



ALBERTA

FireSmart™

Whitecourt

# Whitecourt FireSmart Annual Report

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2024

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# Letter from the Fire Chief

As we reflect on the past year, we are reminded of the importance of collaboration, community resilience, and preparedness in the face of wildfires. The 2024 FireSmart program has been a testament to the strength and determination of all those involved - our dedicated partners, volunteers, and communities who continue to work tirelessly to make their neighborhoods safer.

This year, we have seen significant progress in fire prevention and mitigation efforts, with an increasing number of community members engaging in FireSmart initiatives. These actions have made an undeniable impact on the protection of people, property, and environment. Together, we have fostered a shared commitment to reducing fire risks and enhancing our collective response capabilities.

The challenges we face in wildfire prevention and response are ever-growing, but through continued education, innovation, and proactive engagement, we can rise to meet them. In this report, you will find highlights of our accomplishments, including increased community outreach, enhanced training programs, continuation of our summer program, and successful collaborations with our local fire departments and stakeholders.

As we look ahead to 2025, we remain focused on empowering communities to take ownership of their fire safety. We must continue to build on our successes, learn from our challenges, and strengthen the partnerships that will drive FireSmart's mission forward.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to FireSmart's success this year. Together, we are creating safer, more resilient communities - one step at a time.



*Aaron Floyd*

**Aaron Floyd**  
**Fire Chief**  
**Town of Whitecourt**



# Introduction



## About FireSmart in Whitecourt

Whitecourt is located in the boreal forest and in the Wildland Urban Interface. Due to this location, there are risks from wildland fire events that could have a serious effect on our community. Whitecourt has been working on FireSmart initiatives in the community since 2010, and places a high priority on conducting activities and initiatives that will safeguard our community from fire risks.



## Whitecourt FireSmart Working Group

Established in 2021, the Whitecourt FireSmart Working Group works collaboratively to create a FireSmart culture in the community that is rooted in schools, industry, and government.

The Working Group consists of six Members:

- Town Councillor Tara Baker
- Government of Alberta Forestry Representative Mike Penner (Alternate: Milan Skrecek)
- Whitecourt Fire Chief Aaron Floyd
- Director of Infrastructure Services Drew Hadfield
- Director of Planning & Development Jennine Loberg
- CANFOR Representative Mike Hudson (Alternate: Ken Anderson)

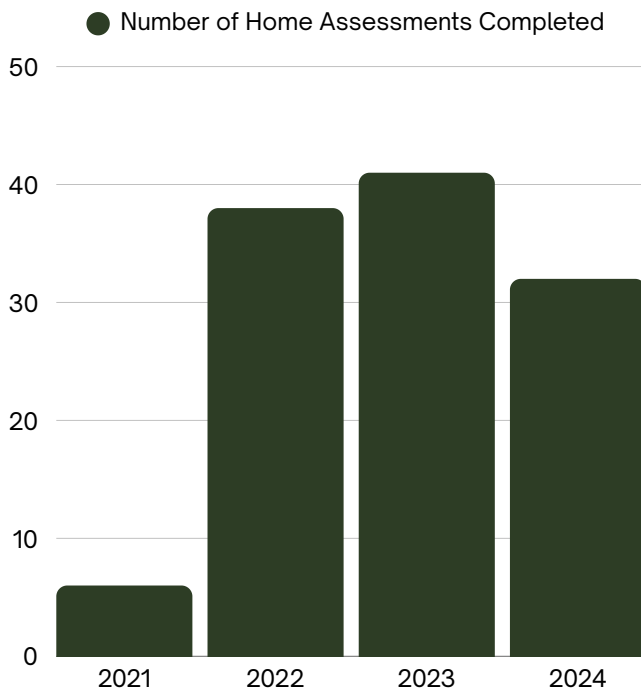
Director of Community Safety Lee Hardman acts as an administrative representative for the Working Group.

# Home Assessments



With funding support from Intact Public Entities and Intact Financial Corporation, the Whitecourt FireSmart Homeowner Incentive Program was created, and has been active in the community since 2021.

The incentive program encourages homeowners to sign up for a FireSmart Home Assessment, and to conduct recommended FireSmart practices to mitigate wildfire risks on their property. In 2024, \$10,200 was granted to 12 Whitecourt residents to FireSmart their properties.



*The graph on this page features a comparison of the number of home assessments completed in Whitecourt and the surrounding area from 2021-2024.*

*In 2024, 32 home assessments were completed.*

*Home Assessments are completed with two Assessors on site, and offer an opportunity for one-on-one engagement with residents on FireSmart best practices.*

# Vegetation Management



Contracted Mulching: Block 1 and 1A, two of the first areas treated, served as our FireSmart demonstration zone. Approximately 25 hectares were retreated to FireSmart standards by contracted mulchers in a continued effort to showcase the our long-term commitment to wildfire mitigation efforts.

The FireSmart Summer crew performed extensive fire risk reduction activities, including falling, thinning, bucking, and mowing, across multiple zones. Specifically, they maintained treated areas in Zones 13, 14, 14a, 15, and 16, over an estimated area of 12+ hectares. These efforts were crucial in mitigating fire hazards and protecting the adjacent residential neighbourhoods in the Hilltop area bordering Centennial Park. Additionally, they completed treatments in other areas within the specified timeframes and budget, demonstrating the crew's efficiency and dedication to reducing fire risks. Notable additional achievements include:

- Extensive hand treatment in Block 7 (2.2 hectares), adjacent to the Whitecourt Hospital, removing approximately 90 dead and downed trees, as well as other available fuel, to protect this critical community asset.
- Additional falling, thinning, bucking, and mowing in Zones 2, 3, and 4 near Eastlink Park, which are located near a main power line (fuel wick) and at an elevation that would facilitate rapid fire spread into the hilltop industrial area.

In total, it is estimated that the crew removed over 600 dead standing/hazard trees in the identified treatment zones, in addition to clearing downed fuels in the treatment areas. All fuels were either bucked and removed for use as firewood or chipped back to the forest floor to eliminate the fuel and hazard.

FireSmart hazard assessments are based on standardized scoring, which evaluates vegetation density, fuel accumulation, ignition potential in relation to values at risk. Scores range from low (minimal fire risk) to extreme (high fire risk). The FireSmart Summer crew assesses each area at the start of the season, and post-treatment to evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation efforts.

- Before mitigation: Several priority zones had high hazard ratings due to blow down and vegetation growth.
- After FireSmart work: Significant reductions were observed across the treated areas:
  - Block 7 saw a reduction in the assessment score from 56.8 to 22.9 (59.68% improvement), and Block 14 a decrease from 59.46 to 22.9 (61.49% improvement), indicating the effectiveness of the treatments in mitigating fire risks.
  - Additional priority zones, including Block 13 (60.61%), Block 12b (59.56%), and Block 15 (69.89%) also Block 16 (50.91%), Block 14A (55.56%), and Block 2 (53.27%), showed marked risk reduction following vegetation treatment.

On average, FireSmart zone risk levels improved by 50.54% post-treatment across all blocks, highlighting the measurable impact of our crews' hard work in reducing fire hazards, creating safer landscapes, and minimizing wildfire vulnerability in treated areas.

# Community Engagement



The FireSmart team actively engaged with the community at public events, including:

- the Whitecourt Annual Trade Fair,
- Canada Day celebrations at Festival Park,
- the Whitecourt Farmer's Market.

At these events, the team provided FireSmart information, promoted awareness, and facilitated bookings for Home Assessments, ensuring residents had practical guidance to enhance their wildfire preparedness.

Our FireSmart team has achieved significant wildfire risk reductions while empowering residents with knowledge and resources to protect their properties. This year's activities reflect a proactive, well-rounded FireSmart initiative, reinforcing the importance of continued mitigation efforts.



# Community Fireguard



On October 30, the Town of Whitecourt received funding and approval for the construction of the Community Fireguard on the east boundary of Whitecourt through the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta (FRIAA).

Administration hired Silvacom Ltd. to oversee the construction management of the project, and Martushev Logging Ltd. to complete the stumping and debris disposal.

On December 4, Administration held a public information session on the Community Fireguard to provide background on the project to residents and businesses in the community.

Construction on the Community Fireguard began on January 31, 2025, with construction scheduled to be complete in 2025.

The Town of Whitecourt will continue to offer updates on the project throughout the duration of construction and seeding.

For more information on the Community Fireguard Project, visit the Town's website at [www.whitecourt.ca](http://www.whitecourt.ca).



# Looking Ahead in 2025



The FireSmart Program plans to continue in 2025, with the follow upcoming projects:

- Continuation of the FireSmart Homeowner Incentive Program;
- Continuation of the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta's FireSmart Vegetation Management Program; and,
- Construction of the Community Fireguard, slated to be complete in 2025.

In addition, the Town of Whitecourt will be continuing with the FireSmart Summer Student Program, hiring a crew of summer students to complete FireSmart clean up and mitigation projects throughout the community from May to September 2025.



Scan this QR Code to visit the FireSmart page on Whitecourt's website to stay up-to-date on upcoming projects and incentives.

