

CBM concerns ignited

Part one of a two part series

BY SHAWNE MOHL
For the Innisfail Province

A group of speakers recently painted a scary picture as they told of being able to light tap water on fire, cattle being killed because of gas containments in the water and water wells going dry.

Three Central Alberta residents, along with three Americans spoke about their concerns in regards to the production of coal bed methane during a meeting held at the Trochu Community Hall last week.

The topic of coal bed methane pertains to the majority of rural Alberta especially those living throughout Central Alberta where a lot of the production of CBM is currently happening.

Coal bed methane, typically referred to as CBM is natural gas - typically methane - found within coal seams under the ground.

CBM used to be referred to as the "trash gas." It is the gas which used to kill the canary in underground coal mines.

Andrew Nikiforuk, a Calgary-based journalist, who also owns lands near Pincher Creek (Porcupine Hills) was the master of ceremonies at last week's full house, and he held a very strong opinion against CBM wells.

Nikiforuk told the crowd of mostly rural land owners that Albertans need to become aware of the damages that CBM production can do to land, water, and one's health.

He explained that in the United States there have been hundreds of thousands of CBM wells dug and put into production with some having up to 64 wells per section.



PHOTO by Shawne Mohl

Jessica Ernst, a landowner near Rosebud, spoke about the devastating effects that CBM has had on her quality of life — from loud compressors to her water supply being ruined.

The areas in the United States, he says, are considered "sacrifice zones."

"I am not prepared or willing to let the Porcupine Hills area become a sacrifice zone," he said.

Nikiforuk went on to explain that he, and the other speakers, believe that CBM is damaging and ruining rural resident's water supplies.

He explained that in the Beisker and Rosebud areas

there have been over 50 people who have had their wells impacted due to CBM production.

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CBM Meeting

Answers to this weeks crossword.

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CBM Meeting

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American Gwen Lache is the Director of the Oil and Gas Accountability Group based out of Colorado.

Lachelt says that the U.S. government needs to seriously take a look at re-writing many of the laws which govern the oil and gas industry.

"Most of our regulations are very outdated and need a lot of work," she said.

She said the noise from these operations is so out of control that farmers are going out in the middle of the night and shooting at the compressors so that they can sleep.

"Noise is now the number one complaint we are hearing from the large compressor heads to the heavy traffic and dust," she said.

Lachelt urges landowners to read over the agreements very carefully. Having clauses in to have well water tested as least once a year isn't a bad idea, she says.

Lachelt pointed out that the oil and gas business in Alberta is not going to slowdown anytime soon. "We need to get better controls in place. We don't want to lose our land one well at a time."

Tweeti Blancett, a six generation farmer from New Mexico told the audience of what she has seen occur on her 32,000 acres ranch that she and her husband operate.

Blancett says that not only has their underground water source been ruined by

being contaminated, but the cattle which roam on their lands have become infected.

With the production of CBM, salt water is extracted during the process of recovering the natural gas. This salt water called saline will sterilize the ground if it isn't handled properly, she said.

Blancett said that during the drilling of the numerous wells on her property the oil and gas companies have sterilized a lot of the lands which poses a problem for her family business because grass no longer grows.

The saline water on Blancett's land is either poured on the land somewhere,

which sterilizes everything it touches or else is put into evaporation ponds.

The evaporation ponds wouldn't be so bad if they were lined properly and fenced, she said.

In Alberta this saline water is generally injected back into the ground through injector wells so that it doesn't sterilize anything like what happened on Blancett's property.

"(The point of me speaking here is that) we want to alert you of our problems so that the same thing doesn't happen to you," Blancett said. "You're ahead of the club because we have had CBM on our property since 1982. You can take a lot of what we have learned and protect yourselves."

Jessica Ernst who lives in the hamlet of Rosebud, near Drumheller was also one of the keynote speakers.

Ernst owns a 50-acre parcel of land, just outside of Rosebud and says since an oil company has been drilling CBM wells around her property for the past two years her water quality has gone from being drinkable to being inflammable.

Since the drilling of CBM wells in her area has commenced Ernst says that she has numerous rashes from the chemicals by showering and using the water to wash her clothes in.

"It's really hard to believe that you are being poisoned by your own water," she said.

Ernst explained that typically fracturing of CBM wells was only allowed when it's below the base of the groundwater protection area.

She accused the company drilling in her area of shallow drilling and fracturing which is causing her water to become contaminated.

She added that the fracturing is causing water levels to drop.

"I believe we are up against a huge war for water. Water is needed for life," she said. "The water is just one impact of CBM (well production)."

Ernst encouraged everyone to write letters to their MLAs, the ministers in the Government, and the EUB.

"Anyone can make a difference," she said. "Write letters and tell them what you want. We are their bosses. They are not

ours. Protect your water and don't let the regulators tell you what to do."

Nikiforuk ended the evening off with closing remarks, explaining that a large portion of our natural gas is piped down to the United States. He said Albertans need to stand up for their natural resources and keep them here in Alberta, and work on the government to implement stricter regulations.

This meeting was hosted by the Pine

Lake Surface Rights Action Group, who have close to 300 members, from all over Alberta.

If you would like more information on this group you can contact Glenn Norman at 224-2799 or 227-2253 or Willie Moran at 442-02660.

Check back next week for Part Two - the industry's side to CBM operations.



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