

Bulletin 2005-33

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Shallow Fracturing Operations: New Requirements, Restricted Operations, and Technical Review Committee

The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (EUB) believes there is a need to consider new regulations and/or industry recommended practices regarding fracturing of wells at shallow depths. The *Draft Directive: Shallow Fracturing Operations: New Requirements, Restricted Operations, and Technical Review*, available on the EUB Web site www.eub.gov.ab.ca contains proposed new prefracturing requirements and restrictions on fracturing in proximity to water wells and proposes the development of a technical review committee to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the issues related to shallow fracturing operations.

Fracturing of hydrocarbon reservoirs to enhance production is a common, well-understood practice, which has primarily occurred in deeper formations below the base of groundwater protection. For this reason, regulation of fracturing operations has been unnecessary. However, the recent trend to development of shallow gas reservoirs has caused the EUB to re-evaluate the need for regulation in this area.

Incidents of shallow fracturing operations impacting nearby oilfield wells have been reported to the EUB. These incidents have not affected water wells or caused any environmental or safety impacts. They were investigated by the EUB and appropriate remedial action was taken.

The EUB has recently met with most major coalbed methane operators and service companies to discuss their fracturing practices, including program design. These discussions have indicated that design of fracture stimulations at shallow depths requires improved engineering design and a greater emphasis on protection of groundwater and offset oilfield wells.

The findings of the technical review committee will be subjected to broader stakeholder review and may result in a revised regulation. Although the draft directive applies to all shallow fracturing, the EUB believes its release is timely, as it is complementary to the direction set out in the draft report of the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee on Coalbed Methane.

The EUB is seeking stakeholder feedback on the draft directive by Friday, January 13, 2006. Feedback or questions may be directed to the Well Operations Section, Operations Group, at EUB.welloperations@gov.ab.ca.

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<http://www.eub.gov.ab.ca/BBS/requirements/gbs/bulletin-2005-33.htm>