

FACT SHEET

Resource Development in the North



LAND COMPLIANCE ISSUES FOR OIL & GAS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Who Protects the Land? Compliance Issues for Oil & Gas in British Columbia

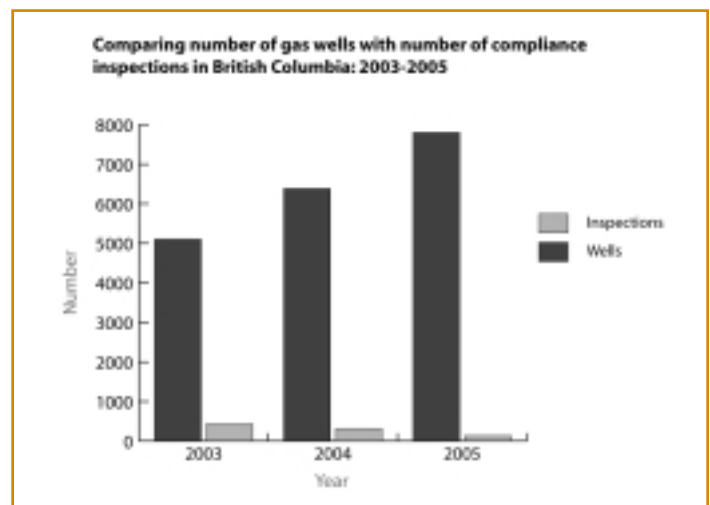
Oil and gas development in British Columbia is almost entirely regulated by the provincial government.

This compliance graph shows that even though the number of wells being drilled is increasing, significantly fewer inspections are being conducted on the land. In our view, conducting 100 to 200 inspections per year is not adequate given the ever increasing amount of activity.



Who Is Minding the Land?

Weak provincial laws governing oil and gas development are a problem, but non-compliance with the laws that exist makes matters even worse. For example, although the number of wells drilled annually more than doubled between 2002 and 2005 in BC, non-compliance remained constant. Oil and Gas Commission field inspection statistics, reported in the Vancouver Sun, show that in 2003, 62% of inspections identified infractions, and in 2004, this non-compliance rate rose to 64%. The government responded in a way unlikely to deter further non-compliance: a total of 49 tickets were issued, ranging from \$230 to \$575 – little more than the cost of a speeding ticket.



▲ The Pine River oil spill killed tens of thousands of fish and it took two years for stocks to begin recovering.

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The laws are written by the Ministry of Energy and Mines and enforced by the Oil and Gas Commission (OGC) whose responsibilities include road construction, well site issues, cleanup of toxic substances used in the drilling process, compressor and pipeline siting and maintenance, and site remediation and cleanup.

“Simply put,

British Columbia’s oil and gas compliance and enforcement laws are crude, inadequate and in need of a complete overhaul.”

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Pipeline Safety is Also a Concern

The additional responsibility of regulating new pipelines across northern British Columbia on top of an already stressed system is a real concern.

Pipeline spills and leaks are relatively common and can cause catastrophic environmental impacts. Between 1980 and 1997 there were an average of 674 pipeline failures per year in Alberta. Another study found that pipeline spills outnumber spills from all other sources combined.

Spills and leaks from pipelines are a major source of contamination in oil and gas producing areas. Pipeline leaks can directly expose vegetation and wildlife to oil and salty water produced during oil and gas extraction and contribute to overall degradation of soil and surface areas. While much of the oil and saline water can be removed, the affected sites can take years, or even decades, to recover.

One such example occurred in August 2000 when Pembina Pipeline Corporation's oil pipeline ruptured and spilled one million litres of crude oil into the Pine River in northeastern British Columbia. At one point the oil slick was reported to be 21 kilometres long. Fish populations in the first 20 kilometres downstream of the rupture point were heavily impacted. Fishery biologists from the Ministry of Environment estimated that tens of thousands of fish died, and many birds and beaver died also. It took two years for the spill to be cleaned to provincial standards and for fish stocks to return to normal levels.



▲ Pipeline spills and leaks such as this one on the Pine River are relatively common and can cause catastrophic environmental impacts.

CREDIT: WEST MOBERLY FIRST NATIONS

The Carrier Sekani First Nations worry about these impacts. The proposed Enbridge pipeline will cross 600 to 700 streams in Carrier Sekani territory and threatens the vitality of the watersheds that sustain them. In addition to streams and rivers, the pipeline would also cross numerous wetlands, which are prime habitat for many species on which the Carrier Sekani rely for food and cultural goods such as clothing and drums.

Where pipeline development proceeds, local communities should ensure that government has the appropriate resources and will diligently monitor and enforce laws to protect people and the environment, particularly given the risk of harm from pipeline-related spills.

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