

August 7, 2007

Letter to the Editor

Why is EnCana not willing to test our water beyond the minimum standards?

I am a member of the Wheatland Surface Rights Action Group (WSRAG) and have been since it started up in 2001. WSRAG has tried to be pro-active with information so that landowners can make good decisions when energy companies want on the land. In particular members have been concerned about the effect of hundreds of CBM wells being drilled and fractured and the effects on our water wells. There have been many stories as to damage caused by the energy companies and WSRAG wanted to ensure that we minimized the likelihood here, or at least be able to prove or disprove who is at fault if a water well fails.

WSRAG hired an independent hydro-geologist, Alan McCann from Edmonton, to study the area and to give us his opinion on what we needed to do to protect our water wells and to be able to identify who may be responsible if there are changes or damages in the future. He has a written report (copied to EnCana) with a list of tests and procedures that help us protect our asset of water. This list also included recommendations that landowners should follow.

EnCana wants to drill a well on land next to me. They came and asked permission to test my water wells, which I granted. I also asked them if they would take two extra water samples; for Barium and Strontium (as recommended by Alan McCann) and also test for dissolved gas. Encana gave me a flat answer of "NO". They would only follow the AB Environment standards (which I and others believe are not stringent enough), and if I did not agree to that, they would not perform the tests at all, and note that I had refused the testing.

I thought perhaps my information may be out of date so I called Alan McCann, who told me that his suggestions were current and strongly advised, as they will help to identify who may be responsible or what may have caused future water problems, if there are any.

EnCana sent someone from Komex to do the testing, and I asked their employee if he could take the extra two water samples suggested by McCann, and I would pay for them from my own pocket. He told me it would be no problem. We discussed costs and I gave him an address for invoicing.

Imagine my surprise – at the end of the day – after he had packed up all of his equipment, when he told me that he had relayed my requests for the extra sampling to his boss (who reports to EnCana) and was advised that he was not permitted to take the extra water samples.... Even if I was the one paying for them! I had been in close proximity to the testing site all day – yet the young fellow was reluctant to come and tell me prior to his shutting down the testing site. What was he or his supervisor afraid of? Me? I'm just a farmer. EnCana?

A long story short – I had to ask an independent person to come back and open the wells to take samples of Barium and Strontium and send them to the labs. I will have the results sent to EnCana and AB Environment. Will EnCana recognize these samples as valid if there is a future problem? I doubt it, there was a reason they did not want to have these samples included in the first place. Was it because they could pin point responsibility in the future? I don't know.

After relaying my frustration and concerns to neighbours and friends, I have found that other companies have been very cooperative with extra testing, but that EnCana has not. I also heard that EnCana refused to do the same tests for a landowner near Hussar. Have others had the same or a similar experience? Have they requested these tests? Have they been refused? Why would EnCana not want as much information as possible about these water wells?

At the end of the day, one has to ask, what is EnCana afraid of? And if they are not afraid, why won't they allow me to have the tests done, at my expense but be recorded on their records?

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Published in the Red Deer Advocate, Drumheller Valley Times, Strathmore Standard and other papers.