

## **Stakeholder engagement “key component to doing business”**

Without the transparency and community feedback afforded by its stakeholder engagement practices, Suncor would lack the license to operate, says Darcy Park, communications officer.

“We’re a growth company,” says Darcy, of the Canadian oil sands developer, “and as an organization with environmental impact we have to have support from the community. It’s also important for us to address issues and mitigate concerns before they arise. It’s the key component to us doing business.”

Park says that Suncor takes its stakeholder engagement cues from its policy, which “sets out our vision.”

According to its guiding stakeholder principles, Suncor seeks to develop “long term relationships with stakeholders that enable us to supply the energy products customers demand, while contributing to a strong economy, healthy environment and social well-being.”

At its operations in Fort McMurray, the company is collaborating with three significant community organizations to ascertain the scope of its impact and whether it has the support of those affected by its operations. Because of the rapid growth in the region as a result of oil development, Park says that ensuring the community has capacity to manage these changes is “critical” to Suncor’s operations.

The company is currently consulting with the Athabasca Tribal Council, which represents five First Nations groups. Fort McMurray, which is in Treaty 8 territory, has a large Aboriginal population, and protection of the environment is one of Tribal Council’s principal mandates.

Following this, Suncor also collaborates with the Cumulative Effect Management Association (CEMA), a multi-stakeholder group made up of industry, government, non-government organizations and First Nations. CEMA identifies and prioritizes environmental and resource management issues. CEMA is a key partner in the Regional Sustainable Development Strategy, constructed in 1998 to manage Athabasca oil sands development.

On social and community issues, the company is collaborating with the Athabasca Regional Issues Working Group, a collection of industry, community and government stakeholders, working to address the rapid development in the region and to minimize negative impact. The group addresses community issues like transportation, housing, and health care as Fort McMurray encounters growing pains. A healthy, thriving community is also important from an employee recruitment perspective, says Park.

Park calls the Suncor's stakeholder engagement process a "work in progress," begun ten years ago as the company began integrating sustainability into its mandate.

"In our business it's becoming more and more important to involve stakeholders. Expectations are increasing - we have to continue to innovate and find new ways to engage. It's a major driver of our company."

Park points out that transparency and responsiveness are the hallmarks of a successful stakeholder engagement model.

"Transparency builds trust. You have to get input early and often, and be willing to be influenced."