



Inspections and Enforcement of Energy Developments in Alberta

This EnerFAQs focuses on the role of the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) in the inspection of energy activities in Alberta. Key to the safe, efficient, orderly, and environmentally responsible development of Alberta's energy resources are the rules and standards by which energy resource activities must operate, and the inspection of those activities and enforcement of those rules.

» **Who is responsible for the inspection of energy facilities in Alberta?**

The AER is responsible for inspecting energy resource activities and ensuring all requirements are followed by enforcing the various standards, specifications, and conditions within our authority.

» **Why does the AER do inspections?**

The AER works to ensure compliance with all requirements through inspections, surveillance activities, early intervention, and education. All of these activities are conducted through the AER's compliance assurance program on behalf of our stakeholders. By conducting inspections, the AER ensures that energy resource activity in Alberta occurs in a manner that is safe, protects the environment, and adheres to all regulatory requirements. For more information about compliance assurance, visit the AER's website at www.aer.ca.



» What does the AER inspect?

AER employees carry out inspections on Alberta's oil, natural gas, oil sands, coal, in situ and pipeline activities, and exploration activities, and on public and private lands where energy resource activity occurs. Routine inspections include

- scheduled inspections based on operator history, site sensitivity, and inherent risk of the facility or operation;
- nonscheduled, unannounced inspections based on reports or complaints from the public; and
- inspections to ensure that procedures and equipment are in use to minimize environmental impacts.

» Where are the AER inspectors located?

The AER has inspectors in 12 locations throughout Alberta.

» What authority do AER inspectors have?

Generally, AER inspectors have the power to enter a site to do the following during inspections:

- take samples;
- conduct tests or take measurements;
- require that information, data, records, reports, and documents be provided;
- record, or take copies or extracts of, information data, records, reports, and documents;
- use computer systems to examine available data;
- use copying equipment to make copies of information;
- make reasonable inquires of any person;
- take photographs or electronic or audio-visual records;
- remove from the site information, data, records, reports, and documents for examination;
- require that equipment is operated or set in motion under conditions that the AER specifies; and
- use or move any machine, structure, material, or equipment to carry out the inspection.

AER inspectors also have the authority to impose remedial measures, such as shutting in a well or shutting down a facility if necessary. As well, inspectors may issue a stop order requiring the partial or total halting of an activity or land use.

» How often do AER inspectors check energy facilities?

Inspections are made at selected stages of an energy resource activity, depending on the type of activity and its inspection history. Inspections are also often conducted as a result of complaints or incidents, or could be triggered by an operator's history.

» **How is a well or facility chosen for an inspection?**

AER field inspections are prioritized based on the weighting of the following three key criteria, referred to as OSI: operator history, site sensitivity, and inherent risk of the facility or operation or activity.

- **Operator history:** A review of an operator's compliance history to allow AER inspectors to focus more closely on companies with higher levels of noncompliance or unsatisfactory inspections.
- **Site sensitivity:** An evaluation of the area where the operation is taking place for factors such as proximity to the public or bodies of water, and for areas where there have previously been significant public concern with energy resource activities.
- **Inherent risk:** A review of specific technical details about the facility, such as well depth, complexity of the operation, and whether the facility is sweet or sour.

The AER also carries out nonscheduled, unannounced inspections based on reports or complaints from the public, and inspections to ensure that procedures and equipment are in use to minimize environmental impacts.

» **How detailed are these inspections?**

Inspectors check to ensure that operators are following sound operating practices and meeting all AER requirements and conditions of approval. AER inspectors will explain rules and analyze procedures with the operator to ensure high standards of operational performance around safety and environmental performance.

» **What happens when unsatisfactory items are found during an inspection?**

Depending on how serious the problem is, AER inspectors may give the operator time to correct the unsatisfactory items. However, if there is danger to people or the environment, a facility can be immediately shut down or the activity will be ordered to stop until the problem is addressed.

» **What happens if the problems are not corrected?**

Where an operator fails to take corrective action, the AER has enforcement tools such as administrative penalties, prosecution, enforcement orders, and the shutting down of an operation until full compliance is demonstrated. The use of these tools depend on the noncompliance identified. For example, a company failing to submit a required monitoring report would face less severe consequences than releasing a toxic substance into the environment, which would result in serious consequences, including the possibility of prosecution.

Also, if an operator is unable or unwilling to correct a problem or take appropriate measures within a specified period, the AER may shut down the facility or order that the activity taking place on the land be stopped.

» **Where do I call with questions or complaints about a specific site?**

First, call the company's local office and raise your concerns. Company information may be found on the sign outside of the lease. If a company does not rectify your concerns, contact the AER.

» **What if I don't know the name of the company?**

Call the Energy and Environmental 24-hour Response Line (1-800-222-6514), explain the problem, and give the location of the well or facility; field staff will then make the necessary inquiries. The AER responds to all public complaints. AER inspectors will contact the company, determine the problem, order corrections when necessary, and report back to you.

The process of identifying the problem, specifying corrective action, and following up to ensure that a problem has been resolved is a standard sequence of events for an AER inspector.

» **Should I contact a government department myself?**

Yes, if you know who is responsible for your particular concern. If you are unsure, call the Energy and Environmental 24-Hour Response Line (1-800-222-6514) and staff will give you a contact name and telephone number.

For more information on these or any other energy-related issues, visit the AER's website at www.aer.ca.

» **Who makes the rules and sets the standards for energy development?**

The AER establishes many of the rules governing energy facilities, operation, and activity in the province. However, other government departments are also involved. For example, the AER operates under the policies of the Government of Alberta and applicable requirements established under the specified enactments.

By means of Alberta's "one-window" approach to energy development, companies submit all applications for energy facilities to the AER, which informs and involves government departments according to established agreements.

» Additional Information

For more information on the AER and its processes or if you wish to speak with your local field centre or have general questions about oil and gas in the province of Alberta, contact the AER's Customer Contact Centre: Monday to Friday (8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at 1-855-297-8311 (toll free).

This document is part of the EnerFAQs series, which explains the AER's regulations and processes as they relate to specific energy issues. Please visit www.aer.ca to read more of the EnerFAQs series.

Every year the AER collects, compiles, and publishes a large amount of technical data and information about Alberta's energy development and resources for use by both industry and the general public. This includes raw data, statistics, hearing materials, and information on rules, policies, and decisions. Publications may be either viewed at the AER library or obtained from the Information Product Services Section (IPSS). Both are housed on the tenth floor of the AER head office in Calgary. Publications may also be downloaded free of charge from the AER website www.aer.ca.

To obtain a print or CD copy of a specific publication, contact IPSS by phone (403-297-8190), fax (403-297-7040), or e-mail ([infoservices@aer.ca](mailto:infoservices@ aer.ca)).

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