

A Brief Sour Gas Chronicle

1922 World's first sour well drilled at Hell's Half Acre in Turner Valley, Alberta. Fumes from flaring and venting peel house paint and dissolve lead fillings.

1924 US Public Health Service identifies H₂S as "one of the most toxic of gases."

1929 Sour gas wells kill 30 oil and gas workers in Texas over a two year period.

1950 Sour gas leak in Mexico kills 22 and leaves another 47 brain damaged.

1960 Ranchers along the foothills from Pincher Creek to Olds complain of rusting fences, ailing cattle, sick trees, asthmatic children and foul odours down wind of sour gas plants. Industry calls it a "psychological" problem.

1971 At the insistence of the Queen of the Netherlands Shell Canada settles a million dollar lawsuit by 15 Pincher Creek families out of court. The suit documented 50 serious incidents of ill health and cattle death. The relocated ranchers call themselves DP's--displaced persons.

1982 Amoco well "blows" and spurts sour gas into the air for 67 days near Lodgepole just north of Edmonton. The blow out kills two workers and hundreds of cattle. Thousand of people down wind complain of headaches, eye irritation, nosebleeds, miscarriages and flu symptoms.

Industry calls it a “social contagion.”

1985 University of Alberta toxicologist Dr. Tee Guidoitti recommends a H₂S registry to keep track of injured workers and ranchers: government refuses to do so.

1986 A \$3-million epidemiological study on Pincher Creek ranchers gives them a clean bill of health. Toxicologists call the study a fraud and a disaster. Funding for sour gas research dries up in Canada.

1990 A book about Hungarian workers in the sour gas fields of Kazakhstan reports widespread lung, nasal and neurological complaints due to low concentrations of H₂S.

1992 After a six year delay the Alberta government publishes the proceedings of an International Workshop on “Effects of Acid Forming Emissions in Livestock.” It called for more studies on sour gas and concluded that “the onus is almost exclusively on the livestock producer to prove that sour gas has an effect on the health of animals and human beings.”

1994 An Alberta Research Council study on a sour gas pipeline break concludes that H₂S and hydrocarbons likely killed and damaged the brains and immune systems of cattle on two ranches in central Alberta. A freedom of information request forces the study’s release four years later.

1996 A lengthy report for Alberta Cattle Commission documents that H₂S and other hydrocarbons can adversely

affect cattle health. A freedom of information request prompts release of heavily edited version two years later.

1997 US report documents widespread human illness, hospitalizations and livestock deaths in northern Michigan's new sour gas fields.

1998 Wiebo Ludwig begins bombing campaign against sour gas facilities in northern Alberta after industrial flares and emissions sicken his family. Vandalism totals \$10-million and brings national attention to sour gas issues.

1999 Violet Holmes sues two Alberta companies for neurological damage (tremors and facial distortions) after sour gas flaring incident in Rimbey, Alberta. Companies settle out of court.

2000 Alberta public safety report criticizes industry regulator for inadequate sour gas monitoring (1 mobile unit) and enforcement. It recommends a proper human health study.

2001 Alberta government promises and then cancels a human health study. It also reduces funding for an animal health study.

2002 Industry faces more than 30 toxic torts from Alberta landowners: most involve sour gas. -30-