

Bulletin 2011-21

June 30, 2011

The Practice of Boiling Produced Water as a Means of Disposal in the Upstream Petroleum Industry

The purpose of this bulletin is to clarify the position of the Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB/Board) on the practice of boiling produced water as a means of disposal in the upstream petroleum industry. The ERCB has become aware that certain licensees/operators have been using modified storage tanks as a process vessel to boil water produced in conjunction with hydrocarbons as a means of disposal. Although only a small number of licensees/operators appear to be using this technique at this time, the ERCB would like to notify all ERCB licensees and prospective licensees that boiling produced water and dispersing it into the atmosphere is not an ERCB authorized disposal method.

Deep well disposal is the most common method of onshore disposal of produced water in North America. The ERCB also acknowledges other methods such as water reuse and recycling. The ERCB has canvassed a number of other jurisdictions and is not aware of any jurisdictions that permit disposal of produced water by boiling it off into the atmosphere.

Licensees and operators are also reminded that Section 39(1)(c) of the *Oil and Gas Conservation Act (OGCA)* requires that schemes for the gathering, storage, and disposal of water produced in conjunction with oil or gas production require prior ERCB approval. Section 8.040 of the *Oil and Gas Conservation Regulations (OGCR)* requires that all water produced at a well or facility must be disposed of in accordance with Section 39 of the *OGCA*.

The ERCB has reviewed the equipment configuration and processes that licensees/operators are currently using to boil-off produced water and has determined that these systems present safety, conservation, and environmental concerns and hence, are not acceptable. In addition, the use of any storage tank as a process vessel is not acceptable. Any licensees/operators currently using any technique involving boiling produced water as a means of disposal and not currently in active communication with ERCB staff about its use must disclose all operation(s)/sites at which they are boiling produced water and submit plans to immediately discontinue this practice. All disclosures must be submitted electronically by e-mail to Directive_055-StorageApps@ercb.ca by August 15, 2011.

Official copies of the *OGCA* and the *OGCR* are available from the Queen's Printer, main floor, Park Plaza, 10611 – 98 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta; telephone: 780-427-2952; Web site: www.qp.alberta.ca.¹ The *OGCA* and *OGCR* are also available on the ERCB Web site www.ercb.ca.

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¹ As a service to its customers, the ERCB makes every effort to make the most up-to-date versions of ERCB-administered acts and regulations available on its Web site www.ercb.ca. However, the Queen's Printer is the official source of all acts and regulations within the Province of Alberta.