

A Feature Article with Paula Gibson, Crisis and Emergency Management Coordinator and IAEM-Canada President

Thanks for joining us today. If you're a regular reader of our IAEM Canada Emergency Manager Features, we have a treat for you. As our fifth feature article we've taken the opportunity to interview Paula Gibson, the IAEM President and the Crisis and Emergency Management Coordinator for Glencore's Sudbury Integrated Nickel Operations. She was appointed to the IAEM Canada Board of Directors in the capacity of the Director of Governance in 2017, and since that time, has worked toward positive change for all members of IAEM Canada by instituting strong governance for the Canada Council and by creating a solid foundation to ensure a robust and enduring organization. Paula was the IAEM Conference Director for 2018 and 2019 where she led an enthusiastic team to outstanding success.

Her passion for Emergency Management (EM) has grown through her professional career as a paramedic, firefighter, police communications officer and respiratory therapist. She later moved into the mining sector where she initiated emergency management practices through her role in safety. This evolved into the Sudbury mining company's first Emergency Management role, one of very few in the North American mining sector. Paula has been instrumental in introducing full emergency management programs into the mining sector and developing a strong collaboration between the public sector and private industry to enhance the resiliency of communities across Canada. Keep reading to learn more about Paula Gibson, her experience and IAEM-CANADA.

IAEM (HM): Can you tell us a little about yourself. Perhaps some of your educational, professional and volunteering background?

PG: Growing up in the far reaches of northern Ontario, I came by my passion for emergency management naturally through the influence of my father, who was a fire chief and leader of a military search and rescue team. The concept of structured response intrigued me from a very young age and I would collect articles of disasters almost to the point of obsession for a child. The one that still comes to mind is the Barry Building explosion in North Bay that took 9 lives. It remains the largest tragedy in North Bay's history to this day. We had just moved to the city and I remember looking out the window at the billowing smoke and listening to the continuous sound of sirens that filled the air.

Ten years after the Barry Building tragedy, I started my career as a paramedic in North Bay. I then became the Chief Medical Officer for the North Himsforth Fire Department and furthered my education as a Respiratory Therapist. During that period I also worked as a Communications Officer for the Ontario Provincial Police.

Moving to Sudbury, a predominantly mining community, I left the traditional vocations and began working in the mining sector as a medic. In 2007 I was seconded to write the Crisis Management Plan for the company that was used as the company's global template. During this time, I enrolled in the Emergency Management program through NAIT (Northern Alberta Institute of Technology). I was one of the first graduates from the program, coming away with diploma in Emergency management, and certificates in public EM and industrial EM. I also received my designation as an Associate Business Continuity Professional.

Soon after, I soon was promoted to a safety role where I was instrumental in introducing emergency management concepts, exercises and programs to one of the sites. After many years of promoting emergency management within the company, credibility for career advancement was found through my role of Director of Governance and Conference Director with IAEM Canada, as well as my achievement of the Canadian Registered Safety Professional Designation (CRSP). The company recognized these

elements as advantageous and created the first emergency management role as a separate entity from safety. This role is one of the very few in mining that encompasses strictly emergency management.

IAEM (HM): What are your current responsibilities in the Mining Industry as the Crisis and Emergency Management Coordinator?

PG: I am the Crisis and Emergency Management Coordinator in one of the largest mining companies in the world and oversee emergency management and crisis management for all of the Sudbury Operations. This role, being new in the mining sector, puts me at the helm of creating an entire and robust EM program for the operations and sets a foundation for other mining companies to follow suit.

As well as full program development, I also train and oversee eight (8) crisis management teams, and structure the emergency management integration of the very specialized response teams including Mine Rescue, Hazmat, Surface Response Teams and First Aid Security into the elements of EM pillars.

The intricacies of the varied hazards and risks presented to the adjacent communities from the mining companies are vast. I work with the city in creating whole community prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery in the event of an upset.

I also respond with either the site crisis team, or the overseeing crisis team in an emergency situation.

IAEM (HM): What emergency activation (disaster) do you remember most from your career and why?

PG: Working in the private sector has a somewhat different focus. I would have to say that the Black Out of 2003 was the one I remember most. There were over 500 workers underground with no method of egress to surface across the Sudbury basin throughout the different mining companies. Intense strategies were performed to provide worker safety. Cell phones and leaky feeders and radio communications were down (due to site distances). I was in charge of the response operations for our company and small windows of hydro was strategically provided from the grid to hoist the workers in a timed tactical sequence. It was nothing that the mining sector had previously experienced and many lessons were learned. I believe that it was the turning point where I began my crusade of emergency management in the mining sector.

IAEM (HM): Why do you enjoy working in this industry?

PG: Emergency management is not something that people think about on a day to day bases, or even understand beyond the response phase. When things go wrong, people need someone to look to. They need the assurance that when things are no longer “black and white”, that their families, communities and businesses can thrive through the turmoil. I like being the person who will “what if” everything to death and see the applicable strategies in that grey area to bring it back to black and white. We must be able to prevent, mitigate, prepare, respond and recover from those things that are not readily in the forefront to ensure resiliency of all sectors and all persons. The satisfaction of knowing you helped a community or even one person cannot be matched.

IAEM (HM): Tell us how and why you became the President of IAEM Canada?

PG: I have been a member of IAEM Canada for over 10 years. In 2017 I was appointed by, the now Past President, Greg Solecki as the Director of Governance for IAEM Canada, as well as the Conference Director for the inaugural IAEM Canada Conference in 2018 and then once again in 2019. The roles took on new meaning for me of what an Emergency Manager can do to advance the profession. IAEM became a passion and I dove in head first, grasping the momentum that IAEM Canada Board of Directors was

taking on in all of the facets of the profession across our nation. Over the two years it became evident that the mining sector wasn't the only area where Emergency Managers weren't recognized. Even with the progression of the profession globally after 9-11, much work still needs to be done to fully bring emergency management to the forefront. The need to have a continuous cycle of improvement must be recognized and Emergency Managers are the ones that can do that. Emergency Managers are unique. Not only are they well-educated and versed in continual advancing concepts, but they are leaders in the worst case scenarios when others no longer can lead. I feel compelled to have the profession recognized as an essential entity in every sector across the nation and even globally.

I became President of IAEM Canada to give Emergency Managers across our nation a voice. A voice of solidarity and credibility, through certification as a CEM and AEM. A voice that fosters continuous improvement and professional development. We are the "what if" solvers and the "what if's" are becoming reality faster than anyone can keep up. If Emergency Managers work together we can stay a step ahead. IAEM Canada is the conduit to make that happen. Emergency Management is changing rapidly and is needed more now than ever. IAEM and IAEM Canada is delving into initiatives to strengthen the field globally and nationally. The time to progress the profession in both diversity and uniformity is now!

IAEM (HM): What does it take to be President?

PG: That is a good question Holly.

The President of IAEM Canada first and foremost must have a passion for the vocation as a whole. Your priority is the needs of your members and the advancement of their profession and professional development. An association is a connection and cooperative link that has common interests and/or goals. As leader of IAEM Canada one must embrace the needs and goals of the members and strategic methods to accomplish those goals by leading the IAEM Canada Board and serving on the IAEM-Global Board.

The President of IAEM Canada must embrace all sectors, all aspects and all types of emergency management vocations and focuses. The responsibility of President goes beyond the day to day. It is a 24-7 obligation to ensure that the members are receiving the best representation in all facets nationally and internationally and that we are moving forward with initiatives for the progression of emergency management and emergency managers.

IAEM (HM): Can you tell us about IAEM Canada? What IAEM is, what's the purpose, and how it benefits the industry, Canada, and communities within Canada?

PG: IAEM Canada is a non-profit organization that encompasses members from every Province and Territory in Canada. IAEM Canada is a council of IAEM which has over 6000 members internationally. Our council committees are comprised of representatives of emergency managers from public, private and government entities across the country. The IAEM-Canada Region became the first region outside the United States in 2003 under the previous IAEM structure. The IAEM-Canada Region became the IAEM-Canada Council (one of seven Councils worldwide) in 2007, when the current organizational structure went into effect. As IAEM-Canada President, I serve as the representative of the Canada Council on the IAEM-Global Board.

IAEM Canada's Mission is to advance the profession by promoting the principles of emergency management; to serve its members by providing information, networking and professional development opportunities; and to advance the emergency management profession.

IAEM Canada is the conduit through which emergency management is represented on a national and

international level in legislative and collaborative initiatives that benefit emergency management to promote the necessity of Emergency Management throughout all sectors for community preparedness and risk reduction, while supporting professional development for all Emergency Management practitioners

IAEM (HM): How many volunteers are there within IAEM and what do they do?

PG: The IAEM Canada Council Leadership consists of;

- Executive positions (President, VP, Past President, Secretary and Treasurer),
- Appointed Directors (Membership Committee, Governance Committee, Partnership Engagement Committee, Marketing and Communications Committee, and Professional Development Committee),
- A diversity of IAEM members volunteer to sit on each committee to accomplish the goals of the IAEM Canada Strategic Plan,

The Board also consists of,

- IAEM Canada Representative to IAEM Certification Commission,
- IAEM Canada Representative to IAEM Scholarship Commission, and
- The Presidential representatives of our four Regions, Alberta, Atlantic, Prairie and Ontario.

IAEM (HM): How can people in (or out) of the industry become a volunteer with IAEM?

PG: Any member in good standing can join a committee by contacting President Paula Gibson at canadapresident@iaem.com or by contacting the Region Presidents.

IAEM (HM): What is your greatest accomplishment?

PG: I would have to say that it is becoming President of IAEM Canada. I always looked up to the Board of IAEM Canada as the international represented of the vocation that I loved so dearly. To be President is by far my greatest accomplishment. I am both humbled and excited to have such a rewarding opportunity to help others achieve their goals in the profession.

IAEM (HM): What are some pieces of advice that you would offer young professionals entering the world of Emergency Management?

PG: I would say that this is one of the most mentally taxing, but the most rewarding professions they could have chosen. The key to success is within your network of emergency management professionals. There is strength in numbers, be it academically driven or experience focused. By joining IAEM you will reap the rewards of those strengths. EM is a relatively small community. You can learn so much through the networking process. We are all here to help one another. Another avenue that should be taken is that of credibility. It speaks volumes. Certifying as a CEM or AEM is one of the most advantageous things you can do to enhance your career.

IAEM (HM): What do you know now that you wish you knew when you were starting in the Emergency Management field.

PG: I wish I would have known the strength behind being a member of IAEM.

I can honestly say that my involvement IAEM Canada was one of the major factors in the advancement of my career.

IAEM (HM): From your experience, and as President of IAEM Canada, you must know a variety of people working in the various emergency management industry sectors. Can you provide some insight into how the emergency management changes and remains consistent between industries (Private, Public, Government, Non-Profit, Health, Technological, Environmental, etc.)?

PG: The role of an Emergency Manager is changing rapidly among all sectors. Climate change resulting in wildfires, floods, drought, tornadoes, severe winter storms, continue to impact communities. Mass casualty incidents and soft target events are on the rise. All of these scenarios and more, impact all sectors and I think that this change is being recognized in the EM profession. I see more collaboration in prevention and preparedness between sectors and more collaboration among emergency managers and other entities be it governmental, private sector or NGO's.

IAEM (HM): In your own words can you identify and describe what you believe to be the most important thing that needs to change in the field of Emergency Management to improve industry?

PG: This can be answered in one word... recognition.

The recognition of the emergency management profession and what an emergency manager can bring to the table is so vitally important.

With the ever increasing occurrences of impactful disasters across Canada, there has never been a more significant time to promote the expertise and need for Emergency Managers.

The days of "dusting off" a manual and working independently to overcome impacts is long gone. As emergency managers we must work together to embrace all facets, all sectors and all aspects of risk reduction and preparedness to ensure the resiliency of Canadians.

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank Paula for her time and efforts in the interview process, being part of the IAEM Features, for her contributions to the Emergency Management field, and her leadership of IAEM in Canada.

If you have any comments or would like to recommend someone as an Emergency Management/ Business Continuity Feature, please contact IAEMCdnComms@gmail.com.