



## Zoo ranch prepared for well blowout

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A plan is in place to protect unusual animals -- including endangered species -- from deadly sour gas, according to Calgary Zoo officials who say they're prepared if a blowout occurs near its rural breeding facility while new wells are being drilled southeast of the city.

"We have peace of mind that everything is in place and whatever happens will be in the best interests of people and animals alike," said zoo spokeswoman Trish Exton-Parder.

"We have taken part in the emergency planning process and the managers of our ranch have worked to come up with a very thorough and detailed emergency response procedure to ensure the safety of the animals at our facility."

The zoo's Devonian Wildlife Conservation Centre, which is home to breeding programs for the endangered whooping crane and Vancouver Island marmot, is located about five kilometres south of where Compton Petroleum Corp. hopes to add six new wells to an existing sour gas well it owns 1.1 kilometres from city limits.

While it does not fall within the four-kilometre emergency planning zone (EPZ) proposed for the wells, Exton-Parder said zoo staff have met Compton officials to discuss the company's drilling plan and to come up with an appropriate disaster plan in the event of a blowout.

Exton-Parder said the zoo is satisfied the company's plan presents a minimal safety risk and that the zoo's emergency response could include evacuating animals from the ranch.

"Similar steps will be taken as for humans. We will remove animals to an area of safety if that's what is required," she said.

The facility is also used to breed moose, caribou, bighorn sheep, zebras and Asian wild horses.

Compton is responsible for evacuating residents in the EPZ if a gas leak occurs and must work with local authorities to inform those within an eight-kilometre emergency awareness zone of potential safety hazards.

The safety of zoo animals was raised this week during the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board hearing into Compton's drilling plan when an opponent of the wells asked if Compton will take responsibility for any harm the wells may cause animals at the centre.

Compton vice-president Derek Longfield said the company is aware of the zoo's facility and that well blowout insurance could be used to cover hefty fines that can be charged for killing animals considered at-risk of extinction in Canada.

The EUB hearing continues today in the Safari Lodge at the Calgary Zoo.

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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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