

Alberta On Scene



FOR PARTNERS IN FIRE AND
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN ALBERTA

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Helping out in Chillan, Chile

Making a difference... pictures tell the story

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, we published an article about St. Albert firefighter Victor Fernandez and the efforts made to provide donated equipment to fire departments in South America. Since that time, Victor has continued his efforts and made several trips to poor countries. His latest mission, to Chillan, Chile in May 2010, also included Alberta Fire Commissioner Trent West, fellow St. Albert firefighter Lyall Hutchinson and emergency services and technical leader for Dow Chemical, Ed van Delden.

Although a planned mission to Chillan, Chile was delayed by a month due to a devastating 8.8 earthquake that rocked the area on February 27, 2010, that didn't dampen the spirits of the volunteers taking part in the mission. If anything, it made organizer Victor Fernandez even more anxious to get to the community and see for himself what damage occurred.

Continued on page 20 ►►



Victor Fernandez and Lyall Hutchinson inside the sea container packed with donated items.



The two donated fire trucks arrived safely in Chile.

This is the 8th issue of *Alberta On Scene*.
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“Fernandez also points out that in addition to helping firefighters, the missions also help the communities as a whole.”

As president of the Canadian Aid for Fire Services Abroad (CAFSA), Fernandez has considerable experience in what it takes to put together a mission. Along with Lyall Hutchinson, a fellow member of the St. Albert Fire Service, both men have been involved in several missions over the past few years. But this time, their mission had even more impact. Instead of providing equipment and supplies for use in the event of an emergency, the May 2010 mission took place on the heels of an actual emergency that had recently occurred.

Together with first time mission volunteers Trent West and Ed van Delden, the May 2010 mission saw the arrival of two fire trucks (donated by Dow Chemical in Fort Saskatchewan) and one 20-foot sea container full of firefighter gear, personal protective equipment and various firefighter tools of the trade.



Some of the Chillan firefighters together with, from left to right in the back row, Victor Fernandez, Ed van Delden, Lyall Hutchinson and Trent West.



Group photo of the 2010 mission volunteers together with members of the Chillan Fire Department.



The two trucks donated by Dow Chemical of Canada prior to their delivery to Chillan, Chile.

“We were treated like kings and people were so appreciative of the equipment familiarization that was provided,” said West. “For me, one of the highlights was going to the school that received two wood-burning stoves for heat in their classrooms. The celebration was fabulous and the parents, teachers and students put on an excellent display.”

Fernandez added, “these trips really are an eye opener. You can read about it and think about it, but until you take part

in a mission you don’t get the full sense of it or how much of a difference it makes. The feelings, the smells, the atmosphere ...they really come together on a trip. And everyone is so appreciative of the donated equipment.”

Fernandez also points out that in addition to helping firefighters, the missions also help the communities as a whole. On a previous mission to Guatemala, he signed a contract with the local fire chief to ensure that the water truck that was delivered would not sit waiting for a fire to be used. Instead, it was put into action right away delivering water around the community, for crops, for washing clothes, etc. As Fernandez points out, “these missions put a whole new perspective on recycling.”

Honouring a hero

"With every mission I've organized, a magical moment always seems to appear. The mission to Chillan was no different," said CAFSA President Victor Fernandez. "We had heard about a firefighter, Ricardo Maureira, who is a Captain with the Chillan Fire Department, who had recently risked his life to save four young children. Equipped only with 40-year old equipment and rubber boots, he entered the building with no breathing apparatus to save these children.



Ed van Delden and night shift captain Ricardo Maureira.

The heat of the blaze melted his boots and his arms were badly burned too. We wanted to provide something special for this firefighter who was recognized by the town as a hero. We had a lot of donated firefighter jackets, but none fit him. Finally after trying on several, the only jacket that fit him was one formerly worn by Ed van Delden. It seemed like fate," said Fernandez. "Ed joined the mission this year, and here it was an old jacket of his that perfectly fit Ricardo Maureira. We were pleased to also share with him some of the breathing apparatus we brought with us."



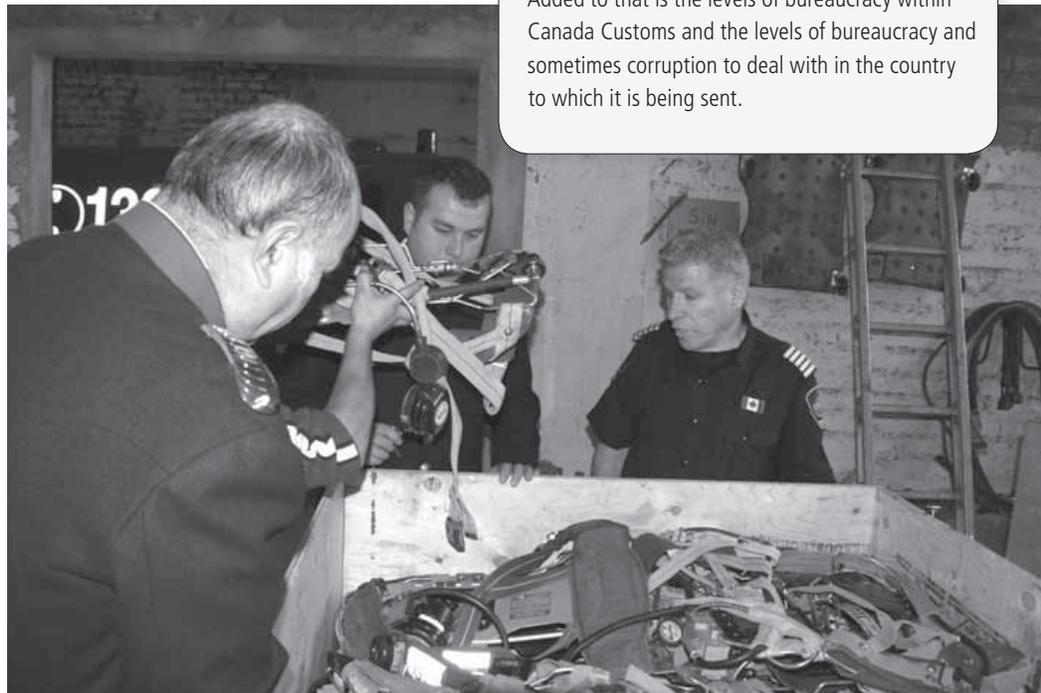
Ed van Delden instructs a Chillan firefighter about the instrumentation of one of the donated fire trucks.

What's involved in a mission?

While each mission takes about 10 days, the actual preparation takes a lot longer – about 11 months. In addition to talking to people about donations, a lot of time is needed to collect donated equipment, clean it, inventory it, package it and then send it out. In fact, it takes over 100 pages of paperwork per fire truck that is donated to a community in South America. Added to that is the levels of bureaucracy within Canada Customs and the levels of bureaucracy and sometimes corruption to deal with in the country to which it is being sent.

In the 10 years since Fernandez created the CAFSA, they have raised about \$9,000, and about \$2.5 million in donations. He encourages everyone to consider donating used equipment to CAFSA to help with future missions. If you are interested in donating used equipment or volunteering for a mission, visit the foundation website at www.cafsa.net.

“The Chillan fire services responded to 100+ emergency calls after the earthquake and worked tirelessly 24/7 for days after the earthquake.”



Victor Fernandez watches as Chillan firefighters look at the fire equipment donations.

"I hope this wasn't a 'once in a lifetime experience' as I would really like to help Victor and CAFSA again in the future with other projects he may have," said West. "This trip made me feel 20 years

younger and I would recommend to anyone to support CAFSA and also consider attending one of their future missions."

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“...the May 2010 mission took place on the heels of an actual emergency that had recently occurred.”

2010 mission snapshot

- Chillan, Chile, the nearest city to the epicenter of the 8.8 earthquake.
- Population of 170,000 people.



The remains of one of the Chillan fire department trucks.



The Chillan Fire Department presents Trent West with a token of their appreciation.

- Fire service for the city consisted of eight fire stations, seven working sets of breathing apparatus.
- Earthquake destroyed four of the fire stations.
- While every fire station had a fire truck, the building collapsing on top of them, leaving them non-operational.
- The Chillan fire services responded to 100+ emergency calls after the earthquake and worked tirelessly 24/7 for days after the earthquake.
- The 2010 mission donated 53 sets of breathing apparatus, two trucks and numerous other supplies. 🔥

Alberta On Scene is published by the Alberta Emergency Management Agency for the information of fire/emergency management professionals and others with a related interest in this field.

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