

## What Is the Energy Resources Conservation Board?

### ERCB Mission

The Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) is an independent, quasi-judicial agency of the Government of Alberta. Its mission is to ensure that the discovery, development, and delivery of Alberta's energy resources take place in a manner that is fair, responsible, and in the public interest.

### When did the ERCB begin?

Alberta's first energy regulatory body was created in 1938. A succession of agencies led to the new ERCB being established on January 1, 2008, as a result of the realignment of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (EUB) into the ERCB and the Alberta Utilities Commission. The ERCB also includes the Alberta Geological Survey.

### What does the ERCB do?

The ERCB regulates the safe, responsible, and efficient development of oil, natural gas, oil sands, and coal, and as well as the pipelines to move the resources to market.

Regulation is done through two core functions: adjudication and regulation, and information and knowledge. ERCB approval must be given at almost every step of an energy project's life.

### What is the authority of the ERCB?

To maintain its autonomous structure, the ERCB answers directly to the Executive Council (Cabinet) of Alberta through the Minister of Energy, but it makes its formal decisions independently in accordance with the six statutes it administers.

### Why is energy regulation needed?

Alberta is unique in that the Crown owns about 80 per cent of the province's mineral rights for resources such as oil, natural gas, coal, and oil sands. In other words, most resources are owned by the people of Alberta through their government. Although private companies may develop these resources, the ERCB is authorized by the government to protect the public interest as it relates to the discovery, development, and delivery of these resources.

In this way, the ERCB ensures that energy development occurs in an orderly way that benefits Albertans. Regulation is needed so that nonrenewable resources are produced in a responsible, efficient, and economically profitable manner, without waste. At the same time, the ERCB also ensures that development meets accepted standards so that potential negative effects on the environment, social values, and public safety are kept to a minimum.

The ERCB also ensures that everyone affected by development has a fair chance to be heard. When conflicts of interest regarding development remain unresolved among industry players or between companies and landowners, the

ERCB's task is to settle the issues in a balanced and fair manner. This may occur through Appropriate Dispute Resolution or the ERCB Hearing Process.

Finally, the ERCB plays an important role in collecting and distributing energy information.

### How is the ERCB organized?

The ERCB is led by a Board that consists of up to nine people: a Chairman and Board Members. Supporting the Chairman and Board Members are the Executive Committee and some 900 staff who work in eight main branches:

#### *Applications*

This branch, made up of three groups, provides a streamlined approach to processing some 40 000 energy development applications each year. The Facilities Group handles project reviews, audits, and approvals related to new or modified oil and gas facilities, such as wells, pipelines, batteries, and gas plants. The Resource Group deals with applications and issues related to development and conservation projects for oil, gas, and coal. The Business Operations and Development Group manages the coordination of administrative support, approvals development, planning, objections, and hearings.

#### *Field Surveillance and Operations*

This branch provides technical and operational expertise in the development, application, and enforcement of regulatory requirements for conventional and nonconventional resources. The branch ensures that oil and gas operations are conducted in a safe and responsible manner through incident response, resource conservation, protection of the environment, and industry liability management. Operating from Field Centres across Alberta, field staff inspect construction, operation, and abandonment operations at oil, gas, and oil sands facilities and respond to emergencies and public concerns on a 24-hour basis. See *EnerFAQs No. 3: Inspections and Enforcement of Energy Developments in Alberta*.

#### *Corporate Services*

This branch incorporates several groups. Human Resources provides services and programs to ensure that a competent and committed workforce is in place to achieve ERCB goals and objectives. The Communications Group develops strategic communication and consultation strategies and delivers related media, Web site, and document services to keep staff and stakeholders informed about ERCB activities. Administrative Services provides building, library, and printing services.

#### *Finance*

This branch provides revenue and expenditure management and administration of the industry funding levy. In addition, staff coordinate the preparation of the ERCB's three-year business plan and performance reporting.

### *Information and Systems Services*

This branch is responsible for ERCB information systems, support, and technological infrastructure, with a focus on new ways to deliver electronic commerce. Another core area is the collection and dissemination of energy resource information, including oil and gas production. This information is also used to determine provincial royalties, well records, regulatory publications, maps, and various energy databases.

### *Law*

This branch provides a wide range of legal advice and services to the organization, with a focus on procedural fairness and objectivity. Its responsibilities include application and regulatory policy, hearings, proceedings, related internal and external consultations, and the formulation of energy regulations and legislation. The branch administers intervener funding and leads a key advisory committee that advises the Board on decisions and policy matters.

### *Geology, Environmental Science, and Economics*

This branch maintains an integrated and current inventory of Alberta's subsurface energy, mineral, and other resources in a geological framework. It provides knowledge, advice, and forecasts about the states of earth-energy resource development in the context of Alberta's environment, economy, and society. The branch also develops and supports regulatory processes and best practices to conserve earth-energy resources, maintains environmental quality, assures public safety, and guides informed risk taking in regulatory and policy decisions.

### *Oil Sands and Coal*

The Oil Sands and Coal Branch has overall responsibility for how the ERCB regulates oil sands activities in Alberta. The branch comprises the Mineable Oil Sands and Coal Group, which looks after oil sands developments that use mining recovery technology as well as bitumen upgrading, and the In Situ Oil Sands Group, which focuses on developments using recovery technology involving subsurface or in situ recovery methods. Collaborating with other ERCB branches, this branch takes the lead on processing applications, conducting surveillance and enforcement of approved projects, and carrying out geological assessments as they apply to the oil sands.

## Who pays for the ERCB?

The majority of the ERCB annual budget is funded through an administrative levy applied to each producing gas or oil well in the province. The remainder is financed about evenly by the provincial government and revenues from application and licensing fees and information sales.

## What is an energy application?

An application is a request by a company for ERCB approval—in the form of a licence, order, permit, or approval—for an energy project. Most energy-related projects require ERCB approval. Each year tens of thousands of applications are reviewed and approved by the ERCB.

The ERCB also plays a vital environmental protection role by reviewing

flaring permits, oilfield waste disposal facilities, drilling waste practices, and emergency response plans.

### How are applications for energy projects handled?

ERCB approval for a facility or project is considered to be routine if an application is complete, there are no landowner objections, and the company applying has met all technical, safety, public consultation, and environmental requirements. The turnaround time for a complete and well-prepared routine application can be as short as a few days.

Some projects require input from other government departments. The ERCB passes such applications to Alberta Environment, which handles distribution to other departments. This “one-window” approach means that applicants do not have to go to each government department for individual review and approval. The general rule is that each government department checks that a specific proposal meets its own regulations and standards and then forwards any deficiencies or concerns to the ERCB via Alberta Environment.

Nonroutine applications take more time—weeks, or even months—to process if there are landowner objections, community and environmental concerns, or objections from competing companies. Objections to applications may also be resolved through facilitation, mediation, or negotiated settlements approved by the Board. However, any unresolved matter or objection related to an application may proceed to an ERCB hearing.

### What is an ERCB hearing?

An ERCB hearing is a formal process that provides an opportunity for different points of view about an energy project to be aired in a fair and orderly forum. A hearing allows for an open, public testing of technical, environmental, social, and economic evidence from those involved. The process ensures that all relevant arguments for and against the energy facility project are heard. See [EnerFAQs No. 2: Having Your Say at an ERCB Hearing](#).

### If the ERCB approves a project, who makes sure the company keeps its promise?

The responsibility for conducting safe, efficient operations rests with each operator. It is in the best interest of the company and the industry to do so. However, the ERCB carries out investigations and inspections to ensure that this is done.

The ERCB maintains staff in Field Centres that conduct thousands of inspections of wells, facilities, and pipelines throughout the province each year. Inspections of coal mines and oil sands facilities are handled by a smaller group of technical staff based primarily in Calgary and Fort McMurray. For more information, see [EnerFAQs No. 3: Inspections and Enforcement of Energy Developments in Alberta](#).

### What happens if a facility fails an inspection?

If a facility fails an inspection, the operator is told to correct the problem within a given period of time. If the situation is dangerous or the operator is unable or unwilling to make the necessary corrections, the facility may be ordered shut down.

## Additional Information

For additional information on the ERCB or its processes or if you have general questions about oil and gas in the province of Alberta, contact the ERCB's Customer Contact Centre: Monday to Friday (8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.) at 1-855-297-8311 (toll free) or 403-297-8311.

This EnerFAQs is one in a series.

- [No. 1: What Is the Energy Resources Conservation Board?](#)
- [No. 2: Having Your Say at an ERCB Hearing](#)
- [No. 3: Inspections and Enforcement of Energy Developments in Alberta](#)
- [No. 4: All About Critical Sour Wells](#)
- [No. 5: Explaining ERCB Setbacks](#)
- [No. 6: Flaring and Incineration](#)
- [No. 7: Proposed Oil and Gas Development: A Landowner's Guide](#)
- [No. 8: Coalbed Methane](#)
- [No. 9: The ERCB and You: Agreements, Commitments, and Conditions](#)
- [No. 10: Public Health and Safety: Roles and Responsibilities of Agencies That Regulate Upstream Oil and Gas](#)
- [No. 11: All About Appropriate Dispute Resolution \(ADR\)](#)
- [No. 12: Oil Sands](#)
- [No. 13: Emergency Response Preparedness in the Energy Industry](#)
- [No. 14: Horizontal Multistage Hydraulic Fracturing](#)
- [No. 15: Objecting to an Energy Resource Project](#)

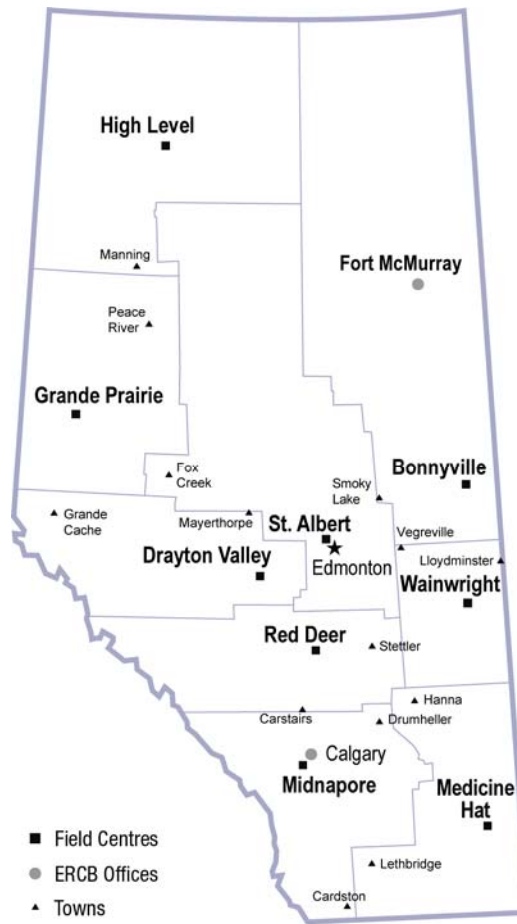
Every year the ERCB collects, compiles, and publishes a large amount of technical data and information about Alberta's energy development and resources for use by both industry and the general public. This includes raw data, statistics, information on regulations, policies, and decisions, and hearing materials.

Publications may either be viewed at the ERCB library or obtained from Information Services. Both are housed on the main floor of the ERCB head office in Calgary. Publications may also be downloaded free of charge from the ERCB Web site [www.ercb.ca](http://www.ercb.ca).

To obtain a print or CD copy of a specific publication, contact ERCB Information Services by phone (403-297-8190), fax (403-297-7040), or e-mail [Infoservices@ercb.ca](mailto:Infoservices@ercb.ca).

## ERCB Offices

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<b>Fort McMurray Regional Office</b>	780-743-7214
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Fort McMurray, Alberta T9H 2K4	
<b>Edmonton (Alberta Geological Survey)</b>	780-422-1927



Field Centres

Bonnyville	780-826-5352
Drayton Valley	780-542-5182
Grande Prairie	780-538-5138
High Level	780-926-5399
Medicine Hat	403-527-3385
Midnapore	403-297-8303
Red Deer	403-340-5454
St. Albert	780-460-3800
Wainwright	780-842-7570