

A DAY IN THE LIFE...

AES Regional Director



AES Ontario Region director Phil Aber arrives in his mid-town Toronto office looking fit and energetic after his brisk regular walk from his home to the subway on his way to work. This being a "typical" day, there are several meetings scheduled. The first is with a Union representative who is here to see him about a harassment case.

Afterwards Mr. Aber tries to explain "In my job I frequently get involved with inter-personal matters. Dealing with people is the major part of most managers' responsibilities. In my 30-year-career with the weather organization I've tended to divide my time among operations, staff work at the National level and line management, all of which require dealing with people." He adds that this mix is definitely an advantage in his position as regional director since he has had some personal experience in all the areas in which regional staff operate.

Mr. Aber's office is comfortable, fairly large and well curtained off from the busy traffic outside. For decoration there is a batique depicting an anemometer, a turn-of-the-century barograph, a large photograph of some London taxis and a smaller picture of himself shaking hands with the prime minister. For the interview Mr. Aber abandons his not-too-formidable desk and sits at a round table.

He starts by outlining his four main job responsibilities: advising senior management on policy, providing organizational leadership, allocating and monitoring expenditures and participating in projects outside the region. But soon he is interrupted by his secretary who reminds him that he has another meeting.

It's an ad hoc chiefs-of-division meeting, made up of four of the seven people who report to him directly. They position themselves around the table and discuss a whole gamut of items ranging from evaluating the various uses of telephones in providing public weather information to deciding

how to fill senior positions while the incumbents are away. An important item on the agenda concerns a regional employee who has had some problems. A number of solutions are pondered and agreement is finally reached on one that considers both the needs of the employee and organizational priorities. A note is read from the Treasury Board stating that all executive personnel should henceforth be bilingual at the C level and Mr. Aber is able to announce with partial satisfaction that he has just passed his B Level French.

After the meeting, the secretary comes back and tells him that his airline tickets to Ottawa are ready for the next day when he is due to make a quick trip to the National Capital to participate in a meeting on the new Treasury Board program involving Increased Ministerial Authority and Accountability (IMAA). He must also make a side trip to nearby Smith Falls in response to a Departmental request for assistance.

Besides frequent trips to Downsview Headquarters, about 15 kilometres away and to the Ontario Weather Centre and Toronto Weather Office at Pearson International Airport, Mr. Aber engages in a fair amount of other travel. For example he considers it a high priority to visit all 19 weather offices under AES jurisdiction in the region at regular intervals and discuss problems personally with the staff. "I try to get to as many W04's and WSO's as possible. These visits tie in with my belief of maintaining the accessibility of the director and seeking staff's ideas and reactions".

There is about an hour's gap between the second and third meeting and Phil Aber fills in the time busily going through his in-basket. There is one complaint from a ship's captain on the Great Lakes that the marine forecasts tend to be "too pessimistic", and in contrast a letter from the director of Computing and Telecommunications Services Branch praising the staff of Sudbury

Weather Office for their assistance during the installation of the METSIS station there.

The third meeting is on finances. An efficient-looking finance officer comes in and the two of them pour over balance sheets closely scrutinizing the year to date's expenditures and the projected expenditures to the end of the year.

During his fast-paced day Mr. Aber comes across as a man of action. With this in mind, I asked him, "What were you doing during the tornado?" Of course I was referring to the major Barrie, Ont. tornado of May 1985, not to the even more disastrous Edmonton tornado of July 1987.

"I stood back and watched the operational teams implement their preplanned responsibilities. They were completely in control. My direct involvement took place much earlier by ensuring procedures and expertise were available." Mr. Aber sounded every bit the calm, competent administrator.

"Our after-the-event evaluations and reports proved invaluable in getting information across to the media on faster, more efficient ways of disseminating weather warnings and to educators in making the public more aware of the real dangers of tornadoes. The Alberta management team certainly benefitted from our experiences and were thus able to handle their situation more efficiently."

Event-filled as it was, this day in the life of Phil Aber didn't cover all aspects of the regional director's job. He tried to bridge the gaps while sitting at his desk eating a quick sandwich lunch.

"I am chief spokesman for the Region on all policy matters", he continued, "and deal personally with enquiries from the media that involve policy issues. In my figurehead role, I play an active part in such public events as the launching of new weather buoys on the Great Lakes or the expansion of Weatheradio services throughout the province. If the Minister or his representative is able to come, I act as coordinator and aide. I participate fully in public consultation meetings, I occasionally give speeches and of course I am regularly in touch with the directors of the five other AES regions."

His last meeting of the day is with Walter Lawrynuik, chief of Forecast Operations for Ontario Region. Walter has been assigned the responsibility of drawing up the Ontario Region portion of the AES Strategic Plan. He outlines the approach he is taking and explains that he is proposing Toronto as the location of the first test-bed Weather Service Office in Ontario Region. The meeting then focuses on the implications of combining the current W04 and regional Weather centres responsibilities there.

Mr. Aber who regards being advised by experts as a key part of his job, acknowledges the work on the Strategic Plan that Walter is doing and a date is set for the next meeting.

He makes it clear that all regions have their peculiarities and therefore Ontario is not a region like the others. "For one thing," he says, "we are practically collocated with AES national headquarters in Downsview. This has some definite

cont'd. on page 9

A Day in the Life *cont'd.*

pluses. For example Ontario Region can take advantage of the Doppler Radar facility at King City, the only one of its kind in Canada. We can also pool resources with headquarters, from stores to personnel". The disadvantage of being so close to headquarters mainly had to do with overlapping responsibilities in dealing with the Province and occasional over-involvement in headquarters' projects.

If Ontario region differs in some respects from other regions, it also has much in common with them. It covers a vast area from the Manitoba border to the St. Lawrence river. More than 200 AES personnel are employed in it. There are five radar stations, two upper air stations and half a dozen contract stations run by the region.

It is obvious that Mr. Aber gets a lot of satisfaction managing a region as varied and complex as Ontario. "The sheer size of the region, the concentration of population, industry and the national media give us many tasks to perform. In addition, we deal with many types of weather, climate and environmental services. The large population of around 9 1/2 million also means that we respond to a significant share of AES's 25 million annual enquiries."

Managing this type of operation and holding these kinds of responsibilities almost seem to rule out a typical day, but Phil Aber assured me that the day I was privileged to sit in on was as close to average as you're likely to get.

Mr. Aber was interviewed by Zephyr editor Gordon Black.