

Wildfires in northern Alberta: Impact on hours worked, May and June, 2016

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As a result of the wildfires that affected northern Alberta in May and the subsequent mandatory evacuation of residents from the Fort McMurray area, some employed people living in Alberta lost work hours, while others put in extra hours during May and June.

In the Fort McMurray area, 8.5 million hours were lost over the two-month period, while 870,000 additional hours were worked. The net effect was a loss of 7.6 million hours.

In the rest of Alberta, the overall effect of the wildfires on work hours was a loss of 2.2 million hours in May and a loss of 700,000 hours in June.

Impact of the wildfires on hours worked for residents of the Fort McMurray area

In the Fort McMurray area, 42,000 employed people (80.4% of the employed population) reported that they lost 8.5 million work hours over the two-month period due to the wildfires. At the same time, 9,600 workers, or 18.5% of the employed population, gained 870,000 hours. The net effect was a loss of 7.6 million hours worked.

Largest loss of work hours in natural resources

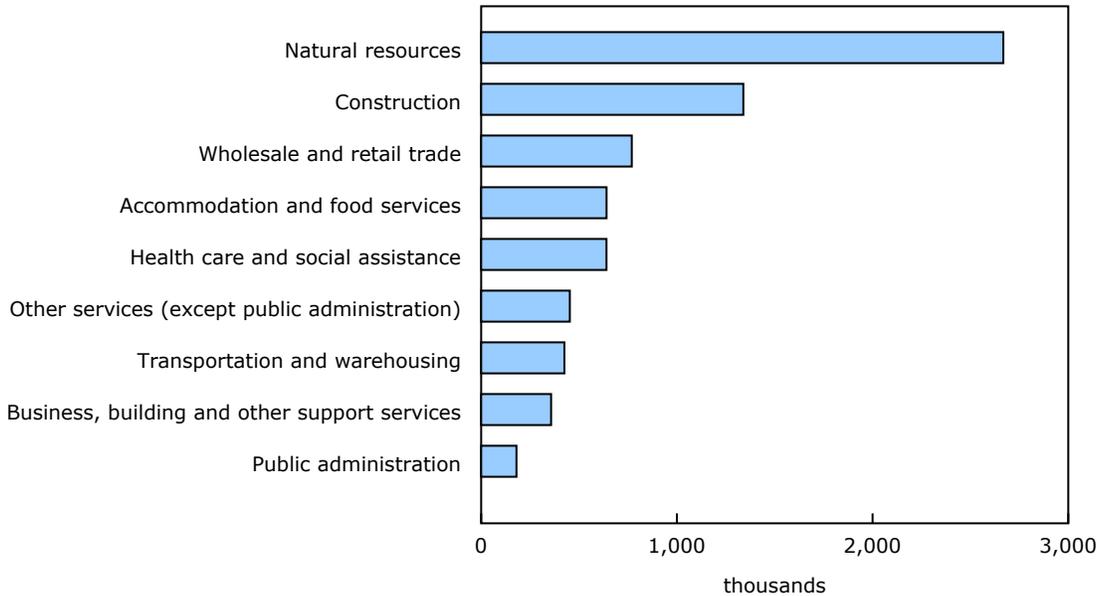
In the Fort McMurray area, most industries recorded a significant share of workers who missed work over the two-month period. The largest share of workers who lost hours as a result of the wildfires was reported in transportation and warehousing (87.5%), followed by health care and social assistance (85.7%) and natural resources (85.1%). The smallest share of lost hours was in public administration (65.2%).

Over the two-month period, 2.7 million hours were lost in natural resources, the largest number of hours lost in any industry. While 85.1% of workers in natural resources lost work time as a result of the wildfires, 26.2% put in 394,000 additional hours.



Chart 1

Total work hours lost in May and/or June as a result of the wildfires by industry, Fort McMurray area



Note(s): Natural resources are also referred to as forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction.
Source(s): Labour Force Survey (3701).

In construction, 78.5% of the employed population lost 1.3 million hours over the two-month period. In wholesale and retail trade, 80.4% reported 800,000 hours lost.

The number of hours lost differed between employees and the self-employed. In the Fort McMurray area, the proportion of the employed population with hours lost was highest among private sector employees (80.5%) and lowest among public sector workers (75.0%). Private sector employees lost 199.8 hours on average, while public sector employees lost an average of 160.1 hours.

On the other hand, 84.1% of self-employed workers reported fewer hours, compared with 79.8% of paid employees. Self-employed workers lost more hours (295.3) on average than employees (195.4).

Impact of the wildfires on hours worked by sex and age groups, Fort McMurray area

In the Fort McMurray area, the net effect of the wildfires on hours worked was a loss of 4.8 million hours for men and 2.8 million for women.

Over the two-month period, comparable proportions of men (80.7%) and women (78.9%) worked fewer hours. The average number of hours lost per person was also similar for men (206.6) and women (200.0). While hours were lost as a result of the wildfires, 20.8% of men reported working extra time, an average of 100.2 additional hours over the two months. A smaller proportion of women (14.2%) worked extra time, gaining an average of 66.7 hours.

Among age groups, core-aged workers—those aged 25 to 54—were most affected by the wildfires, with 81.9% of the 25-to-39 group losing an average of 199.1 hours over the two-month period, and 81.4% of 40-to-54 year olds working 218.1 fewer hours.

At the same time, 75.9% of workers aged 55 to 69 lost work time, putting in an average of 186.5 fewer hours. Among employed youth aged 15 to 24, 71.9% lost hours, working on average 201.2 fewer hours.

While a decline in work hours was recorded in all age groups, there were also gains in some age groups. As a result of the wildfires, 24.0% of employed people aged 40 to 54 worked additional hours, and their average number of hours gained was 94.4. Among workers aged 25 to 39, 14.8% gained an average of 91.8 hours.

Impact of the wildfires on hours worked in the rest of Alberta

As a result of the wildfires, 36,000 or 1.6% of employed people in the rest of Alberta lost 3.8 million hours of work in May. Over the same period, 77,000 (3.5%) workers reported they gained 1.6 million hours. The net effect was a loss of 2.2 million hours in May.

Employed Albertans also lost and gained work hours during the month of June, following the disaster. For that period, 23,000 (1.1%) employed people said they lost 2.1 million hours, while 54,000 (2.5%) reported they gained 1.3 million hours. As a result, the net effect was a loss of 700,000 hours in the rest of Alberta in June.

Impact on hours worked by industry in the rest of Alberta

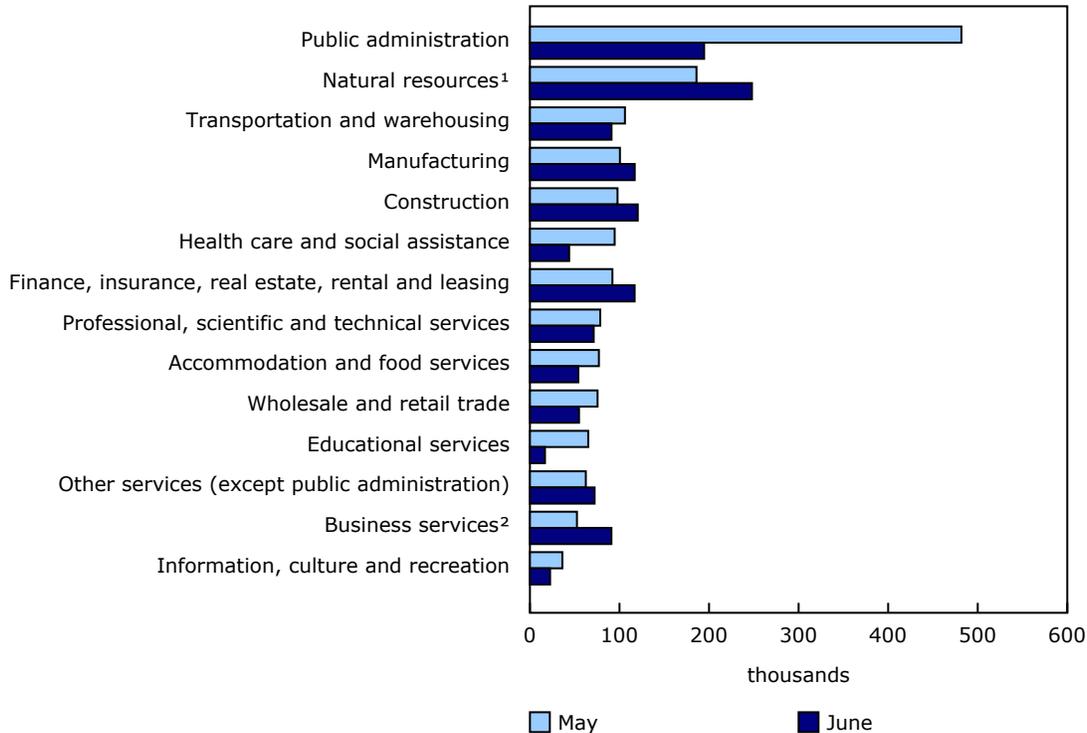
In May and June, most industries reported a net increase in hours worked. Overall, however, there was a net loss, as there were large declines in hours worked in a few industries.

In natural resources, 186,000 additional hours were reported in the rest of Alberta in May. While 6.4% of workers in this industry gained more work time, 6.0% worked fewer hours for a loss of 776,000 hours. In June, 6.7% of employed people in natural resources reported working 248,000 extra hours, while 2.9% reported working 417,000 fewer hours.

In May, 12.5% of people employed in public administration reported an increase in their work time as a result of the wildfires, adding 482,000 hours, the highest among all industries. In June, 7.2% of the workers in this industry put in an additional 195,000 hours.

In construction, 1.9% of workers put in 98,000 additional hours in May. At the same time, 4.6% of workers in this industry lost 1.7 million hours, the highest number of hours lost among all industries. In June, while 1.3% of workers in construction worked 120,000 more hours, 2.8% worked 689,000 fewer hours.

Chart 2
Total work hours gained in May and June as a result of the wildfires by industry, Alberta excluding Fort McMurray



1. Also referred to as forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction.
 2. Business services also includes building and other support services.
 Source(s): Labour Force Survey (3701).

In the rest of Alberta, the proportion of the employed population who reported gaining hours was higher among public sector employees (5.7% in May and 3.3% in June) than private sector employees (3.3% and 2.5% respectively). Public sector workers gained an average of 27.1 hours in May and 20.9 hours in June, while private sector employees put in 17.9 more hours in May and 24.4 more hours in June.

In May and June, employees in the private sector recorded a net loss in work hours (-2.6 million in May and -900,000 in June), while employees in the public sector reported a net gain (+535,000 and +266,000 respectively).

More men than women lost work hours in May and June

The proportion of employed people who reported losing hours due to the wildfires was higher among men (2.4% in May and 1.5% in June) than women (0.8% and 0.5%). In May, the proportion of employed people with additional hours was similar for men and women, while in June, a larger share of men put in additional hours compared with women (2.9% versus 2.0% respectively).

In May, the net effect of the wildfires on hours worked in the rest of Alberta was a loss of 2.1 million hours among male workers and 63,000 hours among their female counterparts. In June, employed men worked 886,000 fewer hours, while employed women put in 176,000 additional hours.

The largest proportion of workers who lost hours in both May and June was among those aged 25 to 39. This age group also had the largest proportion of workers who gained hours over the period.

Note to readers

Data for this release are derived from questions added to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the province of Alberta. Respondents aged 15 to 69, for whom the selected dwelling is the usual place of residence, were asked to report the number of hours they lost and the number of additional overtime hours they worked as a result of the wildfires that affected northern Alberta in May 2016.

These data help to measure the overall economic impact of the wildfires, which led to the evacuation the Fort McMurray area.

The Fort McMurray area refers to the census agglomeration (CA) of Wood Buffalo.

Due to the wildfires, LFS data collection in the CA of Wood Buffalo was suspended in May, June and July. This required that a separate approach to the additional questions be used for Wood Buffalo and for the rest of Alberta.

Respondents in the CA of Wood Buffalo were asked the additional questions in August for the reference period that includes the months of May, June or both. In the rest of Alberta, the additional questions were included in the June LFS (for the reference period of May) and the July LFS (for the reference period of June).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3701](#).

For more information, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca).

To enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact Emmanuelle Bourbeau (613-951-3007; emmanuelle.bourbeau@canada.ca), Labour Statistics Division.