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Gas emissions harm cattle

U of A study first to link animal health to sulphur dioxide

Larry Johnsrude

The Edmonton Journal

Thursday, March 04, 2004

EDMONTON - Cattle exposed to sulphur dioxide, an airborne byproduct of petroleum production, require up to 10 per cent more feed and suffer from weakened immune systems, says a new study on the effect of air pollution on livestock.

The three-year University of Alberta study is the first to link animal health to sulphur dioxide, released into the atmosphere during flaring at gas wells, during sour gas production and gas well blowouts and line leaks.

The research sheds new light on a decades-old controversy about the effects of sour gas plant pollution on surrounding areas.

Although the oil industry has cut down on sulphur emissions from oil and sour gas wells, Bob Christopherson, a U of A professor, found that cattle can be affected by breathing only small amounts of the noxious gas.

"Even at low levels of sulphur dioxide, cattle have greater feed requirements," said Christopherson, a specialist in animal physiology at the U of A.

"They are also more susceptible to infection."

Environmentalist Martha Kostuch, a longtime critic of sour gas production and gas well flaring, said the study confirms flaring should be stopped.

Kostuch, a veterinarian from central Alberta, said health problems in cattle range from respiratory damage to reduced fertility rates.

"This study confirms that even low levels of sulphur dioxide emissions are a significant problem," she said.

Exposure to sulphur dioxide has long been suspected in poor growth rates and respiratory disease in cattle.

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The findings will likely add to the tension between the beef and oil industries.

"It confirms that small levels of sulphur dioxide can be harmful," said Gene Rawe, manager of animal health for the Alberta Beef Producers association.

"The oil industry is doing a lot better in reducing emissions.

"But the effect it is still having on animal health requires more investigation."

It comes as beef producers are already struggling with billions of dollars in lost markets due to the mad cow crisis.

An official with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers said the industry continues to reduce sulphur emissions.

"We've reduced emissions by 20 per cent in the last couple of years and sulphur reduction is an ongoing project," John Squarek said.

A separate study, involving Saskatchewan and British Columbia as well as Alberta, is examining the effects of oil and gas well flaring on the environment, including human and animal health.

In the U of A study, financed by the Alberta Beef Producers and the federal and provincial agriculture departments, 36 head of cattle between the ages of six and 18 were exposed to levels of sulphur dioxide ranging from one to 20 parts per million in a controlled environment to replicate levels they might encounter if raised near oil and gas development.

Christopherson said the animals showed measurable damage to their lungs and the suppression of their immune systems, which could make them more likely to contract infectious diseases.

He also said their metabolism increased, particularly in the winter months, to a point where they required 10 per cent more feed to achieve the same growth.

He said the long-term effect of exposure is not known. His study didn't include fertility rates.

"Our results suggest there needs to be a continual monitoring," he said.

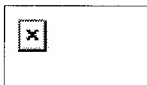
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0005-003
Email Paramount
Re: Kakisa participants.

Kimberley Cliffe-Phillips

From: Shirley Maaskant [Shirley.Maaskant@paramountres.com]
Sent: Tuesday, March 02, 2004 4:30 PM
To: Kimberley Cliffe-Phillips
Subject: Re: Kakisa Community Meeting Notes - Paramount EA

Paramount submits the following comments on the Kakisa notes and attendance list:

Attendance List - Add Lloyd Doyle, Paramount; change #3 Nadine to member of Gowlings, not Paramount; change #4 Neil to member of Allnorth Consultants

Kakisa Notes - I am faxing you our "suggested" changes.

>>> "Kimberley Cliffe-Phillips" <Kimberley@mveirb.nt.ca> 3/1/2004 2:07:13 PM >>>

Please see attached.

<<faxcover - Kakisa Meeting Notes (Mar01-04).pdf>> <<Kakisa Meeting Attendance (Mar01-04).pdf>> <<Kakisa Meeting Notes (Mar01-04).pdf>>

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