Hazard Risk Analysis
Conflictual Social Action

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This section introduces conflictual social action, which refers to situations where community conflict escalates either internally or with external groups.

Definition

Conflictual social action is a gathering of a group of like-minded people at a designated location and at a specified time to make demands, show strong disapproval or disagreement, or perform an indicated action such as a sit-in, flash mob, protest, or blockade; these actions may or may not be reinforced with non-violent action or civil disobedience.

Conflictual Social Action may be expressed in the following ways:

- **Blockade:** "to stop people or supplies from entering or leaving (a port, community, or country) especially during a war." Blockades may happen on highways, roads, and rail networks.
- **Civil Disobedience**: "the conscious, individual or collective violation of a law, regulation, or edict. The order violated is usually deemed to be immoral or unjust by those undertaking the action. Civil disobedience also includes disobeying neutral orders, which serve as symbols of more general opposition."
- **Conflict:** "…a confrontation between one or more parties aspiring towards incompatible or competitive means or ends." Conflicts may create immediate actions or behaviours within a community, or conflicts may build over time.
- **Flashmob** *(Round Dance):* "…a group of people summoned (as by e-mail or text message) to a designated location at a specified time to perform an indicated action before dispersing."
- **Non-violent action**: a technique of conflict engagement that attempts to achieve political or social objectives without using physical or violent acts. Non-violent action may take the forms of protests and persuasion (with officials), non-cooperation, and interventions.
- **Protest**: an organized event at which people gather together to show strong disapproval about a something.
- **Sit-in**: "…a strike or protest in which people sit or stay in a place and refuse to leave until they are given what they demand."

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Discussion

There are many reasons for why conflictual social action might occur within communities, including pending resource development issues, poor relationships with federal or provincial/territorial governments, or conflicts that emerge with adjacent communities. When conflictual social action occurs, there is often a process of escalation that could jeopardize peaceful relationships within and between communities, and/or result in property damage or violence. It is important that community-wide issues are mediated and resolved to help prevent any violent escalation of conflictual social action.

It Happened Here…

On September 15, 2020, a peaceful protest by commercial fishermen turned confrontational Tuesday morning when they arrived at a wharf in Weymouth, N.S., used by First Nations fishermen. There was yelling and cursing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous fishermen, but there were no injuries. The commercial fishermen are protesting what they claim is an illegal lobster fishery in St. Marys Bay in southwestern Nova Scotia. They say a communal First Nations lobster fishery — where the sale of the catch is prohibited — is being used as a cloak for a large-scale commercial fishery, whereas, the Mi'kmaq reject that claim, arguing their right to fish for a moderate livelihood was affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1999. Earlier, hundreds of commercial fishermen briefly blocked access to a wharf in Saulnierville, N.S., used by First Nations fishermen to harvest lobster.

On October 17, 2013, armed RCMP units in New Brunswick clashed with members of the Elsipogtog First Nation (Mi'kmaq) at an anti-fracking protest. The Elsipogtog community was protesting the development of a potential shale gas site in the province, and felt they were not adequately consulted about the project, which would affect their traditional territories. The Elsipogtog community was also unhappy with the lack of progress on their land claims settlements in the region. The RCMP used pepper spray and sock rounds in their attempts to control the crowd, and were accused of intimidating the protestors. The events of October 17 greatly damaged the relationship between the RCMP and the Elsipogtog First Nation, which had been developing a relationship of trust over the past 15 years.

The Idle No More movement was started in Saskatchewan in December 2012 as a reaction against Bill C-45, and the grass-roots movement has gained support across Canada and the world in their opposition to resource development on traditional Indigenous territory (such as pipelines, fracking, mining, etc.). The movement has typically staged protests, sit-ins, Round Dances, and non-violent actions to vocalize their discontent. Since it began, the Idle No More movement has organized hundreds of protests across Canada, and is heavily engaged with its supporters over social media.

Hazard Rating	High Risk ☐	Low Risk ☐	Need More Info ☐	Not Applicable ☐

Yes	No	Need More Info	Not Applicable	FACTORS
☐	☐	☐	☐	Instances of conflictual social action may be more likely to occur in a community where there is limited or no open participation in decision-making processes. Does your community have limited or no active participation in decision-making from a variety of community members?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Conflictual social actions and volatile situations can be de-escalated with the help of a team or person that has been appropriately trained in conflict resolution. Have your community leaders, including police, Band Council, and elders, neglected to appoint a person or team to manage conflict resolution?
☐	☐	☐	☐	The frequency and severity of conflictual social action can be reduced if law enforcement personnel participate in training on effective peace-keeping and crowd management techniques. Do law enforcement personnel, such as community police or volunteer firefighters, need additional regular training on peace-keeping and crowd management techniques?
☐	☐	☐	☐	If conflictual social action has previously occurred in a community the factors that triggered those events may still exist, putting the community at risk for a future conflictual social action. Has your community experienced conflictual social action in the past?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Conflictual social action can occur when there is potential or ongoing resource development that will affect the community's livelihood and traditional territories. Does your community have any prospective or current resource development that will negatively affect community livelihood activities and/or traditional territories?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Conflictual social action may occur because of ongoing legal processes that will affect the whole community, such as land claims agreements and treaty changes. Is your community currently engaged in a major legal process that will affect the whole community, or unequally benefit certain community members?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Conflictual social action can occur during or after large gatherings such as protests, rallies, etc. Does your community host large gatherings?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Controversial elections or voting processes, such as community-wide voting on band council or land management regimes, can trigger conflictual social action. Does your community have a history of controversial elections or voting processes?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Conflictual social action may occur if a community does not have a good relationship with the Federal, Territorial, or Provincial government. Has your community had major conflicts with the Federal, Territorial, or Provincial government?
☐	☐	☐	☐	Conflictual social action may occur if a community does not have a good relationship with adjacent or nearby non-Indigenous communities. Has your community had major conflicts with non-Indigenous communities?
☐	☐	☐	☐	If your community is polarized or strongly divided about a certain issue (such as resource development, land claims issues, housing projects, etc.), there may be a greater likelihood for conflictual social action to occur. Does your community have a history of being strongly divided over resource management or community services?

References

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