January 17, 2017

Academics assess economic impacts of the Fort McMurray wildfire

Edmonton – Two MacEwan University researchers, Dr. Rafat Alam and Dr. Shahidul Islam, have completed a preliminary study of the economic impact of the Fort McMurray wildfires that took place in the summer of 2016.

Assessing the full impact of the wildfire is complicated as many factors are hard to identify, quantify or assign a value to. And, according to the researchers, many aspects of the disaster can’t be assessed at this point in time because there are so many variables involved and so many things are changing on the ground. Alam and Islam add that it can take up to 10 years to gain a solid understanding of what actually happened.

Direct impacts of the fire include loss of property and labour income; loss of oil sands and forestry industry production; and public sector production. The research also delves into the economic impacts of activities like the evacuation and the displacement of people, fire suppression, emergency management and donations. “We have also tried to count some of the indirect costs like mental health, environmental losses, losses in government revenue and royalties,” said Islam.

“The majority of the impacts are negative or harmful but there are some positive or beneficial impacts,” said Alam. “It is our hope that this work will contribute to overall gains in efficiency and provide positive solutions that can help to better to manage disasters in the future.”

The researchers will present their results at a session on Wednesday, January 18. Alam and Islam will share economic numbers and data that are a part of the rapid impact assessment – the evaluation of the effects of a disaster in its immediate aftermath. They will also discuss the process they are using to analyze the data and the next steps in their research.

Alam and Islam are economists in the Department of Anthropology, Economics and Political Science.

When: Wednesday, January 18
Where: CN Conference Theatre, 5-142 (Building 5, room 142) City Centre Campus
Time: 2 – 3 p.m.

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