



The Brief

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Alward government dodging shale gas moratorium

By JEAN LOUIS DEVEAU

Shale gas critics in New Brunswick say that two government-commissioned reports released in October are being used to give a green light to the development of an industry that is too risky for the province.

Dr. Eilish Cleary, the province's Chief Medical Officer, was tasked with examining the potential public health impacts of shale gas development in New Brunswick and making recommendations aimed at preventing or mitigating those impacts.

The Alward government announced in early October that they would not be releasing the study. After public outcry, the Alward government reversed its decision and released the report on October 15th.

Stephanie Merrill, CCNB Action's Shale Gas Alert Coordinator found comfort in Dr. Cleary's health review: "For the first time in over two years, a government issued report openly acknowledges that the shale gas industry has serious health impacts and those impacts will come to New Brunswick if the industry is allowed to proceed."

The N.B. College of Family Physicians passed a resolution calling for a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing for shale gas last April. The association, which represents 700 doctors in the province, wants a moratorium put into place until studies are done and it can be shown whether the benefits outweigh the risks.

Shale gas opponents say hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, for shale gas is a public health concern because the industry has a track record of leaving behind contaminated drinking water, polluted air and emotional duress at its sites of operation in Texas, Pennsylvania and Wyoming. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo softened his support for shale gas when he announced last September that fracking in the state would have to wait until a review of the industry's potential public health impacts was completed.

The industry's critics point to Penobscis, a rural community adjacent to Sussex, as a place where the provincial government was not able to adequately regulate industry. The residents and their supporters say getting information from the government that is needed



Protests against shale gas, like the one seen here at the New Brunswick Legislature in March 2012, have been ongoing since 2010 when it was discovered that the former Graham government had issued shale gas licenses across the province. Photo by Stephanie Merrill.

to assess risk for the community is already a gruelling task.

"How can we expect the government in New Brunswick that has and continues to put industry ahead of the people of Penobscis to protect us from the impacts of shale gas? The Conservation Council is still waiting for information requested from the Department of Environment back in July on air quality in Penobscis. The Alward government is violating rules of responding to information requests within 30 days," says Merrill.

Dr. Louis LaPierre, a Professor Emeritus of Biology at Université de Moncton, was commissioned to hold public meetings and gather public opinions concerning the government's 116 recommendations for regulating a potential shale gas industry. LaPierre's report was released on October 15th.

LaPierre noted that there were few comments about the

government's regulations at those meetings. Instead, the public shared their concerns with how shale gas could affect their water, health and environment. Shale gas opponents are criticizing the conclusions of LaPierre's report, which they say are not derived from the data received.

"Dr. Cleary and Dr. LaPierre did not have the mandate to give the green light to shale gas, as seems to be reflected by government and media. Both reports support what the opposition has been saying," says Merrill. "New Brunswickers have been saying the risks are big and we aren't willing to assume them. Dr. LaPierre reports this as he heard it in the government-supported tour last summer and Dr. Cleary substantiates those risks, at least with respect to public health."

About 20 community groups from across the province released a statement on October 19th suggesting that LaPierre's recommendations and conclusions were based on opinion, not science.

Meaningful public consultation is another concern of the shale gas critics. The critics say that the handful of meetings chaired by LaPierre did not include the cities of New Brunswick or communities that could be most affected by the development of a shale gas sector.

"MLAs should hold meaningful public consultations on whether to allow or not allow shale gas development in New Brunswick. This consultation should start with legislative hearings, and later include public meetings on the government's final recommendations," says Dr. Caroline Lubbe-D'Arcy, a Fredericton dentist and active opponent of shale gas.

Shale gas opponents have noted that the Alward Conservatives criticized the previous Graham Liberal government for its lack of public consultation on the proposed sale of NB Power.

"The Alward government is guilty of the same undemocratic actions of forcing a decision on New Brunswickers that based on all the evidence collected could very well harm us in the future," says Dr. Lubbe-D'Arcy.

Dr. Jean Louis Deveau is a social scientist with the Fredericton Chapter of the Council of Canadians.

This line never stops! XL and E-coli: a memoir

By CHRISTOPHER WALKER

The major recall of E-coli contaminated meat from XL doesn't surprise me in the slightest. There may be some substance to calls for greater regulation and the resignation of Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz. But there is a deeper problem that no one in the elite media seems interested in addressing – the sweatshop working conditions at XL. I know it from personal experience.

Like many New Brunswick men, I went west at 19 to seek my fortune. One of my many jobs was in Alberta's now infamous XL Foods plant, which advertised "1,100 positions available." If you could wield a knife and obey basic commands, you started at \$8.50 an hour for a 40-hour week.

XL specialized in workers within arm's reach of homelessness, and had a reputation as one of the only places that would hire someone right out of prison. Onsite housing resembled jail cells, with 20 five-by-eight foot rooms in each of six trailers. The trailers were enclosed by 10-foot chain-link fences and there was security guarding the gate 24/7. These living conditions provided ample opportunity to get to know my co-workers. Alcoholism and smoking (pot as well as tobacco) were rampant. Some of my co-workers had struggled with crack addiction. A substantial portion were immigrants and transnational migrant workers. I lived with folks from Somalia, South Africa, the Philippines, Cambodia and Mexico, and of course lots of Maritimers.

Working conditions created high turnover, meaning XL was perpetually hiring. Nurses were onsite for frequent acute injuries. Even if you avoided serious injury, it was just a matter of time before tendonitis or some other chronic condition would flair up, terminating your "career." XL's business practices conformed to the


sweatshop model of profit perfectly: collect the poorest, most vulnerable workers in society, work them as hard as possible until their very capacity for work gives out, then throw them on the junk heap and hire new fodder for the mill. These practices hurt consumers as well as workers.

Allow me to illustrate. I worked in the ground beef department, cutting open improperly sealed packages and dumping the meat back into the grinder. The little metal clip and plastic packaging were dumped into the garbage. When the plastic and metal slipped into the grinder one day, I immediately found the foreman to stop production. We spent five minutes fishing the plastic and metal out of the machine. When production resumed, he grabbed me by my collar and said, "This line never stops! If you do that again you're fired!" I would like to pretend that when it happened again, I experienced a moral dilemma and thought about some kid biting into a burger and spending the rest of the day at the dentist getting his shattered teeth rebuilt, but I didn't. No one noticed, so I kept my mouth shut and kept my job.

In the choice between eating and doing the right thing, eating wins every time. I can remember a co-worker whose job was testing for E-coli complaining that the foreman would not let him do his job properly, and would ship meat that had not been tested. It would be easy to judge the foreman and say he was unethical and a bully. But if you look a little deeper, he had a quota to meet. If he didn't get a certain amount of product out the door each shift he would be fired. Dad can't pay for college unless he has a job.

So the point is this: the very structure of the XL model ensures that all sorts of corners get cut. Production demands are such that health and safety come second to productivity. When workers are barely able to make ends meet, and can lose their jobs at a moment's notice, well, these conditions do not breed moral courage. As this scandal plays out maybe some heads will roll and maybe some new government

inspectors will be hired. But it is my firm assertion that until we ask the question, "is there a better way to organize production?" these outbreaks will continue well into the future. It would be totally irrational to suppose otherwise.



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