

WOOD BUFFALO BUSINESS RECOVERY HOTLINE





THE DISASTER

On May 1, 2016, a wildfire began southwest of Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada. Two days later, it swept through the community, prompting the evacuation of 88,000 residents, destroying approximately 2,400 homes and buildings and forcing the largest wildfire evacuation in Alberta's history.

Over the next couple of weeks, it continued to spread across northern Alberta and into Saskatchewan, consuming forested areas and impacting Athabasca oil sands operations. The fire spread across approximately 590,000 hectares (1,500,000 acres) before it was declared to be under control on July 5, 2016. Insurance companies estimate these wildfires will cost them an estimated \$3.58 billion, making it by far the costliest disaster in Canadian history.

When a natural disaster hits a community, whether it be a flood, tornado, hurricane or wildfire; the immediate response involves first responders like firefighters, paramedics, police and military. In addition, the Canadian Red Cross helps vulnerable communities affected by disaster by providing vital assistance for people's basic needs. Working in close collaboration, these parties respond to the immediate crisis and role and responsibilities are very clear. The Emergency Operations Centre is set up, they are in charge, and nobody does anything unless they are directed to do so. They understand lives are at stake, and as a result, this type of response model is the most effective. However, unfortunately, business is rarely, if ever, a participant in the Emergency Operations Centre. This needs to change. Their issues are critical as well. Getting them back to business means livelihoods are restored, and business and economic recovery efforts are accelerated.

This is a story about how a business recovery hotline contributed to accelerating a region's immediate business and economic recovery efforts.

THE RATIONALE

When a disaster hits, there are a number of private, public and non-profit sector groups that begin positioning themselves to lead business and economic recovery in a community. While the federal and provincial government have a critical role to play in providing much needed resources, the only ones with a clear, direct mandate are local government, and the department or group they fund to carry out economic development. This group reports directly to Council, and Council reports directly to the electorate. Ideally, they need to be the ones leading the efforts, as they are the ones that ultimately have to live with the decisions that are made. It is a clear, simple governance model. This important leadership role includes collaborating with various stakeholder groups in meaningful ways.

Economic developers are trained in business retention and expansion; business and investment attraction; workforce development; opportunity identification and performance metrics. Increasingly they are also being trained in the area of business and economic recovery. They work with a range of stakeholders on a daily basis, and are able to align themselves with government, the private and non-profit sectors. As a result, they are the ones that need to be empowered to lead business and economic recovery in their community. They have the ultimate accountability and know who the key stakeholders are. Engaging them is critical in both the short and long term.

Working alongside the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) Economic Development Department and the Canadian Red Cross (CRC), we helped design a phased business and recovery plan, which was set in motion when it was approved by RMWB Council on May 25, 2016. Shortly thereafter, the Hotline was established and operational to support businesses.

I want to personally thank the Canadian Red Cross for its willingness to fund the Hotline and provide the funds to support vulnerable small businesses in the Wood Buffalo region. They recognized the need to support small businesses and made it a priority in the early stages of response and recovery. The results speak for themselves.

Sincerely,

Leann Hackman-Carty

*Leann Hackman-Carty, CEO
Economic Developers Alberta*



OUR OBJECTIVES

On May 30, 2016, Economic Developers Alberta (EDA) opened the Wood Buffalo Business Recovery Hotline in Calgary, Alberta as a resource for businesses affected by the wildfires. Solely funded by the Canadian Red Cross, the Hotline was developed and operated by EDA, in close collaboration with the Red Cross and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Economic Development Department as their offices at the time were inhabitable.

The goals and objectives were to:

- Contact approximately 4,000 companies with current RMWB business licenses;
- Update contact information on these companies;
- Collect information on their specific and immediate needs after the wildfire;
- Provide resources to help with their identified needs;
- Assess their eligibility for Red Cross Small Business Emergency Financial Assistance in the amount of \$1,000; and
- Advise of the eligibility status and provide further instructions as needed.

The Hotline was marketed through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, newspaper ads, billboards, radio spots, and the rmwb.ca, choosewoodbuffalo.com, and redcross.ca websites. Operators handled both incoming and outgoing calls, and were provided with a:

- Script;
- Map of the affected areas, including the restricted zones;
- Resource Guide, with details on all aspects of the recovery efforts and resources available to both business owners and individuals (updated as needed); and
- Call-out lists pulled from the current RMWB business license database.
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

OUTCOMES

For the first month of operations, the Municipality authorized outgoing calls between 8:30am – 5:30pm as complaints were received regarding calls made outside of business hours.

From May 30 – August 31, the Hotline handled 15,669 calls; 4,890 incoming, and 10,779 outgoing, contacting companies with a current business license (as per the master RMWB list) at least three times. For those companies whose phone numbers were no longer in use, attempts were made to find the company online, with the database updated as appropriate.

The Hotline concluded on August 31st. Here are some highlights on how the it helped:

- 4,134 companies were registered
- 2,355 companies were on the RMWB business license database (57%), while 1,783 (43%) did not have current licenses. 9% of the non-licensed companies were taxi drivers, with 383 individuals registering
- 3,296 companies received Canadian Red Cross emergency financial assistance via transfers arranged by ATB Financial
- Of those that registered to receive funding, a portion did not receive it due to the fact they either did not meet the criteria, or chose not to provide basic corporate or banking information
- A social media campaign was carried out, the results of which are reported in the Social Media report completed by Press + Post media. Highlights include more than 1200 unique website visits, reaching over 40,000 individuals in the region.



TOP ENGAGED FACEBOOK POSTS & ADS



Engagement: 0.4%
Reach: 13,535
Comments: 4
Likes: 40
Shares: 16
Link Clicks: n/a



Engagement: 3.6%
Reach: 14,895
Comments: 0
Likes: 7
Shares: 8
Link Clicks: 521



TOP ENGAGED TWEETS



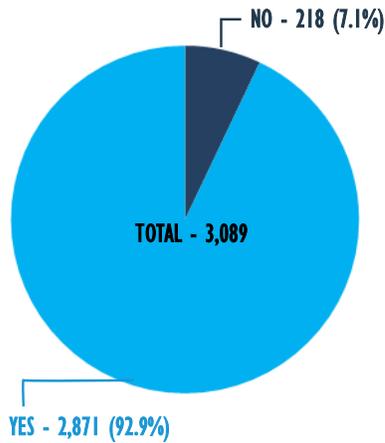
Impressions: 3,950
Engagements: 10
Retweets: 2
Profile Clicks: 2
Likes: 1



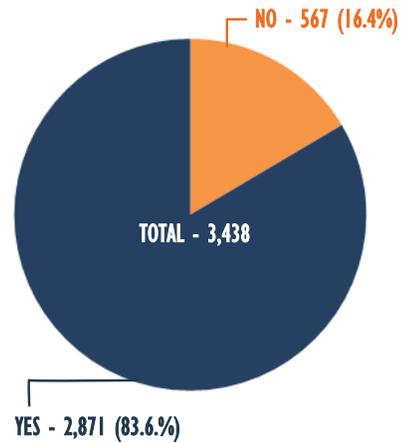
Impressions: 3,946
Engagements: 37
Retweets: 5
Profile Clicks: 7
Likes: 6

BUSINESS SURVEY RESULTS

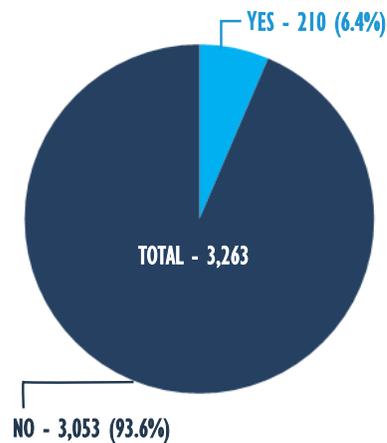
RMWB BUSINESS LICENSE



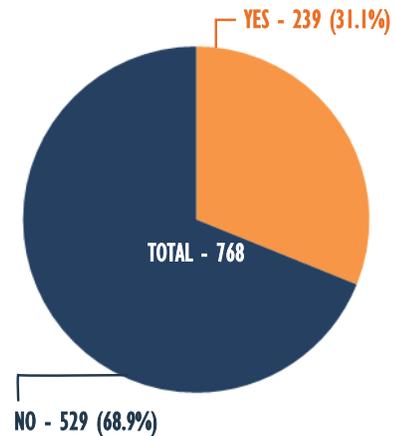
HAVE YOU LAID OFF OR TERMINATED ANY EMPLOYEES POST DISASTER?



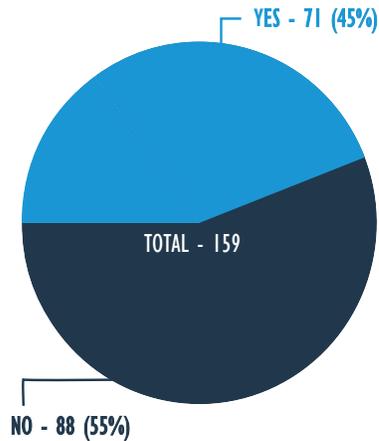
ARE YOU A FRANCHISE?



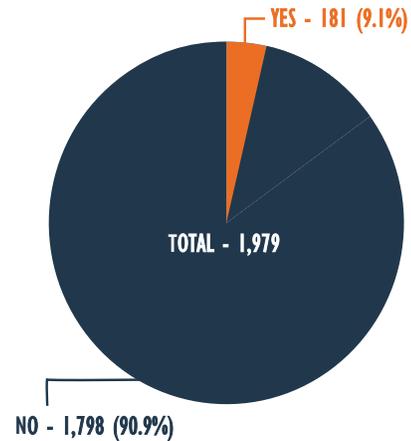
DID YOU HELP YOU HELP WITH YOUR EMPLOYEES PERSONAL RECOVERY?



ARE YOU A FRANCHISE? (IF YES, DO YOU HAVE CORPORATE SUPPORT?)

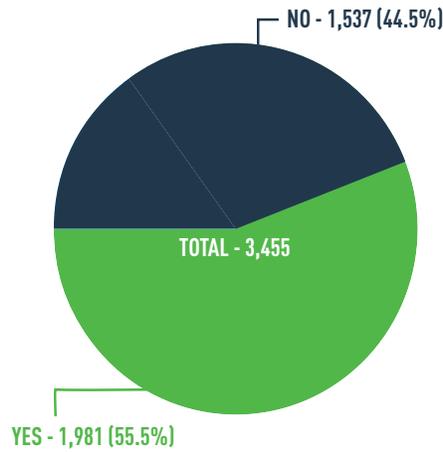


ARE YOUR CRITICAL PAPERS/RECORDS SECURE/BACKED UP?(IF YES - DO YOU NEED ASSISTANCE IN ACCESSING THEM?)

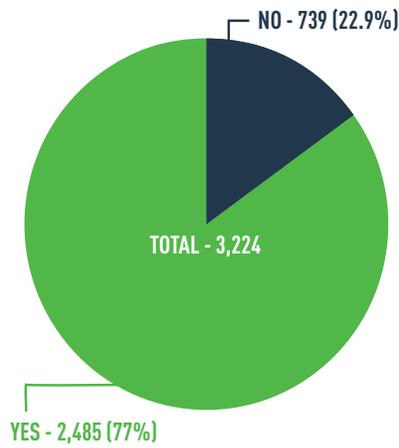


BUSINESS SURVEY RESULTS CONT...

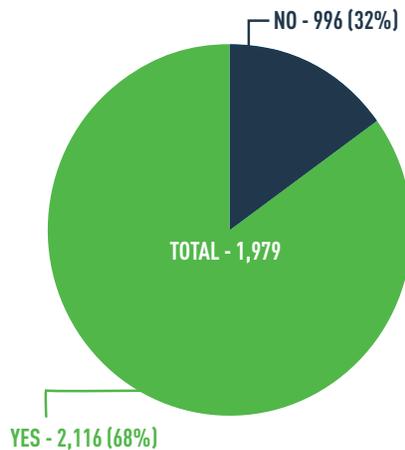
DO YOU HAVE BUSINESS INSURANCE?



DO YOU HAVE A CUSTOMER LIST TO ADVISE THEM OF THE STATUS OF YOUR BUSINESS?

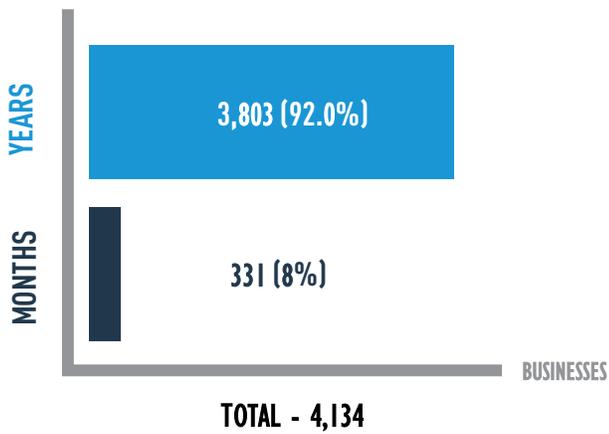


DO YOU HAVE A SUPPLIER, OR WHOLESALER LIST TO ADVISE THEM OF THE STATUS OF YOUR BUSINESS?

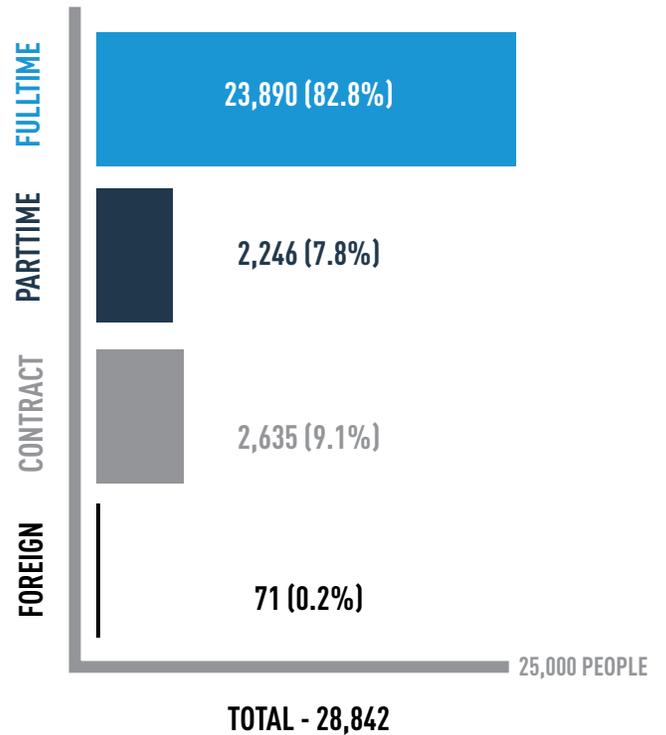


BUSINESS SURVEY RESULTS CONT...

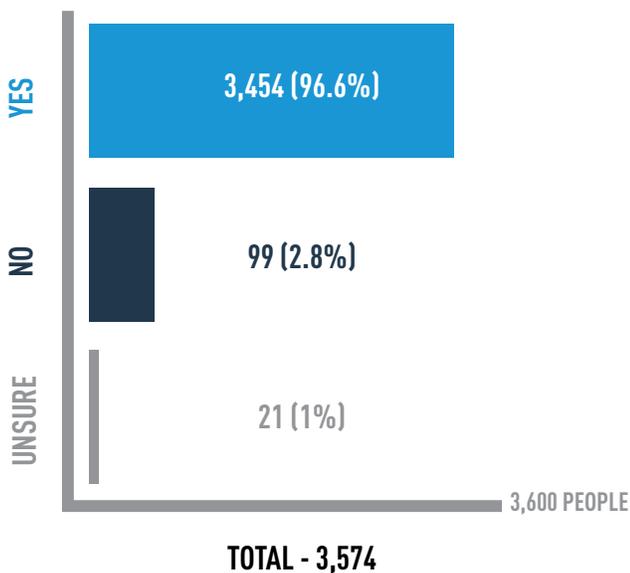
HOW LONG HAS YOUR BUSINESS BEEN IN OPERATION?



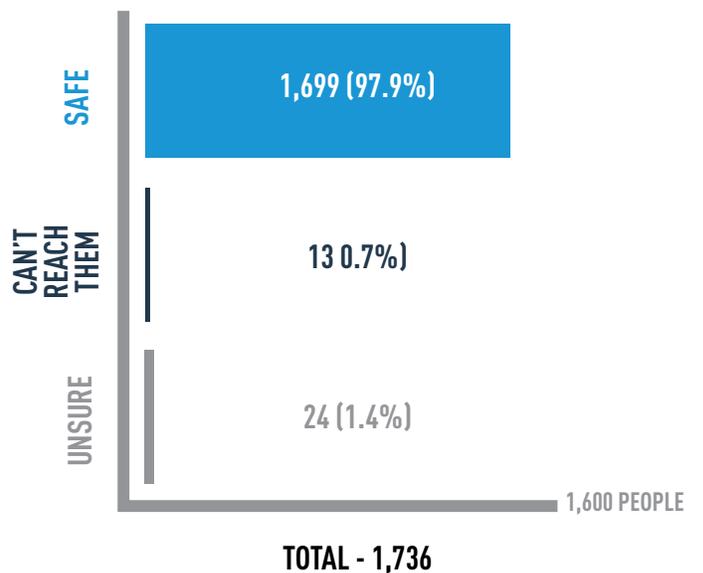
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES AT YOUR COMPANY BEFORE THE FIRE?



WAS YOUR BUSINESS AFFECTED BY THE WILDFIRES?

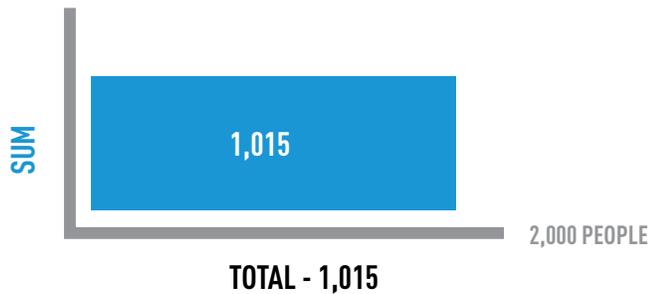


WHAT IS THE STATUS OF YOUR EMPLOYEES?

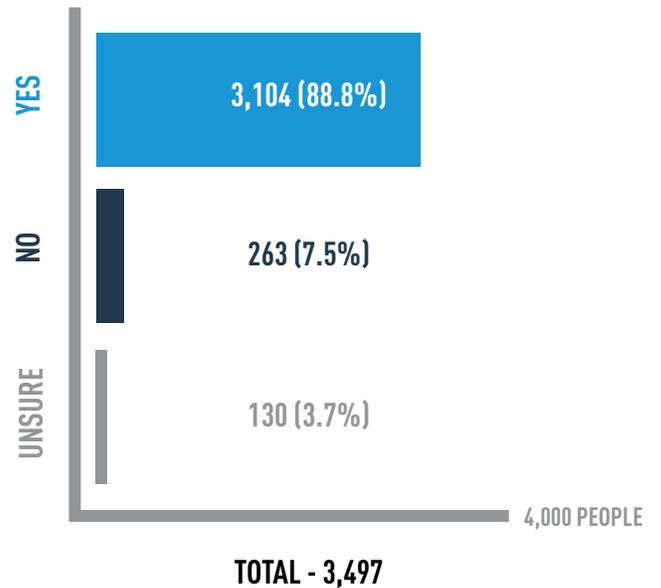


BUSINESS SURVEY RESULTS CONT...

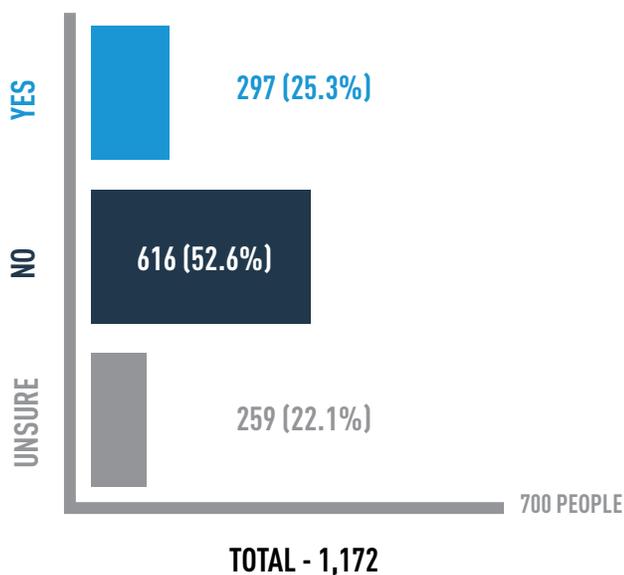
HOW MANY EMPLOYEES LOST THEIR HOMES?



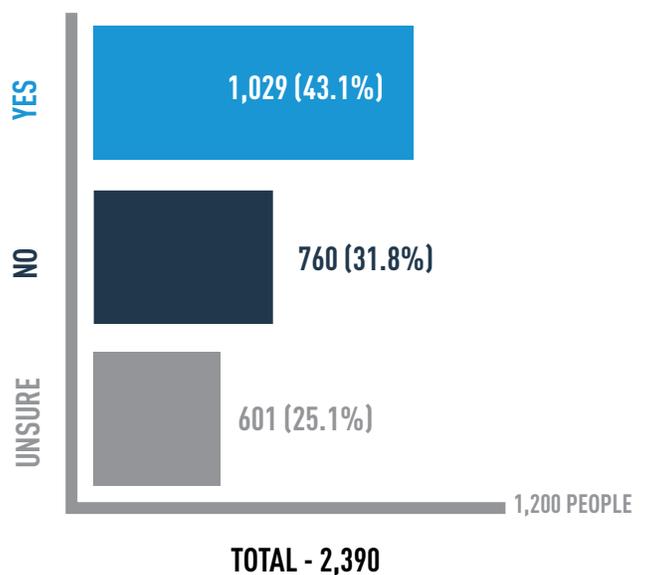
ARE YOUR CRITICAL PAPERS/RECORDS SECURE/
BACKED UP?



WILL YOUR EMPLOYEES NEED ASSISTANCE?

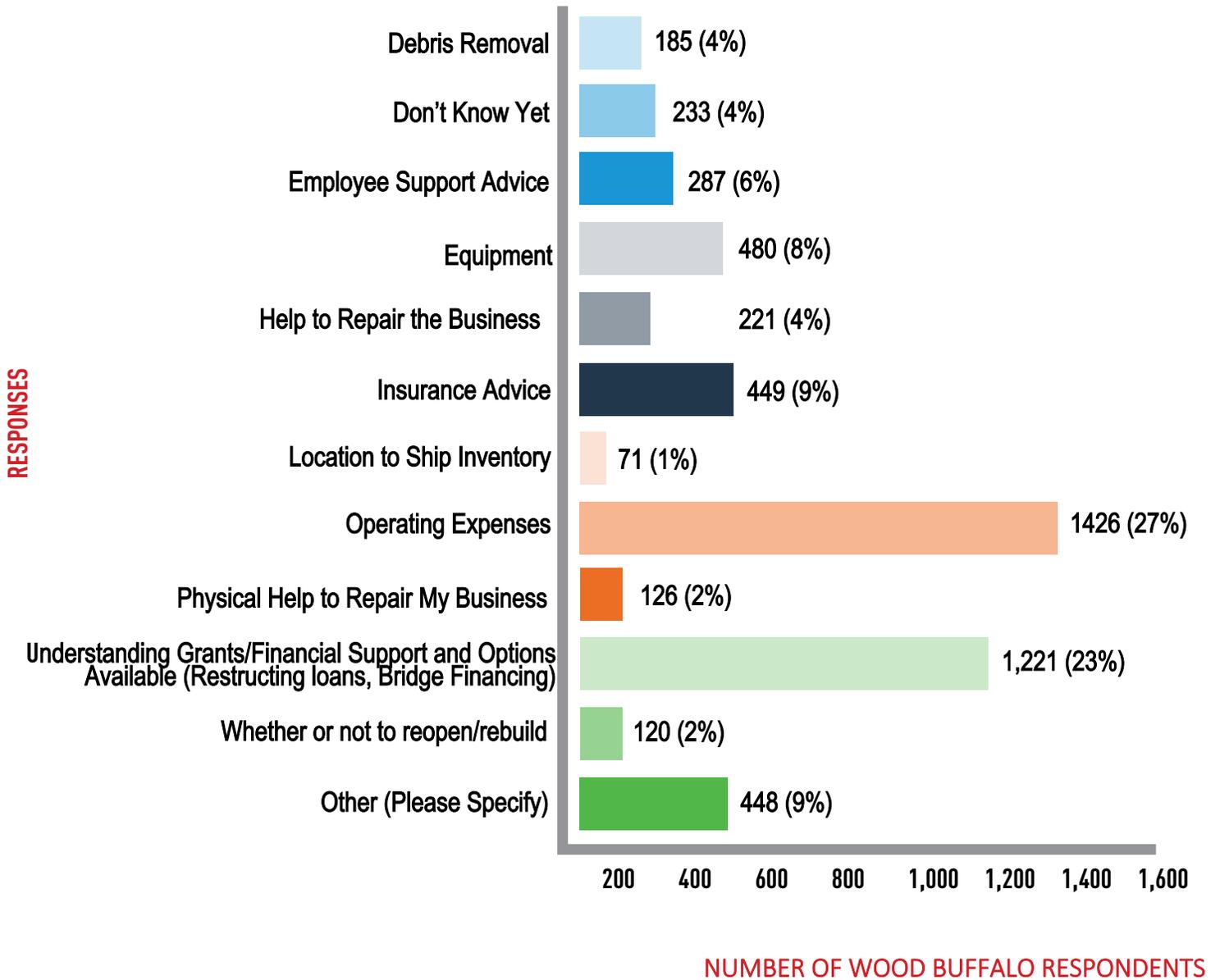


DOES YOUR BUSINESS INSURANCE COVER
FIRE, SMOKE DAMAGE LOSSES?



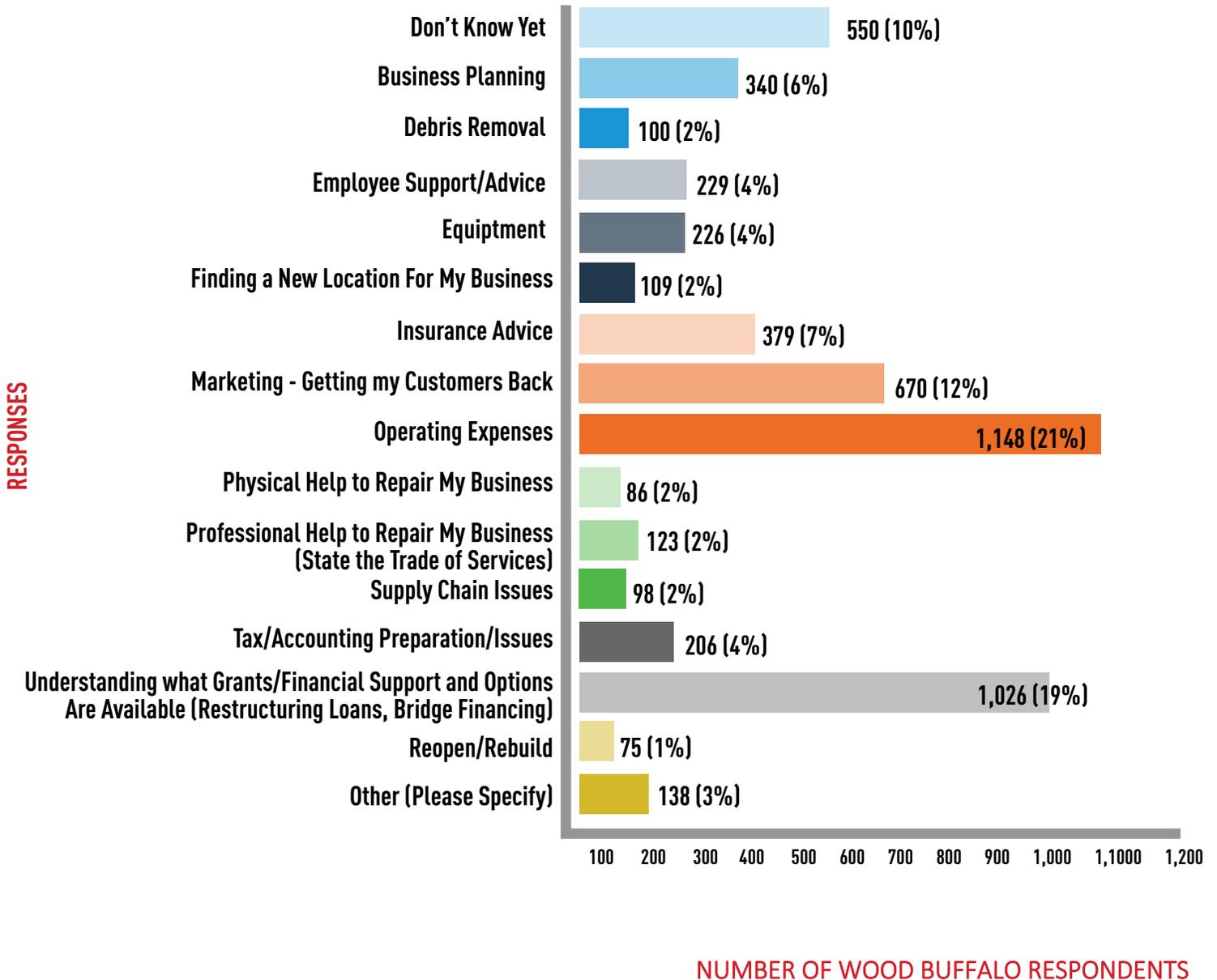
BUSINESS SURVEY RESULTS CONT...

WHAT ARE YOUR IMMEDIATE NEEDS?



BUSINESS SURVEY RESULTS CONT...

WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU BELIEVE YOU WILL NEED WITHIN THE NEXT ONE TO TWO WEEKS?



Note: These results are based on an optional survey . Not all businesses contacted completed it. Responses did not impact eligibility to receive Red Cross financial assistance.



PARTNERS

Lead by Economic Developers Alberta in collaboration with:

- **Canadian Red Cross** - Hotline funding, financial assistance to eligible small businesses, program design and development, website updates and liaising with various stakeholders
- **Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Economic Development Department** - Staff, resources, additional management support, liaison with various government and community stakeholders, RMWB website updates and communications
- **ATB Financial** - Support with distribution of emergency funds to small businesses
- **ExecutivePulse Inc.** - CRM system, survey development
- **AG Consulting** – Business recovery consulting, hotline operations and strategic advice

Other service partners:

- **Executive Solutions** - Hotline staff schedules, payroll, recruitment services
- **Calgary Economic Development** - Leased physical space in the Global Business Centre
- **Press & Post** - Social media marketing campaign
- **TELUS** - Phone set up and support

QUOTES



I am incredibly proud of the work we did in establishing and operating the hotline. This collaborative, responsive model put the customer (small business owner) first and set out clear roles and responsibilities for each partner. I am optimistic RMWB's Economic Development Department will continue to find success in the future as they begin to focus on recovering their economy next.

**- Leann Hackman-Carty
CEO, EDA**



I believe the work we carried out over that three month period was critical in accelerating the ability of the RMWB to recover its business community. Small businesses are the heart of a community. Making, and keeping them a priority is essential to the overall vibrancy and sustainability of a community.

**- Angela Groeneveld
Business Recovery Specialist, AG Consulting**



EDA was instrumental in helping our business community get back up and running. The hotline let business owners know we were there for them. Not only did they administer the initial emergency financial relief program but they were also a sounding board the businesses needed immediately after the fire. Staff at the hotline went above and beyond to ensure callers were informed on all the resources available to them.

I was fortunate to be on the ground working with the hotline for a few weeks after it opened. I saw that they truly cared and wanted to help our community. Being there also allowed me to help them understand our community better which improved customer service even more. I'm so grateful to EDA for working so hard to get the hotline up and running so quickly. I want to thank EDA for their work. They were amazing.

**- Lisa Slade
Senior Economic Development Officer,
RMWB Economic Development Department**



Hon. Minister Larivee visit



Bob Hawkesworth (Director, Stakeholder Relations, Southern Alberta Premier's Office) visiting the Hotline



Lisa Slade, RMWB



Visuals of Social Media Campaign



QUOTES

Oh thank you so very much!! This is so thoughtful of our city to do this! I was wondering how I was going to pay my bills as I count on that since my husband was put on disability. God truly answers prayers!!!!

- AMF CONTRACTING

I just wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you so much, it means a lot to me that my government is willing to step in after such a big crisis. I am very grateful, thank you.

- EAT ELITE INC.

Thank you very much for the emergency funding offer, we feel that it would best served by directing the funds to another business that needs the funding.

- THE CHILDREN'S PLACE # 3325

Difficult to express via email my sincere thank you for all the efforts of the RED CROSS, but: "Thank you very much"

- PHARMACIST

There was no attitude, ignorance, judgment or negative feel to our interactions, it was pure sadness, comfort, compassion... just an honest desire to help in any way they were permitted...

- GRANT'S MECHANICAL