

2009-2011 REPORT OF THE AFL ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

DIRTY OIL OR CLEAN OIL?

Over the course of the past several years the environmental conversations on climate change have shifted to focus on the understanding and the provision of *dirty vs. clean* oil.

But what does this mean and how will it impact both the oil sands and the jobs of those workers employed both directly and indirectly in the energy sector? To begin we know it will mean future development of Canada and Alberta's vast energy resources in an environmentally sustainable manner.

The oil sands account for 55 per cent of Canada's oil production of approximately 2.5 million barrels per day, with established reserves of 170 billion barrels. This gives Canada's oil industry a bright future that will enhance the economic stability of all Canadians to share in Alberta's good fortune.

However, the environmental impacts are obvious, and must be regulated and monitored on everything from water usage and pollution to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Before we rise up in indignation at the perceived indifference of the oil industry on the environment, it must be remembered that the coal-fired U.S. energy industry shoulders responsibility for the production of 64 times as many GHG emissions as the Canadian oil sands.

While our country has a wealth of resources, Canada does not have an energy strategy, nor have either our federal or provincial governments committed to one that is environmentally sustainable.

As a result of conflicting information Albertans have been left pondering which of these extreme views is the truth? How can we take action when we have been barraged with a tsunami of negative media coverage of Alberta's oil sands?

The truth, as usual, is to be found somewhere in the middle, buried in hyperbole, lost in hot air.

The truth is that the oil sands are here. They are now the cornerstone of our economy. The oil sands are the biggest economic project and generator of employment in Canada. They pay for much of the vital public services we demand - including health care and education.

The truth is that we **MUST** make the oil sands as environmentally sustainable as possible. This means having tough environmental standards, reliable monitoring of those standards - and real enforcement of those standards. Clearly, as we have seen from recent media stories on environmental standards, Alberta has a long way to go. From the deformed fish in the report last year by University of Alberta aquatics geologist that said the oil sands industry is contaminating the environment, to hundreds of ducks drowning in tailings ponds, the oil sands have been given an environmental black eye.

From an Alberta government agency saying that the Regional Aquatics Monitoring Program is failing to do enough to monitor the effects of the oil sands on the lower Athabasca region, to criticism of the advisory panel appointed by the Alberta government to provide "world-class" monitoring, the need for improved monitoring - and enforcement - is obvious.

But this is not all bad news. The environment is becoming more and more important to Albertans. The Environment Committee of the Alberta Federation of Labour will continue to push for the oil sands to improve its foot print. For example, we are bringing resolutions to this convention on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to halt the approval on new tailings ponds.

The Committee welcomes the Canadian government passing Bill C-469, the Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights, and will be pushing the Alberta government to pass its own environmental bill of rights.

With the right plan, the right environmental standards and enforcement, the oil sands can generate the wealth Alberta needs to make the transition to a green economy, creating green jobs – and a brighter, cleaner, sustainable economy for future generations of Albertans.

Water and the protection of same will play a major role in earning and retaining public support. Poorly managed, an energy strategy could result in nightmarish consequences. However, if we can communicate the importance of environmental sustainability, the impact could be minimal.

The provincial government's Water for Life strategy was developed a few years ago and was not hugely supported by the environmental lobby in Alberta.

That being said, it at least established a set of guidelines and processes in following governance on water usage and conservation in Alberta. What all of us as Albertans must demand is the active participation in a review of the guidelines and processes on a regular basis to ensure accountability and long- term protection of our diminishing water source.

A new measure or initiative has been brought forward by the Alberta government that comes as a result of the over-allocation of water from the Athabasca River for the

oil sands and as a result of public pressure from negative health effects upon the Athabasca and the Blackfoot First Nations people of Fort Smith. It is important that the committee comments on issues that impact on First Nations.

In moving forward the Committee recommends that we encourage members and future members of the committee to participate in the public process of Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs).

These public advocacy committees should have a broad impact on the environmental aspects of the river basins throughout Alberta and, with public support, the WPACs will advocate on behalf of all Albertans on the future of our water.

Over the past two years the Committee has focused on issues that affect both our everyday lives and the lives of future generations. These included:

- Oil-sands developments
 - Monitoring regulations/policy
 - Federal/provincial
 - Tailing ponds
- Water for life
 - Water management
 - WPACs
 - Water rights
- Nuclear energy
 - Public input on all planned nuclear power generation in Alberta
 - Public input on the transportation and disposal of all nuclear waste
- Electric generation of renewable power
 - Alberta wide
 - Wind and solar

At the last Alberta Federation of Labour biennial convention the Environment Committee sold to environmentally minded conventioners stickers of bullfrogs for \$2.00. The Committee raised \$320.00 which was donated to Carbon Zero Canada.

Again this year, the Environment Committee is selling bullfrog stickers for

\$2.00. The proceeds from this year's bullfrog sales will go to paying for the eco-friendly power generation for the four days of convention. The cost of Bullfrog Powering this convention for four days for an area of 10,000 square feet is \$207.19.

With the support of the Alberta Federation of Labour Executive Council, Bullfrog Power has been contracted to provide energy to convention. Bullfrog resources its power from both wind and hydro, both of which are eco-friendly sources of energy.

The Environment Committee will continue to challenge the Alberta government on environmental issues resulting from the oil sands. No one should hide from the truth. But, some balance is required. The Alberta government has committed to establishing a panel of experts to advise the government on building a monitoring and reporting

system. We, the citizens of Alberta, must demand that the monitoring data is publicly accessible.

Accountability is what is required. We do not need half-truths, misconceptions and myths propagated by opponents to the oil sands.

The members of the Alberta Federation of Labour Environment Committee would like to acknowledge the many years of support and tireless dedication given by Brother Tom Olenuk to the Alberta Federation of Labour's Environment Committee. Brother Tom was a well-respected union activist and dedicated environmentalist who died on November 19, 2010 at the age of 57.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Committee,

AFL ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE, 2009-2011

Rh'ena Oake, Chair	CUPE 1169
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Roxann Dreger	UNA
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Committee Members who served a partial term:

Jean Endruschat	CUPW-Edm.
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