

March 18, 2008

Ms. Kelly Stone, Publisher  
Drayton Valley Western Review  
4905 - 52 Avenue  
Box 6960  
Drayton Valley, AB  
T7A 1S3

**Re: Western Review Readers Deserve Factual Information about Sour Gas Development and Public Safety**

Dear Ms. Stone:

The March 4, 2008 edition of the Western Review included an article by reporter Lori Clark entitled “*Sour Gas Activists Visit*” that contained a number of falsehoods regarding the actions of the Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB).

The ERCB is Alberta’s energy regulator. Our role is to ensure that energy development in Alberta is done fairly, responsibly, and in the public interest. In short, we are the referee in Alberta’s oilpatch.

Because of our role, everyday we deal with conflicts between energy companies and landowners, concerns about sour gas development, and questions about coalbed methane development.

We welcome public scrutiny. Healthy skepticism is a virtue. It keeps people, businesses and governments on their toes. The ERCB is no exception; we need to be able to stand up to public scrutiny, Albertans expect no less.

That is why it is so important that Western Review readers get the facts on statements made in the March 4 Western Review article.

First of all, the Western Review never contacted the ERCB to discuss the claims made in the article; this led to a number of significant inaccuracies in the story.

In the article, author Andrew Nikiforuk is quoted as stating “...80 per cent of the gas wells in Alberta leak”.

False. Less than one per cent of Alberta’s wells have experienced gas migration.

Mr. Nikiforuk is then quoted as saying, “The EUB used to monitor gas migration. They no longer do.”

False. The ERCB monitors and tracks gas migration from wells. The ERCB also requires companies to mitigate gas migration in the rare instances when it does occur.

The article then says, “Nikiforuk also states that ground water in Alberta is very poor. We now have people in central Alberta who can light their water on fire...Nikiforuk explains the ability to ignite the water is the result of high methane levels not to mention the other chemicals present.”

Had the Western Review contacted the ERCB, we would have directed your readers to a study from the Alberta Research Council, released on January 17, 2008, which assessed four water well quality concerns from private landowners and found no link between coalbed methane development and water well quality. Instead, it found that the quality issues were predominantly due to naturally occurring methane, plus poor well construction and maintenance.

The article then quotes Nikiforuk as saying the ERCB “...has just two air monitors for the entire province.”

False. The ERCB has 88 portable gas monitors that can track levels of hydrogen sulphide. The ERCB also operates two air monitoring trucks (each outfitted with state of the art equipment) which can be mobilized to anywhere in the province in the event of an incident.

Further in the story, an official from the Pembina Agricultural Protection Association discusses an odour complaint in Drayton Valley in 2007 and is quoted as stating, “The EUB was not frank or honest in their assessment of the January gas release.”

False. The Board responded immediately, we brought in additional staff and air monitoring to the area, we conducted an exhaustive three day ground and aerial search, we conducted a comprehensive records search and audit to determine if any discrepancies in gas reporting volumes existed, and we provided regular updates to media and concerned citizens. In May 2007, the Board issued a public investigation report that could not pinpoint the source of the odour.

The ERCB takes all incidents related to any level of sour gas and energy development very seriously and has intensified monitoring and inspections in the Drayton Valley areas as a result of this incident.

Western Review readers also need to know that the public was not at risk during this incident, as the highest level of sour gas recorded was 0.17 parts per million. Alberta Workplace Health and Safety indicates that the occupational exposure limit allows up to 10 parts per million for eight hours without breathing apparatus. Sour gas can also be found in sulphur hot springs (Banff Hot Springs averages 2 parts per million), sewage, swamps, manure piles, and landfills. If the Western Review had contacted the ERCB for comment, we would have been pleased to share that information.

The article then discusses a March 2006 sour gas release near Big Valley, Alberta. The story indicates that a landowner was, “...exposed by the same company’s sour gas when she was riding on her property. The EUB didn’t acknowledge that incident.”

False. The Board received the complaint on March 27, 2006. After an investigation, our staff determined the cause of the leak and issued high risk enforcement action against the company.

Ensuring that oil and gas development occurs safely in Alberta is the ERCB's number one priority. We also believe that Albertans, and Western Review readers, deserve accurate and balanced information regarding energy regulation in our province.

Yours truly,

*- original signed -*

Tom Neufeld  
ERCB Communications Manager

C.C. Patricia Johnston, General Counsel, Energy Resources Conservation Board  
Dennis Merrell, Executive Director, Alberta Weekly Newspaper Association  
Graham Long, Drayton Valley Western Review Editor