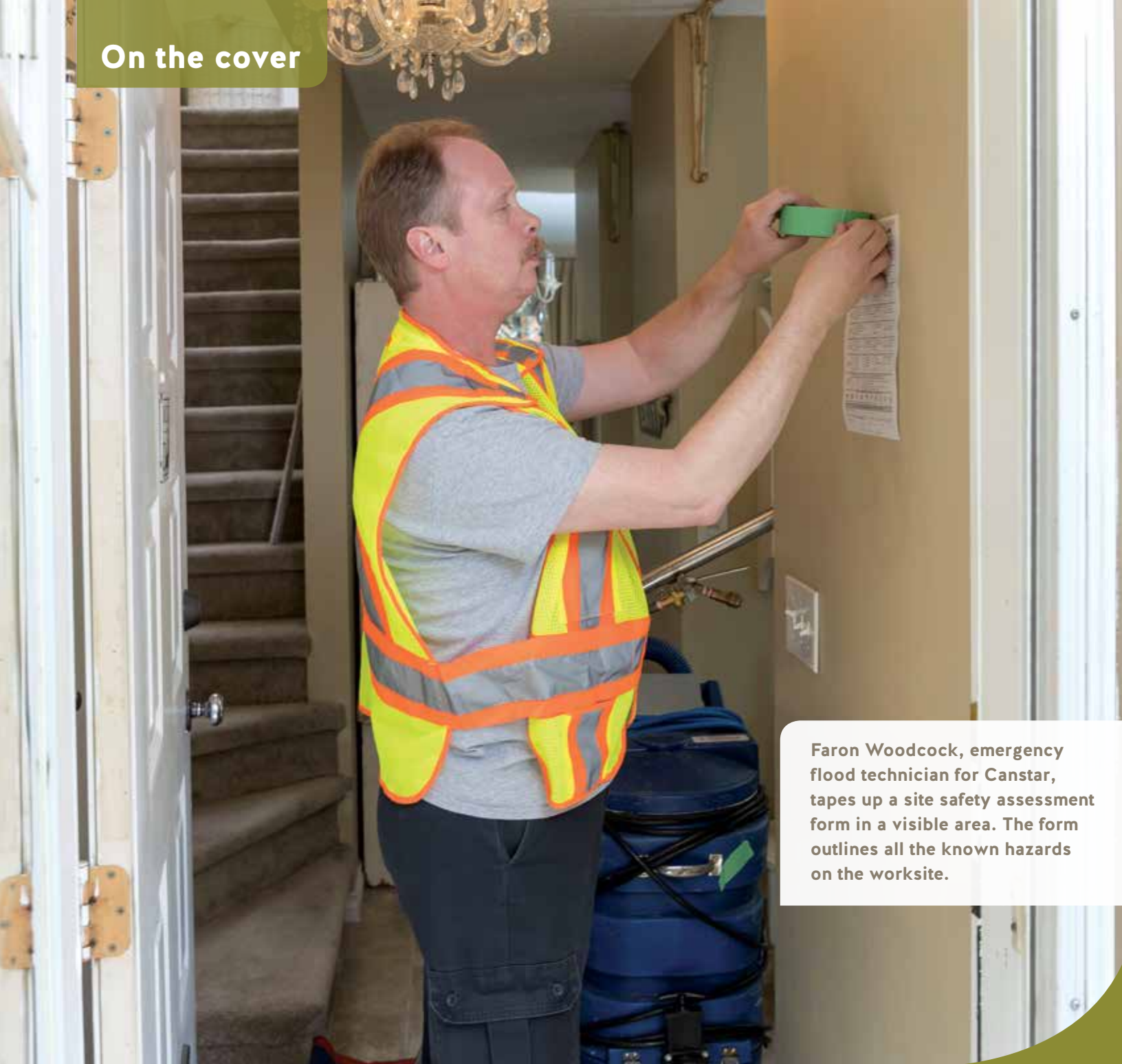


On the cover



Faron Woodcock, emergency flood technician for Canstar, tapes up a site safety assessment form in a visible area. The form outlines all the known hazards on the worksite.

After a disaster, restoration contractors pick up the pieces

By Marnie Douglas

The jobsites of fire and flood restoration contractors are unlike most. They could be facing raw sewage floating in knee-deep water, mould layered over walls, pathogens from a crime scene, or rooms filled with toxic chemicals from burnt plastics, carpets, wood, and fabrics.

Once emergency responders have finished their work, restoration contractors and insurance adjusters are some of the first people to enter a home or building after a disaster such as a fire or flood. The aftermath of a fire or flood can leave serious health hazards for contractors — particulates, electrical hazards, rotting and structural damage, lingering odours from smoke, mould and mildew, plus exposure to asbestos, lead, mercury, and biohazards, to name a few. These potentially hazardous exposures are preventable with proper controls in place.

Not your everyday hazards

“These are definitely not your standard hazards,” explains Kathy Tull, WorkSafeBC industry specialist. “These contractors experience different health and safety challenges than other contractors because they

deal almost entirely with emergency work, and every environment they go into can be different than the last. Every new jobsite could pose different hazards.”

There are about 140 fire and flood restoration contractors across B.C. Providing service to them is the British Columbia Construction Safety Alliance’s (BCCSA) Fire and Flood Restoration Program. Their Technical Advisory Committee, which comprises a small group of safety specialists from within that group of contractors, is keen to develop health and safety resources they can share among members — particularly smaller restoration contractors who don’t necessarily have access to the same health and safety resources as larger companies.

“The beauty of this committee is that the industry is bringing all of their safety-related materials to the table and willingly sharing everything,” adds Tull, who is also the WorkSafeBC representative on the committee.

Current committee members include representatives from the BCCSA, Belfor, Canstar Restorations, CJB Construction, Downs Construction, FirstOnSite, On Side Restoration, Phoenix Restoration, Platinum Pro-Claim Restoration, and WorkSafeBC. The committee dates back to 2005 when it was under the British Columbia Association of Restoration Contractors, which amalgamated with the BCCSA in 2016.

Sharing information is the right thing to do

Robby Todosichuk started with Canstar nearly 20 years ago, primarily removing hazardous materials from homes and businesses damaged by fire, flooding, and other emergencies. Today, he is the company’s safety manager, and says the committee provides an excellent opportunity to develop and share best practices to keep all employees safe.

“We’re sharing information to raise the bar amongst all our contractors. Safety is safety. Although we’re all competitors when it comes to business, we’re not competing when it comes to safety.”

Dennis Maloney, health and safety manager with Downs Construction, agrees. He’s been in the restoration business for more than 20 years and a committee member since 2007.

“My hope is that employers ask questions and understand that safety should not be considered secondary. It should be considered part of the overall



The site safety assessment form provides documentation of the hazards on a worksite.



The Technical Advisory Committee (L to R): Robby Todosichuk (Canstar), Campbell Irving (FirstOnSite), Candice Brown (BCCSA), Gary Bird (Belfor); Kathy Tull (WorkSafeBC), Dennis Maloney (Downs), Sarah Graham (CJB), Justin McConville (On Side), Wes Rundle (Platinum Pro-Claim). Not pictured: Heather Driessen (Phoenix).

business structure,” he says. “Employee health should be vital to the success of any company.”

Assessing safety on site

One of the committee’s successes to date is the introduction of a site safety assessment (SSA) kit, which includes a form, instruction guide, and an online course (free to B.C.’s restoration industry) through the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS). The online hazard-assessment course covers essential topics, such as hazard mapping, workplace inspections, risk-assessment techniques, and the hierarchy of controls. It’s one of many CCOHS courses on health and safety in restoration that are available for free to B.C. restoration contractors through the BCCSA.

Here’s how the form works: Before any work begins, a site safety assessment is conducted by a trained person. The results of the safety assessment are documented on the SSA form. The SSA must be updated as conditions change on the jobsite, and a new SSA is required at the start of a new shift. The guide helps users navigate the safety assessment and fill out the form. Both Todosichuk and Maloney say the form is valuable for both individual contractors in assessing site hazards and other contractors entering the worksite.

The form must be completed by a crew leader every day before any work starts, and it must be posted visibly on site, usually on the main entryway. “Then, anyone coming on site can see it and they understand the hazards that have been assessed,” he explains. “Sometimes the hazards will change day-to-day so it’s important that everyone is on the same page and can see what’s being done day-to-day.”

Just who is the prime contractor?

Another important task that the committee is working on is recommendations for who should have the role of prime contractor on a restoration worksite. Under the *Workers Compensation Act*, if no prime contractor is specified in writing, the role defaults to either the home/building owner or the insurance adjuster on site. If it defaults to the homeowner, it means that the ultimate responsibility for injuries or violations could fall to someone who has never even been on the worksite.

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, a prime contractor must be qualified to ensure coordination of work activities and ensure compliance with the Act and the Regulation.

Without a prime contractor focused on health and safety, each new contractor on site — plumbers, electricians, other trades, and possibly other restoration companies — might expose new hazards without informing other contractors.

Connecting with the rest of industry

The BCCSA, in partnership with WorkSafeBC, arranged a breakfast meeting May 16 that brought together insurance adjusters and restoration contractors to talk about issues relevant to the industry regarding the responsibilities for health and safety on restoration worksites, and the assignment of a prime contractor. Both Maloney and Todosichuk agreed that this meeting was a positive step in continued improvements around health and safety for restoration contractors.

“Owners, prime contractors, coordinators, insurance adjusters, employers, supervisors, and workers need to all work together to reduce the risks and keep the workplace healthy and safe,” says Candice Brown, safety and injury management advisor with the BCCSA.

Brown says the third important initiative the committee is working on is completing a series of guides for exposure control plans (ECPs) for the different types of materials and substances a restoration contractor might typically encounter, including asbestos, silica, sewage, and polychlorinated biphenyl (commonly known as PCB).

“In this industry, you never know what you’re going to encounter. The ECP guides will be very valuable

to everyone involved in the industry. A restoration contractor could draw from this information to create a site-specific exposure control plan,” she says.

“The committee is making big strides in health and safety,” Brown adds. “The goal is to promote workplace health and safety within the restoration contractor industry in B.C., by addressing emerging issues and high-risk injuries, and offering solutions via training and resources. Hazard recognition was a big step, and the committee wants to be a resource for any company, large or small.”

For more information

- The BCCSA provides access to health and safety courses for B.C.’s fire and flood restoration industry. Find out more at bccsa.ca.
- The Site Safety Assessment Guide and form can be found on bccsa.ca or at ssaform.com.
- Health and safety requirements related to responsibilities on a restoration worksite can be found the *Workers Compensation Act* and *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation* on worksafebc.com. Particularly:
 - Part 3, Division 3 of the Act — General duties of employers, workers and others, sections 115–119.
 - Section 20.3 of the Regulation — Coordination of multiple employer workplaces. ☺



New look!

BCMSA

On-Site Health & Safety Training
200+ Online Safety Awareness Courses
Certificate of Recognition (COR) Program
Reduced Cost for Online SDS Management
COR Organization Self-Assessment
free online tool available to all organizations
BCMSA/PWABC 2nd Annual Joint Conference
September 15-18, 2019 in Penticton

Share the knowledge!
BC MUNICIPAL SAFETY ASSOCIATION

bcmsa.ca

