

LEVEL OF DESCRIPTION:

Series

No.:

AU023.008S

FORMS PART OF:

AU023 Martha Kostuch fonds

TITLE:

Sour gas series

CREATOR:

Kostuch, Martha

DATE RANGE:

1977-2008

EXTENT:

7.23 meters of textual records and other material

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY/BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

In 1978, Martha Kostuch made a connection between high sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emissions from sour gas plants in the Rocky Mountain House, Alberta area, with an increase in animal diseases and deaths, which she encountered in her veterinary practice. She looked at the emission standards and pollution controls for sour gas producers as regulated by the Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB), later known as Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (EUB), and found them defective and substandard. She also discovered that if an infraction was committed, often the penalties were nonexistent or inadequate. Various people who lived in the downwind plume of the sour gas plants provided Kostuch with information about serious health concerns, animal health issues and water problems they were also facing. They also attributed these issues to high SO₂ emissions and their complaints to the EUB or the gas producing companies had rarely been followed up or taken seriously by those contacted.

In 1981, when the two gas companies at the Ram River and Strachan sour gas plants applied for an increase in production, Kostuch intervened. At a public hearing, Kostuch presented her case for higher SO₂ emissions capture. She was successful in her bid and the EUB changed their regulations to reflect the new, higher standards. She continued to monitor applications to the EUB, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) or Alberta Environment for changes, renewals and increases to sour gas production or transmission of sour gas. She often intervened by citing higher SO₂ capture was needed, along with better and safer company regulations and emergency response plans.

When Martha Kostuch first started questioning the applications and approvals in the 1980s, her ideas were not taken seriously by the EUB and the wealthy gas producing companies, therefore, she often turned to the media to bring her concerns to the public. Several times, in conjunction with other environment groups, Kostuch had to resort to a media blitz and/or a letter writing campaign to bring pressure on the EUB or ASRD to hold public hearings or environmental impact assessments. She was tireless in her pursuit of reducing SO₂ emissions to the lowest possible measure and in striving to ensure the public was safe from blowouts and accidental leaks. She explored all possible avenues under legislation, EUB rules and regulations, health studies and scientific reports to back her cause. She was quoted in newspapers saying that she wasn't anti-industry, realizing jobs were important, but wanted industry to be constantly environmentally responsible, to take human and animal health concerns seriously and to share wilderness areas with the public. Kostuch soon became known throughout the gas industry as someone who would not back down and eventually the gas industry accepted that their applications would be thoroughly reviewed by Kostuch and openly criticized and challenged at public hearings, in the media or through the legal system if she found them inadequate.

During the mid to late 1990s, there was a demand in the marketplace for natural gas and for sulphur to be used in fertilizer. An area south east of the Rocky Mountains had an extremely large reservoir of sour gas, and when the price for that commodity increased, the area exploded with industry activity. Drilling, exploration and pipeline companies clamored to submit applications for approval and Kostuch was very busy intervening. In one instance, the EUB received simultaneous applications from Shell Canada Limited and Husky Oil Limited for the Caroline Development Project to increase production and transmission of sour gas. This competition for the resources went to a public hearing where Kostuch was asked by the EUB to review the applications and submit her opinion.

During this time, Kostuch was on several environmental boards including, the Environmental Council of Alberta (ECA), and the Alberta Environmental Network (AEN). Eventually, a regularly scheduled series of meetings were set up between the ECA, the EUB and industry representatives, where new regulatory controls for drilling, production and transmission of sour gas were negotiated and written into the EUB Directives as law. Also included, were harsher penalties for infractions.

Kostuch also met regularly with representatives from the Ram River and Strachan sour gas plants to ensure regulations were being adhered to, and to offer suggestions for improvements. As well, in 2005, she became a member of the Tay River Advisory Committee to monitor a large gas find in that area. She was never in favor of sour gas production, and she never quit fighting to ensure that it was the least harmful to the environment that she could make it.

CUSTODIAL HISTORY:

In April 2008, Martha Kostuch signed an agreement with Athabasca University to have her records digitized but she passed away before this work could be started. After her death on April 23, 2008, her records went into the custody of her son Edward and in July 2008, he donated the records to Athabasca University, Athabasca, Alberta.

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

The series consists of material pertaining to Kostuch's work to have new and tougher sour gas industry regulations legislated through the EUB, which forced gas producers to be environmentally aware and accountable. The new regulations included a reduced SO₂ emissions cap, updated safety regulations for plants and pipelines, a new requirement, an emergency response plan as well as stiffer penalties. The records also include materials concerning the Shell Caroline pipeline leak in 1994.

Textual records in this series includes; applications and supporting documentation, reports, site drawings and maps as submitted to the EUB for approval from industry, legal documents, briefs submitted to public hearings from interveners, including Martha Kostuch, reports of EUB hearings, studies, correspondence, newspaper clippings, newsletters, notes, and magazine articles written by Kostuch and others. As well, much of the material has been annotated by Kostuch.

Photographs in this series depict images of the Shell Canada pipeline and leak, Nova Corporation installing a new sour gas pipeline, animals health problems, sour gas fires, a hot pipeline and a gas plant. The transparencies depict damage to vegetation from SO₂ emissions. The 3 posters are of photographs taken by Canadian Hunter Exploration Company for a pipeline crossing application. The electronic records are of applications to process sour gas and reports on sour gas and of reports on SO₂ emissions.

SOURCE OF TITLE:

Title taken from the contents of the fonds.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Series also includes -170 maps. -85 site plans. – 64 photographs. -26 transparencies. -6 optical. – 3 posters.– 1 floppy disk.

CONSERVATION:

Conservation copies have been made of some of the newspaper clippings, thermal fax paper and mimeograph paper.

ARRANGEMENT NOTE:

Series have been based on the major topics identified from the creator's arrangement, though some records may pertain to a number of series.

LANGUAGE NOTE:

The material is in English.

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

None.

USE CONDITIONS:

Permission for use required. Subject to *The Copyright Act*.

FINDING AIDS:

Box list and file list are available. Some of the material is available in electronic form.

INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING ACCESSIONS:

2008.015

Further accruals are not expected.

ASSOCIATED MATERIAL:

Other records pertaining to the Energy Resources Conservation Board can be found in the Alberta. Department of Energy and Natural Resources fonds and the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board sous-fonds at the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta and the Alsands Project press clippings collection at the Glenbow Archives in Calgary, Alberta.

GENERAL NOTE:

Information for the administrative history was obtained from the records and from *The Edmonton Journal*, *Calgary Herald* and *Red Deer Advocate* newspapers.

SUBJECT HEADINGS:

Natural gas - - Law and legislation

Oil and gas leases

Natural gas, pipe lines

Natural gas, reserves

Gas wells

Environmental policy

Industrial laws and legislation