
OPINION-EDITORIAL

ADDRESSING THE MYTHS ABOUT COALBED GAS

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Recently, I have been watching the residents in the communities of Smithers and Telkwa as they strive to better understand what the exploration of coalbed gas (CBG) in the Telkwa coalfield means as well as consider how it would work and what the potential benefits might be in their community.

Since January, members of the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources' Community Relations branch have been conducting pre-tenure engagement in the Telkwa area with local government, First Nations and members of the public. There is a range of knowledge in the community about CBG. What is important is to get the facts out and eliminate the misinformation on CBG currently circulating in the community.

First let's discuss the timelines involved with developing CBG. There is no commercial production of CBG anywhere in the province - companies are only at the exploration stage. It is during this exploration phase that it is determined if there's a viable resource to produce CBG. There is a significant amount of time between the exploration and commercial production phases. It is an incremental process, not a full industry created overnight.

Second, government is involving the local community. We've attended public meetings in Smithers and Telkwa, held panel discussions with the media, met with community groups and individuals. Public discussions will continue throughout the summer and fall, and include a technical Coalbed Gas workshop in early September. Government has a statutory obligation to consult. This government believes Community and First Nation engagement is an essential part of the resource development process.

Third, CBG is regulated in British Columbia. In fact, all oil and gas activities in B.C. are regulated by the Oil and Gas Commission (OGC). Ensuring public safety remains the OGC's highest priority. And a key issue associated with CBG activity is the regulations governing water disposal. As well, the oil and gas regulations are comprehensive. The OGC has established a three-phase approval process for coalbed gas:

1. Evaluation,
2. Feasibility, and
3. Coalbed Gas Production.

At each stage, the company must make an application to the OGC and receive all necessary approvals. CBG Evaluation, Feasibility and Production plans will identify how environmental and social impacts will be minimized or avoided. Prior to approval, at each stage the OGC must

be satisfied that the company has worked with the community to identify and address concerns and interests.

And finally water disposal. The B.C. Government takes the issue of water disposal very seriously. Currently, under B.C. regulations there are two ways to discharge CBG produced water and they are both highly regulated. Deep-well injection is monitored through the Oil and Gas Commission and is regulated under the Oil and Gas Waste Regulations. As well, the Code of Practice for Discharge of Produced Water from Coalbed Gas Operations, under the *Environmental Management Act*, is in place to ensure that all standards are met and water is monitored. This government remains committed to ensuring that we lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality bar none.

Government is taking a very pro-active approach to improve the availability of environmental baseline information. The Environmental Resource Information Project is a key program to gather additional information, and an opportunity for community members, First Nations and industry to be involved. This project, which began in 2003, compiles and distributes known environmental information and new scientific baseline studies.

Government is getting the facts out to the people of the Telkwa region. It is the facts which will allow us all to make the best possible decisions for the future of CBG and the Telkwa area in the future.