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alberta seismic patrol

NEWS RELEASE

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Things the seismic industry doesn't want you to know

LESLIEVILLE, ALBERTA, OCTOBER 4 2002

It has been estimated that 65-70 percent of Alberta farmers are unaware of their rights when dealing with the energy industry. The following list states things you "REALLY" need to know when dealing with the seismic industry.

1. You do not have to allow seismic exploration on your land.
2. From personal experience, a permittee agent (landman) cannot be trusted to always tell the truth.
3. Absolutely everything must be in writing. They have been known to say "it doesn't need to be in writing, if there are any problems, call us and we will be there right away to address your concerns."
4. Do not fall for the line "you are the only one" that wants more money or is denying access.
5. Ensure that they will not be on your land at critical times eg: before your crop is in.
6. Insist that they set shot hole plugs close to the bottom of the hole and fill with bentonite pellets only.
7. Insist that the seismic company be responsible for any damage to your water well for "at least" one year.
8. Damage releases aren't required under government regulations or the law. When signing a release, make sure that they will be responsible for any damages that may appear later, eg. debris buried under snow or hidden in the bush.
9. Read and UNDERSTAND what is presented to you. If you are unsure, seek assistance before signing.
10. Join your local surface rights group or form one with your neighbors and then join the Alberta Surface Rights Federation. Contact Tom Nahirniak at 780-672-6021.

WHAT TO DO IF THE DAMAGE IS ALREADY DONE:

1. You must contact the seismic company to see if they will remedy the problem. If not,
2. Contact Public Lands Division at 310-0000 780-427-3932 and an investigator will be sent out. Remember to take pictures of the damage, in case you have to obtain legal counsel.

PUBLICATIONS THAT ARE ESSENTIAL FOR EVERY RURAL LAND OWNER:

Water Wells That Last for Generations and Seismic Operations and Farmers Rights.

These publications are free and may be obtained by calling 310-0000 780-427-2181.

When the Oilpatch Comes to Your Door: a Citizens Guide to Protecting Your Rights.

Published by the Pembina Institute 780-542-6272 or ask your local library to bring in a copy for you.

We are at an unique point in time for all rural residents to speak out and effect a positive change in our lives and in the lives of those that follow us. As you may have heard on the

radio or read in the newspaper, more and more farmers are getting involved and speaking up. Contact your local newspaper or radio station and express your concerns. I even went as far as having my story on the front page of the Red Deer Advocate and have received nothing but accolades for doing so.

In our next release, we will be informing you what to do if your water well is damaged and will discuss the Water Well Restoration and Replacement Program which is administered by the Office of the Farmers Advocate.

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----- Original Message ----- **From:** [GREG BROWNLEE](mailto:GREG.BROWNLEE@telusplanet.net)
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UNREST IN CENTRAL ALBERTA WEST

LESLIEVILLE, ALBERTA September 26, 2002

I am the spokesperson for a group of rural residents that are deeply concerned by the way in which seismic companies operate in our province. Our group, centered in the Leslieville area, and called ASP, began forming in the aftermath of the Synterra Technologies Sylvan 3D Project, which was conducted in mid October 2001.

This company left our neighbourhood with damaged water wells, shot hole plugs pulled out of the ground while cultivating this Spring, and debris left on our fields and in our woodlots.

Recently, while circulating a petition, I stopped at 35 farms, acreages, and small businesses in our area. 33 of those petitioned signed. Many added remarks of encouragement in reference to seismic companies, such as, "go get 'em".

Although not scientific by any means, it indicates to us that 96% of rural residents who live in active seismic exploration areas are experiencing problems caused by seismic companies.

I may be quoted as saying: "I'm on my third water well in 7 years. Every time seismic goes around my farm, my water well is damaged. In the last 2 years it has cost me over \$24,000.00 in having had to drill 2 new wells and repairing damages to my yard resulting from the water well drilling. I, as yet, have not received a single cent in compensation. I am sick and tired of subsidizing the seismic industry!

My second well, which was completed in June 2001, was in an underground river. With the well cap off, you could actually hear the water flowing by. The quality of the water could only be described as pristine. We have a white bathtub, and when it was filled, the water had a slight bluish tinge to it, just like city water.

By mid March 2002, it was becoming apparent that my second well had been damaged. The problem? – Iron, and lots of it, with the consistency of freshly squeezed orange juice.

No amount of chlorine shock treatments would remedy the problem and the surface seal had been broken. This allowed surface water to enter my well and wash dirt and fine particles of rock into the well bore, which of course did wonders for my plumbing fixtures. When the pump was pulled, the well was 3 feet shallower than when originally drilled.

What really gets me is that I had the use of this good water for only 10 months and the underground river has been permanently polluted. I am on my third well now and I am worried that if this aquifer is damaged, how many more are beneath my farm. What if there aren't any more aquifers with good fresh water? What is the value of a farmstead without water.

The sad thing is, I lived for over 13 years in an area north east of Edson where there was no active seismic exploration and the only well problems anyone had were mechanical. I unfortunately relocated to an area of active seismic exploration and look what has happened.

In our next release, we will be discussing what you "really need to know" before the landman shows up - what to do if the damage is already done, and where to obtain free government publications that are essential for every rural resident who wants a fair shake from the seismic industry and wants to protect their water well.

OUR GOALS

1. To petition the Pembina Institute to help in this matter.
2. To increase public awareness with regards to the way the seismic industry operates.
3. To inform rural residents of their rights when dealing with seismic companies.
4. To lobby for changes to existing legislation to prevent repeated geophysical surveys on land previously surveyed using existing technology.
5. To force seismic companies to adhere to the Exploration Regulations (employment creation)

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WHAT HAPPENED TO MY WATER
LESLIEVILLE, ALBERTA OCTOBER 15, 2002

If your water well has become damaged after seismic exploration has been done near you, you MUST contact the seismic company to see if they will be of assistance. If they didn't cross your land, obtain the information from your neighbour who did allow access. Time is of importance in this situation as the sooner the damage is reported, the greater the likelihood of receiving assistance from them. Documentation is extremely important right from the start. Record dates, who you talked to, and what was said. This also holds true if you contact a government geophysical inspector.

If the seismic company is unwilling to repair or replace your well, the next place to contact is Public Lands Division at 310-0000...780-427-3932 and an inspector will be sent out to evaluate your situation. Also contact the Office of the Farmers Advocate at 310-0000...780-427-2433 and check into the Water Well Restoration or Replacement Program. This program is funded by levies placed on the oil and gas industry. These were the steps I followed and the following are my experiences in dealing with the Farmers Advocate.

1. After my 1st call I was left with the impression that they were discouraging me from applying. Why? They repeatedly said nothing is guaranteed and you are taking a gamble on being compensated. I said "send me the application anyway".
2. Upon receiving the application I noted that the applicant must provide evidence linking seismic activity to my well damage. If I could prove that, I wouldn't have needed to apply.
3. I called a second time to ask how I was supposed to do this and talked to Matt Collins from the Farmers Advocate. He also repeatedly said nothing is guaranteed but did say that in this particular instance, the need for direct evidence is being waived and all expenses directly related to drilling a new well was covered. This included relandscaping, electricians, backhoe, etc., but added "do not add any embellishments". When I asked what he meant, he said "don't try to add anything not related to the new well, such as a buried cistern".
4. I called a third time to ask how I was supposed to prove the amount of time it took to relandscape my yard. Now this is where things get interesting. Matt

Collins completely denied what he had previously said and told me he said “We might just possibly at an outside chance consider the directly related expenses”.

5. Eventually the work was completed and I sent in my claim.
6. A representative of the Office of the Farmers Advocate eventually called to arrange a time for my hearing. At this time, I was told that in order to expedite matters, after the hearing I was to leave the room momentarily and would be called back in after a decision had been made.

THE HEARING was chaired by Bernie Yachymyshin (Office of the Farmers Advocate). Art Marshall (Alberta Agriculture) and Steve Wallace (Alberta Environment) were also in attendance. A lot of time was wasted with Steve Wallace proposing all kinds of different scenarios that all pointed to my well having been previously damaged, even the fact that I have two water samples that prove there was nothing wrong with my well until after the seismic exploration was conducted, was glossed over. My well seal was also broken and this fact was also deemed unimportant. Everything I said was cross examined and if I hadn't done four months research beforehand, I would have been completely railroaded out of there. At this meeting I also mentioned that there were open shot holes in our area. To this Bernie Yachymyshin replied “who cares, the holes aren't that deep”. Steve Wallace said nothing so I had to say that these unplugged holes were a breach of the Exploration Regulation and a direct source of contamination of our drinking water. I also mentioned that I had made an additional mistake on my claim and nobody cared. The chair of the meeting seemed to be more interested in my article that was on the front page of the June 29, 2002 Red Deer Advocate and a faulty shot hole seal that I have, than in what happened to my water well. We ran out of my allotted time before I could finish my presentation and was ushered out the door with a promise of a decision within two weeks. After three and a half weeks I phoned Bernie Yachymyshin and he stated that out of the 3 people at the hearing, at least one of them had been too sick to communicate on the phone and that was why there was a delay. A couple of days later he left a message on my voice mail saying my application had been denied because I could not prove that seismic activity had damaged my well.

In my opinion, the Water Well Restoration or Replacement Program, which I previously mentioned is funded solely by the Oil and Gas Industry, is nothing more than a little bit of window dressing and should be eliminated as it offers false hope to cash strapped farmers.

In our next release, I will be discussing what it was like to try to work with the government on this issue.

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LET'S WORK ON THIS TOGETHER

LESLIEVILLE, ALBERTA OCTOBER 23, 2002

Our petition to the Pembina Institute worked and Mary Griffiths (formerly Liberal Environmental Critic) has become our advocate to the government. She suggested that we try to work with the government on this issue and this is how it went.

1. Called and left a message for Dave Bartesco (Sustainable Resources...Head Geophysical Unit) to return my phone call. There was some confusion over this as the secretary insisted on knowing what it was about. She said that everything that happens in that office goes through her and I must tell her what it was about. I declined, saying it was a confidential matter.
2. The next morning Mr. Bartesco angrily asked what I wanted. I requested a new investigation into the Sylvan 3D project. He then said "We had our lawyers check the Exploration Regulation and you are technically guilty of a breach of the Regulations. (I had exposed the top of a seismic shot hole seal) and could be made responsible for that shot hole for life. A thinly veiled threat if I ever heard one. He then said "let's work together", which I agreed to.
3. Jerry Riddell (inspector) called and said he would be down the next day.
4. Upon his arrival I told him of all the problems caused by the Sylvan 3D project. I also told him that the seismic shooter (Polaris Explorer) had not complied with the department order to return to the project and check all seismic shot holes. We investigated a shot hole adjacent to my farm and it was in good order. I then suggested we drive down the road to my neighbour's to investigate their damaged well and all the debris the seismic company left on their farm. To this he vehemently disagreed and said I wasn't allowed to go along. The only reason I wanted to go along was to make sure the investigation went smoothly and that all my neighbour's problems were addressed. He wasn't even interested in visiting the farms where the shot hole seals had been pulled out of the ground during spring cultivation. When I asked him about the open shot holes on a neighbour's pasture, he said "so they missed some....big deal".
5. So here we have three breaches of the Exploration Regulation that the government is well aware of and a refusal to assess any fines except possible to me.

In conclusion, it is readily apparent that working with the government is a complete waste of time and in my five months of research and dealing with our civil servant, I am of the opinion that they have become just as arrogant and corrupt as our political leadership. As for our environment, we have leaking shot holes that are contaminating our drinking water and a government that thinks oil and gas is more important than a rural water well user's rights to fresh water.