provided in the FireSmart Community Assessment Report. The FireSmart board will need to prepare a FireSmart Community Plan in cooperation with their Local FireSmart Representative.

FireSmart Neighbourhood recognition status can be earned by meeting the following criteria:

- Enlisting a wildland/urban interface specialist to complete an assessment and create a plan that identifies locally agreed-upon solutions that the community can implement.
- Sponsoring a local FireSmart Board which maintains the FireSmart Community Plan and tracks its progress or status.
- Conducting FireSmart Events each year that are dedicated to a local FireSmart project.
- Investing a minimum of \$2.00 annually per capita in local FireSmart Neighborhood efforts. This is surprisingly easy to do since volunteer time is credited at \$25.43 per hour (2019 amount).
- Submitting an annual report to FireSmart Canada documenting continuing compliance with the program.

## Links to Helpful Resources

FireSmart Canada Website: https://www.firesmartcanada.ca/

FireSmart Canada Community Recognition Program Tab: https://firesmartcanada.ca/programs/neighbourhood-recognition-program/

FireSmart Canada FireSmart Manual's Tab: <u>https://www.firesmartcanada.ca/resources-library/category/manuals</u>

Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Website: http://www.saskpublicsafety.ca

Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency FireSmart Tab: http://www.saskpublicsafety.ca/communities/firesmart-communities

Signature of Local FireSmart Representatives / Provincial Liaison

#### **Camille Harris**

Wildfire Prevention & Mitigation **Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency** Box 5005, 2120 Central Ave N Prince Albert, Canada S6V 6W9 Phone: 306-940-6158 <u>Camille.Harris@gov.sk.ca</u> <u>saskpublicsafety.ca</u>

#### **Michael Springinotic**

Wildfire Prevention & Mitigation Specialist Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Box 5005, 2120 Central Ave N Prince Albert, Canada S6V 6W9 Cell: 306-940-6349 michael.springinotic@gov.sk.ca saskpublicsafety.ca

#### Mike McColgan, RPFT

Wildfire Prevention & Mitigation Specialist Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Box 5005, 2120 Central Ave N Prince Albert, Canada S6V 6W9 Cell: 306-940-8587 michael.mccolgan2@gov.sk.ca saskpublicsafety.ca