

New fracking best practices getting mixed reviews

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A new national hydraulic fracturing code of conduct recently put out by the Petroleum Services Association of Canada (PSAC) is getting mixed reviews.

The non-binding PSAC code of conduct outlines standards of practice for technical and environmental performance for companies conducting fracking operations.

While Sundre Petroleum Operators Group (SPOG) officials call the new code "a step in the right direction", Don Bester, president of the Alberta Surface Rights Group (ASRG) says it is nothing but a public relations ploy.

"This thing is just a propaganda spiel and that is all it is," Bester said from his Innisfail home Thursday. "It's just the old, put the soother in the mouth thing. They do what they want to do. They aren't bound to the code, and neither are the companies that sign on to it. It's good in theory but it's not being practised."

"I've seen so many of these best practices being

implemented by the oil and gas industry, and it is only driven by the members who are part of that organization where there are hundreds of other companies that aren't members and they don't follow that code of practice."

The ASRG monitors oil and gas activities across the province, including in West Central Alberta.

Fracking uses high-pressure water and chemicals forced down drill holes to break up rock formations, facilitating the extraction of oil and gas. The process has been controversial for its use of water and its possible impacts on the environment.

The PSAC code is the result of public and industry consultations in four provinces, including Alberta, over the past six months, say officials.

The code covers five major areas: water and the environment; fracturing fluid disclosure; technological development; health, safety and training; and community engagement.

• Regarding water and environment, the code calls, in part, for companies to "develop technologies for reduced water consumption in our operations that make usable alternatives to fresh water, with a con-

tinued focus on reducing, recycling and recovery of water."

• Regarding fracturing fluid disclosure, the code calls, in part, for companies to "provide our customers with a list of additives used in fracturing fluids that meets all industry requirements" and provide customers with "alternative environmentally friendly fluid additive options."

• Regarding technology development, the code calls, in part, for the "development of new technologies and processes, informed by scientific study and application, to strengthen operational and environmental performance by maximizing resources used and reducing emissions."

• Regarding health, safety and training, the code calls, in part, for companies to "strive to achieve zero incidents performance records through proactive and structured approaches", "meet or exceed safety requirement, and maintain credential through regular and vigorous internal and third-party audits of safety practices" and "commit to continuous improvement and development of best practices in health and safety."

• Regarding community engagement, the code calls, in part, for companies to "engage with local communities to understand and respond to specific local concerns, and communicate openly about operations" and "to develop tools that will facilitate ongoing and meaningful dialogue."

The PSAC is a national trade association representing service, supply and manufacturing sectors of the upstream petroleum industry. It has about 200 members.

PSAC president Mark Salkeld said the new code of conduct has been put together to "build trust in oil and gas operations."

"We have seen public concern surrounding hydraulic fracturing operations increase over the past years," said Salkeld. "It was definitely time to address that in a proactive and positive way, but we know talking to community members wasn't going to be enough. We had to act. That's why we created the hydraulic fracturing code of conduct."

The Sundre Petroleum Operators Group took part in the consultation that resulted in the new PSAC code of conduct.

"SPOG feels that this is definitely a step in the right direction as there has for a long time been a gap between the oil and gas producers that we typically engage and communicate with and the services companies that are actually in the field doing the work," executive director Tracey McCrimmon told the *Gazette*.

"Even though the service companies represent the operators that contract them, it is actually the service companies for the most that are in the field and interacting with the community. Their operational practices have the biggest impact on landowners regardless of who hires them so it is very encouraging to see the service sector move in this direction."

SPOG is a collection of oil and gas companies with operations in the Sundre area. The organization also includes non-voting associate members such as Mountain View County.

Last spring SPOG released a beneficial management practices document for fracking, including fracturing fluid disclosure, water wells, groundwater and aquifers, water use, and information sharing with the community.

• Regarding fracturing fluid, the SPOG document states, in part: "Industry will provide, upon request, the disclosure of fracturing chemical additives on a well-by-well basis to residents and/or landowners consistent with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' hydraulic fracturing operating practice" and "industry will commit to moving towards using greener products."

• Regarding water testing, the document states, in part: "Industry will test as a minimum all water wells within a 250-metre radius. Industry will also commit to reviewing requests outside the 250-metre radius on a well-by-well basis if requested by a potentially impacted resident."

• Regarding water use, the document states, in part: "Industry will make best efforts to share area beneficial practices such as pipelining of water, sharing of fracturing fluids and looking for ways to reduce water consumption through water recycling opportunities and technologies."

In 2012 the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) released six new operating practices for shale hydraulic fracturing operations, including for the disclosure of fracturing fluid additives, fracturing fluid risk assessment and management, baseline groundwater testing, well-bore construction and quality assurance, and fluid transportation, handling, storage and disposal.






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