

# EnCana gets overhaul approval



Antelope move across a road near gas-production facilities in the Jonah field last summer. EnCana Oil and Gas (USA) Inc. will overhaul 32 of its gas-condensate production facilities in the field later this year. (Jeff Gearino/Star-Tribune)

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GREEN RIVER -- State officials have approved a request by gas-producing giant EnCana to tweak its ozone-causing emissions in the lucrative Jonah field as part of a production facilities overhaul.

EnCana Oil and Gas (USA) Inc. received Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality permission to reduce the company's volatile organic compounds emissions while increasing nitrogen oxide emissions in the Jonah field, Director John Corra said in a decision issued April 1.

EnCana requested the permit change as part of an overhaul of 32 of the company's gas-condensation production facilities in the field. EnCana is Sublette County's single largest gas producer and the biggest operator in the field.

Potentially poisonous ozone gas is created by chemical reactions between nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds in the atmosphere in the presence of sunlight.

The Pinedale area has been plagued by dangerous ground-level ozone for the past few winters, prompting health warnings from the state on occasion.

Scientists believe the principal source of both air pollutants is the emissions from the industrial facilities and motor vehicle exhaust in the Jonah field.

A handful of Sublette County residents spoke overwhelmingly against EnCana's attempt to amend its DEQ Air Quality Division permits during a public hearing in February. They worried the move would undermine efforts to reduce harmful ozone levels in the Upper Green River Basin in southwest Wyoming and could actually increase levels of the dangerous pollutant.

EnCana will be allowed to increase its nitrogen oxides emissions in the Jonah field by about 77 tons per year under the permit change.

Company officials said that would be offset by an emission reduction of about 525 tons in volatile organic compounds.

## **Credit banking**

The amended permit will allow EnCana to use a "credit banking" process that allows the company to increase nitrogen oxides while cutting back drastically on volatile organic compounds emissions.

State officials believe the key to reducing ground-level ozone is to cut both nitrogen oxide and volatile organic

compound emissions. Scientists say the tricky part is to know when and where to cut the emissions.

Under state rules, a portion of any net emission reduction may be used to offset emissions from new sources, with the remainder being "banked" as an emissions credit available for use to offset future net emission increases.

EnCana officials said the company plans to use its excess volatile organic compounds emissions credits to offset the expected increases in nitrogen oxides emissions resulting from the overhaul of the 32 gas-condensation production facilities later this year.

The Upper Green River Basin has registered at least slightly elevated ozone levels in three of the past four winters.

Researchers now recognize that the estimated 5,000 natural gas wells in the Jonah and nearby Pinedale Anticline fields have a lot to do with that trend. The DEQ drafted an interim plan last summer that called for reductions in both pollutants to help combat the problem.

Last month, Gov. Dave Freudenthal asked the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to designate Sublette County as a "nonattainment" area for dangerous ozone levels.

If the EPA approves the designation, Wyoming will have three years to develop an implementation plan to solve the problem. The state will likely have a decade or more to fix the ozone problems once the plan is developed.

Corra and other DEQ officials will meet with Pinedale area residents Thursday to discuss air quality issues and the recommendation for the ozone nonattainment designation.

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