



River Breakup Advisory

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by: River Engineering Team, River Forecasting Centre

River Breakup Advisory for Athabasca River

Alberta Environment has issued a **River Breakup Advisory** for the Athabasca River including the towns of Athabasca and Fort McMurray. Although river breakup may not occur for several more days, river ice conditions can change rapidly.

This year, snowpack conditions, ice measurements, and weather conditions indicate a potential for a dynamic breakup of the Athabasca River. When a dynamic breakup* develops, there is a high probability of an ice jam forming.

The development of an ice jam, its location or size, cannot be accurately predicted. However, when a jam forms downstream of Fort McMurray, serious ice jam flooding can occur, such as the ice jam flood events of 1977 and 1997. If a jam forms upstream and suddenly releases, a surge of ice and water will move downstream. The size of the surge depends on the ice jam. In the past three years, ice jams have formed several kilometers upstream of Fort McMurray and no flooding occurred in Fort McMurray.

River Engineering staff have been monitoring the Athabasca River Basin since early March and will continue to closely monitor river breakup.

Detailed current information regarding river ice breakup in Fort McMurray is available from the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo through the Web site at http://www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca/info_centre/index.htm or from a recorded message on the telephone hotline (780)-799-8000.

*A dynamic breakup occurs when the solid ice cover is lifted by rising water levels and breaks into pieces which then move downstream with the streamflow.

With the onset of warmer Spring temperatures, ice breakup will occur in Alberta's rivers. This may result in the formation of ice jams, but not always. The location and occurrence of ice jams, and possible associated flooding, are very unpredictable. Local authorities are advised to monitor the ice covers and water levels in the rivers in their communities.

This advisory is in effect for seven days and will be updated if there is any change in conditions