

## **TORONTO SUN - HIGH RIVER GUN GRAB'S LESSONS FOR FORT MAC**

**At the moment, there isn't the time for a good old-fashioned gun grab. A lot can happen during the next few weeks until evacuees can return. We'll be watching.**

BY LORNE GUNTER, EDMONTON SUN - UPDATED: TUESDAY, MAY 10, 2016 06:41 PM EDT

<http://www.torontosun.com/2016/05/10/high-river-gun-grabs-lessons-for-fort-mac>

There is no reason to imagine the RCMP are on the hunt for private firearms while everyone is evacuated from Fort McMurray. Well, okay, perhaps there's one reason to imagine it: The force's atrocious behaviour the last time an Alberta community suffered a major natural disaster – the High River flood in June 2013. On that occasion, Mounties kicked down the doors of hundreds of private homes – many with no flood damage whatsoever – in an obsessive search for (among other things) firearms. Their excuse during the flood was that they were searching for stranded survivors. But they entered and re-entered homes they had already cleared and homes where the owners had let authorities know there were no survivors trapped inside. They searched in places too small to hide guns. And on some blocks they went only to houses whose owners had had guns listed in the old firearms registry. It became known as the High River Gun Grab.

So when reports started surfacing from Fort McMurray that Mounties were searching for “dangerous goods,” including ammunition, some oilsands region gun owners became concerned. Their concerns were compounded when it was revealed RCMP STO (Special Tactical Operations) were going door-to-door searching for “stragglers.” After all, it was STO that had conducted many of the gun-seizing home entries during the flood. It might appear like overkill to send, effectively, a SWAT team to do a rescue mission that could be accomplished by peace officers or park wardens. Still, it would appear a second gun grab is not underway, at least not yet.

Last year, after the RCMP public complaints commission issued a rather weak report on its investigation into the High River fiasco, very senior Mounties let it be known that concerns over the legality of what went on in High River had been heard and understood. They were happy the report hadn't been tougher. That meant Commissioner Bob Paulson didn't have to take the unpopular step of disciplining or even firing current commanders and members. With the force badly demoralized by years of ineffective leadership, formal discipline would have split the force more. But rest assured, these same high-level sources claimed, the message had gone out to all division commanders (including at K Division in Alberta) that nothing like High River would ever be tolerated again.

That reassurance is consistent with a statement federal Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale (whose portfolio includes the RCMP) made on Sunday. When asked if Mounties would repeat their post-flood actions, the Saskatchewan Liberal MP said “I wouldn't expect a repeat of that problem. The RCMP will be following the law quite closely and everyone's individual rights will be properly respected.” Keep in mind, though, that Mounties insisted during the floods they were following the law closely, too. They insisted Alberta's emergency powers act gave them the authority to conduct home searches and gun seizures without warrants. Yet, Goodale seems to be right. Mounties are not kicking down doors and taking guns in McMurray – at least not yet. One senior Mountie told me “we're too (bleeping) busy right now to be doing a d-to-d rounding up stray guns. If a gun owner calls us worried about firearms left behind, we'll go pick them up. If we have reason to believe there is ammunition in a burnt out garage or shed, will try to round that up, too.”

Flames and bullets or shells don't mix so well. But at the moment, there isn't the time for a good old-fashioned gun grab. A lot can happen during the next few weeks until evacuees can return. We'll be watching.