

# **2016 AER Peace River Survey Executive Summary**

**Alberta Energy Regulator**

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## Background

The Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) has conducted public opinion research to measure awareness and confidence levels related to AER initiatives in the Peace River area to reduce odours associated with cold heavy oil production.

## Objectives

- To measure familiarity with and determine perceptions of the AER among the general public and landowners in the Peace River area
- To measure awareness of and familiarity with the issue of odour emissions in the Peace River area
- To measure awareness of and familiarity with the proceeding that the AER held in the Peace River area, including the resulting decision and recommendations
- To measure awareness of AER activities that have occurred as a result of the Peace River proceeding, which includes introduction of new requirements, subsequent scientific work, and inspections and compliance sweeps
- To measure confidence levels of the AER among the general public and landowners in the Peace River area

## Methodology

305 random telephone interviews of Albertans aged 18 and over living in the Peace River area were conducted between January 14 to January 20, 2016. The margin of error for the survey is  $\pm 5.6$  percentage points 19 times out of 20. The results could not be compared to any baseline because this was the AER's first targeted stakeholder survey in the Peace River area.

## Cost of Research

EnviroNics Research was selected as the vendor following a competitive process. Total cost of the research project was \$21 000.

## Overview of Findings

Total awareness of the regulator and its role in regulating energy development (aided and unaided) was at 72%. Out of those who expressed familiarity with the AER, 69% reported feeling somewhat or very confident that the organization can effectively regulate the oil and gas industry in Alberta.

Peace River residents' opinion of industry regulation is positive, with 54% of respondents indicating the oil and gas industry is being regulated at least somewhat well with and 19% indicating it is being regulated very well.

When asked about key AER regulatory responsibilities, residents reported strong levels of confidence, with higher scores in ensuring public safety (82%) and ensuring appropriate industry response (78%) and lower scores in environmental protection (68%) and enforcement (64%).

Perceptions related to companies operating in the area are positive, with 77% of the Peace River area residents indicating they have a positive impression about companies involved in developing and producing energy from the oil sands.

Awareness of odour issues in the Peace River area is very high, with 76% indicating they definitely or likely heard or saw something about it. Only 15% of respondents reported noticing the odours themselves within the past six months. Of that 15%, 43% reported odours within the past month, 38% between one and six months ago and 21% in the past week. When asked if they felt the situation is better, worse, or about the same as it was compared to two years ago, 48% of residents aware of the odour issue say it is about the same, 32% reported it is either much or somewhat better, and 7% reported it is worse.

When asked about awareness of any official proceedings regarding the Peace River odour problem, residents are evenly divided (50% no, 49% yes), with 9% of those aware indicating they were involved with or attended the proceedings. Of those who were aware, 47% indicated they are familiar with decisions or outcomes, and when asked about what the outcomes were, most (43%) made general comments about requiring the local oil and gas companies to reduce odours or emissions. In addition, some can name specific outcomes, such as enforcement (13%), reduction of venting/flaring (10%), regional air monitoring (10%), tank cleaning (9%), and legal actions (9%).

Peace River area residents reporting an awareness of actions that have taken place to address the odours was at 38%, with 20% naming the AER as the organization responsible. When those unaware were informed of the AER's role, 56% reported that the AER's actions have been at least somewhat effective, while 28% indicated they have not been effective.

When asked about media recall, 61% of Peace River area residents recall having seen, read, or heard mentions of the AER in the media. Among those exposed to media, most recall traditional media sources such as TV coverage (45%), newspaper articles (33%), word of mouth (17%), radio (15%), and a newspaper insert (13%). Online sources also provided opportunities for Peace River area residents to learn about the AER, with 13% reporting the Internet and 10% reporting social media as media sources.

## Use of Findings

The Peace River survey allows the AER to measure awareness, recall, and confidence in the Peace River area related to initiatives to reduce odours associated with cold heavy oil production. The results will be used as a performance measure for outcome 5, "Increase public confidence in the AER regulatory system in the Peace River area," on the [Peace River Performance Dashboard](#). As this is the first survey completed

since the Peace River proceeding, these results will serve as a baseline measure that will allow for future tracking of public opinion.

In addition, the AER uses the results of opinion research to better understand concerns of Albertans and stakeholders in the preparation of public information and communications materials and to support engagement efforts.

## **Contact Information**

Contact our 24-hour media line at 1-855-474-6356 or one of our media contacts. See more at:

<http://www.aer.ca/about-aer/contact-us/media-contacts>