



City wants larger evacuation zone

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Leaders of the City of Calgary's disaster response team say the evacuation zone for sour gas wells that Compton Petroleum Corp. wants to drill on the southeast edge of the city should be larger than what the company is proposing.

Saying Compton has shown the "wrong mindset" when it comes to emergency planning, the city's disaster services co-ordinator Harvey Rindfliesch said the company's plan for protecting public safety in the event of a blowout is incomplete and is too reliant on the belief that a deadly gas leak won't happen.

"In my opinion, making the assumptions that everything will go according to plan and that the chances something will happen are zero is the wrong mindset," Rindfliesch said.

"We need to be prepared for the unexpected and prepared for something to go wrong because our experience shows us that it can and often does."

The company acknowledges that many details of its emergency response plan -- including an agreement with the city on how the safety of southeast Calgary residents will be ensured-- must still be ironed out, but says it has fully considered the implications of a blowout.

Rindfliesch and Calgary fire Chief Wayne Morris presented their concerns about Compton's plan to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board on Tuesday.

Since Compton didn't provide the city with models of how gas will disperse in the event of a blowout, Rindfliesch said the emergency planning zone (EPZ) for the wells should have at least a 10.4-kilometre radius. Air dispersion models presented by independent experts hired by a group opposed to the wells recommended a radius of 10.4 to 12.8 kilometres.

Compton hopes to reduce the size of the EPZ from 15 kilometres, which encompasses about 250,000 Calgary residents, to four kilometres, which includes only about 200 homes.

Morris said the city is prepared to work with the company to develop an appropriate emergency plan and is confident the city's fire, police and ambulance crews can handle an emergency related to the wells.

Morris and Rindfliesch also said they want the company to be required to do a full-scale emergency response exercise prior to the start of drilling.

Compton's emergency plan consultant Dick Bissett said earlier in the hearing that while the likelihood of a gas leak is minimal, the emergency plan is based on the worst-case scenario of a blowout occurring. Compton's lawyer Allan McLarty said the company has based its plan on air dispersion models for unusual weather conditions that could blow toxic sour gas toward the city.

The City of Calgary supports the company's intention of depleting natural gas reserves on the edge of the city as soon as possible.

The city's acting director of land use planning, Paul Cochrane, told the board that the city's growth plan

envisions new homes being built within 1,500 metres of the company's wellsite by 2008.

The hearing continues today at the Best Western Hospitality Inn.

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Sour Gas Well Hearing

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This story features a factbox "Sour Gas Well Hearing".

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