

Environmental group blasts oil-by-rail report

Proposal to use trains circumvents rigorous scrutiny, ForestEthics says

Steven Chua, The Canadian Press

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A task force report has been handed in to the British Columbia and Alberta governments that examines the idea of transporting oilsands crude via rail if proposed pipelines don't get the green light, government documents show. It's an idea the environmental group ForestEthics calls "underhanded."

It's a "backdoor way for industry to bring tankers to the coast without the same sort of public oversight or public process that we've had around the Enbridge pipeline or would have around the Kinder Morgan pipeline," said Ben West, the campaign director for ForestEthics.

A joint provincial working group was announced in July by premiers Alison Redford and Christy Clark, of Alberta and B.C. respectively.

The group was to develop recommendations for the two provinces related to energy exports and the opening of new export markets for products like bitumen, including pipeline and rail transport.

"Rail can be considered a viable alternative to pipeline movement based on costs of transport," state the terms of reference for the working group.

"If pipelines are not developed, rail will step into the void to deliver bitumen to the West Coast."

West said the report raises safety questions, especially in light of two recent and highprofile train accidents. Oil transport by rail has become a contentious topic since a train containing crude oil derailed and exploded in Lac-Mégantic, Que., last July, killing 47 people.

Another train carrying crude exploded last month in North Dakota.

There were no injuries in that incident.

"Myself and other people were pretty freaked out about what happened there," West said of the two fiery blasts.

The provincial working group was mandated to submit a report to both leaders by the end of December.

An Alberta government official did not respond to a question about the completion and release of the report, while an official in Clark's office said the report is complete but no date has been set for a public release.

CN Rail declined to comment.

The task force is led by Steve Carr, deputy minister of natural gas development in B.C., and Grant Sprague, deputy minister of energy in Alberta.

No one from either ministry could be reached for comment.