



Institute for Catastrophic  
Loss Reduction

Building resilient communities

Institut de Prévention  
des Sinistres Catastrophiques

Construction de resilient communities

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## **Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction releases preliminary report into why some Fort McMurray homes survived in otherwise decimated neighbourhoods**

### **Report author Alan Westhaver available for media interviews**

TORONTO: According to a preliminary report released today by the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction, homes that survived in Fort McMurray in otherwise decimated neighbourhoods were those more resistant to ignition by embers. This was largely due to actions and decisions taken by homeowners who had adopted FireSmart® mitigation measures to a greater degree than the owners of adjacent homes who did not take such actions. In 'Why some homes survived: Learning from the Fort McMurray wildfire disaster', researcher/author Alan Westhaver sought to answer the question: 'Why did some homes survive this wildland/urban interface fire with little or no damage, while others were vulnerable to ignition and destroyed?'

After evaluating the fire environment and clearances between homes and the forest edge, Westhaver discounted direct contact from flames or radiant heat of the forest fire as being significant sources of home ignition at Fort McMurray. Instead, he concluded that wind-driven embers were the most probable cause for the majority of early home ignitions in the areas where the fire made its transition from forest into urban neighbourhoods.

Says Westhaver "In all neighbourhoods studied, homes whose owners had adopted FireSmart guidelines survived much more frequently than homes where they had not, despite the extraordinarily harsh conditions. FireSmart works, it is a very effective program to reduce the probability of home ignition and wildfire losses.

Home survival in these circumstances is not random, nor is it a function of luck," he says. "Whether a home is destroyed by an interface wildfire or not greatly depends on conditions immediately around the structure, the area for which homeowners are responsible."

The preliminary report containing these and other conclusions and results can be downloaded for free in PDF format at [www.iclr.org](http://www.iclr.org)

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Established in 1998 by Canada's property and casualty insurers, ICLR is an independent, not-for-profit research institute based in Toronto and at Western University in London, Canada. ICLR is a centre of excellence for disaster loss prevention research and education. ICLR's research staff is internationally recognized for pioneering work in a number of fields including wind and seismic engineering, atmospheric sciences, water resources engineering and economics. Multi-disciplined research is a foundation for ICLR's work to build communities more resilient to disasters.

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