

Inspections and Enforcement of Energy Developments in Alberta

This EnerFAQs focuses on the role of the Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) in inspections of energy developments. Key factors in the safe and efficient development of Alberta's energy resources are the rules and standards by which energy facilities must operate and the enforcement and inspections to ensure that these rules and standards are met.

Who inspects energy facilities?

The ERCB has the responsibility for inspecting energy facilities and enforcing the standards, specifications, and conditions set out in licences and approvals. Various government departments also have legislated mandates to inspect energy facilities.

For example, **Alberta Environment** enforces clean air and clean water regulations, and **Alberta Sustainable Resource Development** safeguards fish, wildlife, forests, and public lands.

Why does the ERCB do inspections?

The goal of ERCB is to ensure compliance with regulations through inspections, surveillance activities, early intervention, and education. All of these activities are conducted through our Compliance Assurance program on behalf of Albertans, our stakeholders. By completing inspections, the ERCB ensures that resource activity within the province is conducted in a manner that protects public safety, minimizes environmental impact, preserves equity, and ensures effective conservation of resources.

To find out more information about Compliance Assurance, visit the ERCB Web site at www.ercb.ca.

What does the ERCB inspect?

ERCB staff carry out inspections on Alberta's oil, natural gas, oil sands, coal, and pipeline facilities. Routine inspections include

- scheduled inspections based on **OSI**: operator history, site sensitivity, and inherent risk of the facility or operation;
- nonscheduled inspections based on reports or complaints from the public;
- inspections of natural gas processing plants, particularly sour gas plants;
- environmental inspections to ensure that procedures and equipment are in use to minimize environmental impacts;
- inspection of coal mines and oil sands mines to ensure that the facility is safe, follows environmental guidelines, and has efficient resource production and conservation;
- spot checks during the construction and testing of pipelines;
- periodic inspections of operating pipelines; and

- inspections of oil and natural gas batteries (the equipment for collecting, separating, and measuring oil and gas).

How many ERCB inspectors are there?

There are over 80 inspectors located in the ERCB Field Centres throughout Alberta. A list of the ERCB Field Centres and their telephone numbers is on the last page.

What authority do ERCB inspectors have?

ERCB inspectors are backed by law through the powers granted by the statutes under which the ERCB operates. They have the authority to shut in a well or shut down a facility if they deem it necessary.

How often do ERCB inspectors check energy facilities?

Inspections are made at selected stages of energy development, depending on the type of facility and its previous inspection history.

How is a well or facility chosen for an inspection?

ERCB field inspections are prioritized based on the weighting of three key criteria. These criteria are described above as **OSI**: operator history, site sensitivity, and inherent risk of the facility or operation.

- A review of an operator's compliance history allows ERCB inspectors to focus on operators with an unacceptable level of unsatisfactory inspections. The ERCB considers any company with three or more major unsatisfactory inspections provincially to have a poor inspection record.
- Sensitivity of the area where the operation is taking place is also reviewed and includes items such as proximity to the public or bodies of water and areas where there has previously been significant public concern regarding oil and gas operations.
- The risk of a facility or operation is determined by reviewing specific technical details about the facility, such as well depth, complexity of the operation, and whether the facility is sweet or sour.

How detailed are these inspections?

Inspectors check to ensure that companies are following sound operating practices and meeting ERCB requirements set out in its regulations and in the facility's licence. ERCB inspectors have the expertise to explain regulations and analyze procedures with the technical staff operating the energy facility being inspected.

What happens when an inspection finds unsatisfactory items?

Depending on how serious the problem is, the ERCB inspectors may give the operator time to correct the unsatisfactory items; however, if a regulation is seriously disobeyed or there is any danger to people or the environment, the facility will be immediately shut down.

What happens if the problems are not corrected?

If the situation is dangerous, the well or facility will be shut down immediately. Also, if an operator is unable or unwilling to correct a problem within a specified period of time, the ERCB will shut down the facility. The operator may be given a short time extension in which to correct the situation, as occasionally there may be delays in obtaining the necessary equipment to correct a problem. However, the ERCB must be satisfied that safety is not a concern and that the operator is making every effort to meet the requirements.

Where do I call with questions or complaints about a specific site?

Determine who the operator is; company information may be found on the sign outside of the lease. Call the company's local office and give the company a chance to rectify or explain the situation.

Sometimes an inspection resulting from a citizen complaint may not immediately reveal the problem, and several inspections may be necessary before the problem can be traced back to its source.

What if I don't know the name of the company?

Call the nearest ERCB Field Centre, explain the problem, and give the well or facility location; field staff will make the necessary inquiries. The ERCB responds to all public complaints. ERCB inspectors will contact the company, determine the problem, order corrections when necessary, and report back to you.

The process of identifying the problem, specifying corrective action, and carrying out follow-up to ensure that a problem has been resolved is a standard sequence of events for an ERCB inspector.

Should I contact a government department myself?

Yes, if you know who is responsible for your particular concern. If you are unsure, call the nearest ERCB Field Centre and staff will give you a contact name and telephone number.

To find out more information on these or any other energy-related issues, you may visit the ERCB Web site at www.ercb.ca.

Who makes the regulations and sets the standards for energy projects?

The ERCB establishes most of the regulations governing energy facilities in the province. However, other government departments are also involved. For example, Alberta Environment is concerned with applications on lands owned by the province and those with potential for harming either people or the environment.

By means of Alberta's "one-window" approach to energy developments, companies submit all applications for energy facilities to the ERCB, which informs and involves government departments according to established agreements.

How long have ERCB regulations been in effect?

The ERCB's predecessors date back to 1938, to work at ensuring wise development and use of Alberta's energy resources.

The current ERCB was formed when the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board was realigned into the ERCB and the Alberta Utilities Commission. As Alberta's energy industry grows and develops, regulations also change. The ERCB is continually evaluating, updating, and strengthening its regulations as new technology is developed and as experience shows the need for change.

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

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.

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- [No. 3: Inspections and Enforcement of Energy Developments in Alberta](#)
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- [No. 9: The ERCB and You: Agreements, Commitments, and Conditions](#)
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- [No. 15: Objecting to an Energy Resource Project](#)

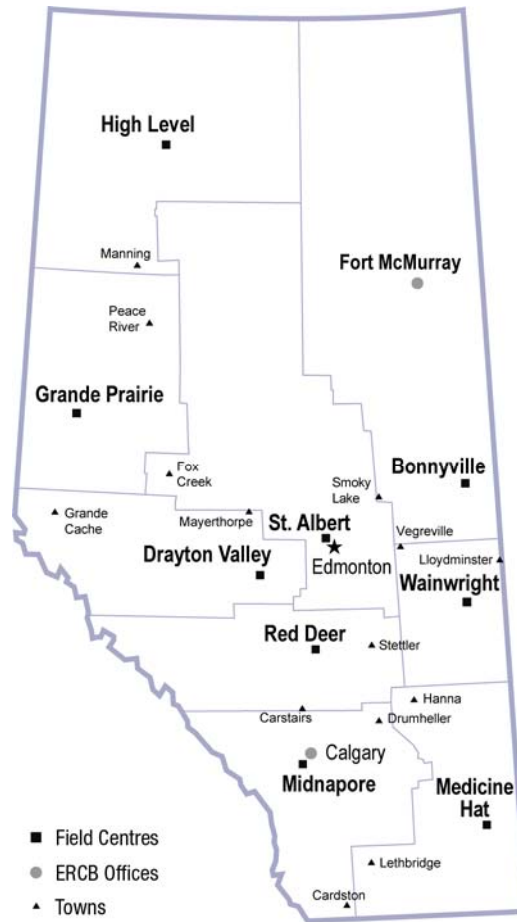
Every year the ERCB collects, compiles, and publishes a large amount of technical data and information about Alberta's energy development and resources for use by both industry and the general public. This includes raw data, statistics, information on regulations, policies, and decisions, and hearing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

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.

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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
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