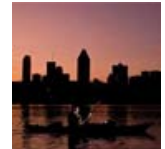


IN WEDNESDAY'S PAPER
ROOTING FOR ROOT VEGETABLES



THE VANCOUVER SUN



IN SUN BUSINESS
TOP GAINING CANADIAN HOUSING MARKETS...

UVic urges B.C. to use Public Health Act to investigate sour gas leaks

BY STEPHEN HUME, VANCOUVER SUN FEBRUARY 8, 2011 BE THE FIRST TO POST A COMMENT

STORY PHOTOS (1)



Stephen Hume
Photograph by: The Vancouver Sun, The Vancouver Sun

Sour-gas leaks pose a critical risk to inhabitants of British Columbia's Peace River district, says an environmental policy group at the University of Victoria urging provincial Health Services Minister Colin Hansen to investigate using the Public Health Act.

Hydrogen sulphide, the toxin in sour gas, is so deadly victims exposed at concentrations as small as 250 parts per million can die in minutes. Some northeast wells tap reservoirs with concentrations as high as 160,000 parts per million.

In 2003, a sour-gas leak in China killed 243 people, injured 9,000 and forced evacuation of 64,000 people. Canada has so far escaped a similar catastrophe, but in 1979, a sour gas pipeline ruptured, forcing evacuation of 18,000 people in Edmonton.

The Environmental Law Centre at UVic says a recent string of accidents in B.C. is sufficient for an investigation under the Public Health Act. The centre is backed by the Peace River Regional District, the Treaty 8 Tribal Association, three first nations, three citizens' groups, the B.C. Grain Producers Association, the Metis Nation of B.C. and half a dozen environmental organizations.

It points to sour-gas leaks, flares and emissions that have reportedly killed 34 oilpatch workers in Alberta and B.C. and have disabled hundreds more over the past three decades. A disaster was narrowly averted in 2009 when an alert resident in the South Peace smelled the rotten-egg odour of hydrogen sulphide from a gas-well leak and got 18 other residents out of the area.

A subsequent investigation found that the company's warning and emergency procedures were ineffective.

The Environmental Law Centre asks Hansen in a letter delivered Monday to use his public health powers to launch a provincial investigation into whether current law and policy governing natural-gas wells, production facilities and pipelines offer adequate protection from sour-gas leaks.

"There can be no doubt that sour-gas leaks are a critical public health hazard — as demonstrated by a long list of accidents, including last year's sour-gas leak that killed a horse and injured a Pouce Coupe woman," the letter says.

"Yet Oil and Gas Commission officials do not have adequate expertise or authority to protect About 58,000 people live in the Peace River Regional District, 20,000 of them dispersed across a rural agricultural area about the size of North Korea.

POPULAR STORIES around ME
Click here for the top stories being read by people in your neighbourhood and across the country. Learn more

STORY TOOLS
E-mail this Article
Print this Article
Comments (0)
Share this Article
Font: A A A A

RELATED TOPICS
Colin Hansen
British Columbia
Domestic Policy

Perfectly Lovely

DIAMOND.COM
free shipping

MOST POPULAR NEWS
MOST READ E-MAILED COMMENTED
Woman's body found in Burnaby Lake park
Owner of sled dog company accepts 'moral responsibility'
Christina Aguilera, Roseanne Barr, Michael Bolton: How to mess up the National Anthem (video)
Christina Aguilera flubs U.S. anthem at Super Bowl
Vanoc officials were concerned about safety of luge track
Owner defies city and cuts down trees
[more >>](#)

BREAKING NEWS ALERTS
Sign up to receive e-mail alerts on breaking news from The Vancouver Sun.
SUBMIT

SUBMIT

▣ [Our Privacy Statement](#)

Over the last decade, it has been the epicentre of an oil and gas boom and is a principal source of revenue for the province.

Worries about sour-gas leaks have been constant in the community, particularly where gas wells are drilled close to residences or schools. A common complaint is that worries about inadequate warning and evacuation plans are shrugged off by authorities.

One recent example cited in the letter to Hansen says that a company satisfied its duty to consult with residents by taping a paper to the front door while the householder was at home. The householder was expected to pay long-distance charges to call the Calgary telephone number.

Another company delivered letters of notification to landowners after the response deadline had passed.

Residents on a dead-end road who learned a sour-gas well was being drilled where it cut off their only evacuation route in an emergency couldn't get their notice of concern heard by oil and gas authorities until the well was finished.

The Environmental Law Centre says its review of provincial laws and regulations under the Oil and Gas Activities Act found that they compromise public health and safety rather than protecting it.

Among its shortcomings, provincial legislation relies on vague and unenforceable standards, lacks scientific or health-based monitoring, permits officials to exempt industry from strict controls and doesn't require adequate consultation of residents at risk, the groups says.

"This must change," the letter says. "B.C.'s medical health agencies must begin to participate fully in all aspects of regulatory development, implementation, and oversight for oil and gas production.

"A voice for public health must be at the table when facilities are being developed and regulated."


The letter says although calls for involvement of public health authorities have been stated and restated by advisory committees, medical health officers and the auditor-general for more than seven years, nothing has happened.

It wants the inquiry to examine whether current laws and policy adequately protect the public from sour gas and related hazards; if not, how law and policy can be improved; what measures can ensure that public health issues get higher priority, and how public health officials can become full partners in developing better law.

"It is simply unacceptable that Health Authorities continue to be assigned a peripheral role in natural gas regulation — and are mainly involved after an incident has occurred," the letter says. "An ounce of prevention is worth ten thousand pounds of cure. Proactive measures must be taken to prevent accidents before tragedies occur."

shume@islandnet.com

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun

 [E-mail this Article](#)  [Print this Article](#)  [Share this Article](#)

What Do You Think?

[Login](#) or [Register](#)

Already a member?

To comment, please login.

E-mail address

Password

New to the site?

To leave a comment, you need to [Register](#).

[Questions?](#) - [Visit our FAQ](#)

ADS BY GOOGLE

[Patrick Schörle](#)

[Victoria 1-Day Coupons](#)

[Villas in Italy for rent.](#)

Saanich Peninsula & Victoria
Real Estate Consultant
www.patrickschorle.com

1 Amazingly Great Coupon Every Day.
Up to 90% off Restaurants, Spas...
Couvon.com/Victoria

200 Exclusive, Luxury Villa Rentals
Italy. Private Pool-Concierge Staff
www.tuscanynow.com

INSIDE THE VANCOUVER SUN



Top images from around the globe



10 Actresses Who Could Play Wonder Woman



Top gaining Canadian real estate markets since 2000



Opinion: Downtown bike routes are a disaster



11 puppies left in storm are safe

Home News Opinion Business Sports Entertainment Life Health Technology Travel Jobs Cars Homes

Classifieds

DON'T MISS

- Today's Paper
- Hot Topics
- Breaking news
- Sun on Twitter
- Video Centre
- News Quiz
- Iconic Photos
- Save at SwarmJam

MOST POPULAR

- Woman's body found in Burnaby Lake park
- Owner of sled dog company accepts 'moral responsibility'
- Christina Aguilera, Roseanne Barr, Michael Bolton: How to mess up the National Anthem (video)

FORMATS

- Sitemap / RSS
- Contests
- Blogs
- Columnists
- Photo Galleries
- Videos
- Mobile
- iPad App

VANCOUVER SUN

- About Us
- Contact Us
- Work for Us
- Advertise with Us
- Subscribe to the Print Edition
- Rate Our Delivery Service and WIN
- Newspaper in Education

TOOLS

- Search for a Job
- Buy/Sell a Car
- Real Estate Listings
- SwarmJam Sweet Deals
- Place a Classified Ad
- E-mail Alerts

SEARCH