



Cloudy Thursday.
See Page A2

HIGH **-19C** LOW **-26C**

INSIDE

COUNT



Rare sighting of albino grosbeak among record numbers of birds spotted

City/A3

MOB TALK



Oil Barons playing solid and getting wins

Sports/B1

COMMENT

More health-care problems below the surface than doctor's letter

Perspective/A4

SARS

Emergency Outpatients

急症室

Nuclear power for the oilsands under study

Regional councillor wants other energy sources examined first

By **RENATO GANDIA**
Today staff
and *The Canadian Press*

The debate on nuclear power for the oilsands is expected to mushroom again after a consortium including a research arm of the Alberta government said a proposal is expected by the end of January.

Four unnamed companies have expressed interest in using energy from nuclear reactors in three Alberta locations — including two in the oilsands, said Wayne Henuset of Calgary-based Energy Alberta Corp.

Henuset said Tuesday that greenhouse gas concerns have pushed nuclear power in Alberta from a pie-in-the-sky concept to a viable alternative.

But Wood Buffalo regional John Vyboh told *Today* Albertans are not sold on the idea of nuclear power for the oilsands.

"I think what people really want to see is alternative energy up here. Given the climactic weather patterns that we've been seeing, I think people would really like to see us go to more renewable energy forms whether it happens to be solar or wind-driven or something that's thermal," Vyboh said this morning in an interview.

The longtime Fort McMurray resident said nuclear energy is the last thing "people really want to see ... no matter how clean they make it sound, you're always one accident away from a major disaster."

Meanwhile, a local member of a group that calls itself Environmentalists for Nuclear Energy said the oilsands maybe "starving other industries of much needed natural gas for their operations."

The petrochemical, fertilizer, potash pulp and paper industries cannot compete with the oilsands demands and capability to generate and buy natural gas, Gary Lewis said.

The group was founded in France and has a Canadian office in Ontario, where most of Canada's atomic electricity generation is produced.

The Oilsands extraction process, especially the so-called steam assisted gravity drainage, uses a huge amount of natural gas.

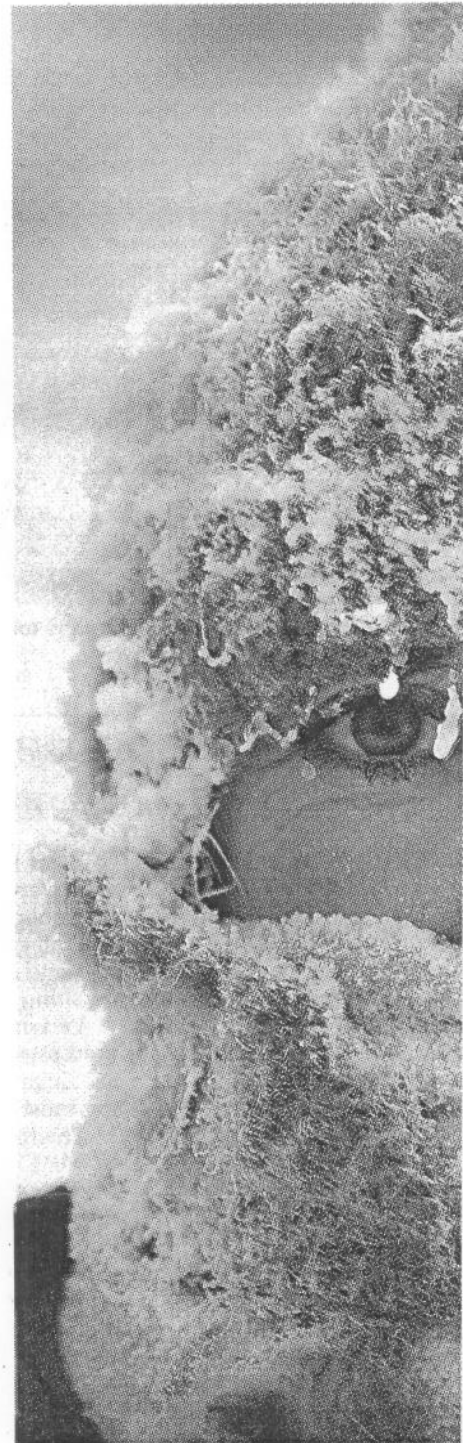
"Although the cost of natural gas is somewhat lower now it has reached levels in the past that made it difficult for these industries to compete with the oilsands and some unfortunately have gone out of business," Lewis said.

"We're using far too much natural gas in the oilsands extraction," he said, adding anytime he brings up the topic there are a few sympathetic people saying it sounds that nuclear would be great for steam assisted extraction.

Lewis also stressed that nuclear power is much more environmentally-friendly because it doesn't produce greenhouse gases, an opinion espoused by Henuset.

"It's becoming more of an essential need because of global warming," Henuset said, adding that a \$3-billion Candu reactor could be operational in Alberta in 2015. "They can't be using the atmosphere as a dumping ground anymore — societies won't allow it. It's the world changing, not because of some scientist talking about global warming: people just look outside and see the effects."

Almost all of Canada's 20 nuclear power plants operate in Ontario, with one each in Quebec and New Brunswick.



CARRY ON, FROSTY — Letter carrier I daily deliveries as the postal worker s faced the -25 C conditions while makin

SNO

Crews s

By Today staff

The hard stuff packed onto city st stay where it is for the time being.

"The cold weather has hardened t pack to the point where it is better to le the roads until we can haul it away," s Elder on Tuesday in a statement.

Instead, four crews are in the p removing accumulated snow where it pushed to the roadsides, and a fifth ("help alleviate concerns with the (h snow) being left after the preliminary f Elder said.

Snow removal has been finished i Creek and crews are now working in Th

Ministe



**Report finds fault
with health
system's response
to disease**

Canada/A6

TAKING A TOLL



**Violence in Iraq
results in 13 deaths**

World/A8

COPING



**Alzheimer's hard on
victims, loves ones**

City/A3

Although natural gas prices are currently fairly low, the long-term supply in northern Alberta won't last through the lifetime of the oilsands megaprojects expected to come onstream over the next decade.

The feasibility study is designed to look at other options, while acknowledging that any new energy sources are likely years off.

The Alberta Energy Research Institute (AERI), the federal government and several unnamed companies have expressed interest in the feasibility study, said project coordinator Soheil Asgarpour.

Vyboh said he is leery about such a feasibility study, saying such a move is opening the door towards convincing people of a "very unsafe energy form."

"I would certainly rather see these companies do some type of feasibility studies on environmentally-friendly energy forms."

He also questioned why the four companies interested in the study are unnamed.

"I think that's a tell-tale sign that they're not perhaps completely certain about this type of technology. I've always believed that if you feel strongly about something then you're not afraid to associate yourself with it."

A nuclear power plant would require approval from provincial and federal regulators. No nuclear plant has ever been built in Western Canada and Asgarpour admits it could be a long shot.

"Usually reactors are much, much larger than we need for oilsands projects," said Asgarpour, director of heavy oil and upgrading at Energy INet, a research organization that works with industry and stakeholders.

At this point, no government or industry group has committed to paying for the study.

The move comes amid pressure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and burgeoning development in northern Alberta which has companies such as Husky Energy and Total SA of France looking at alternatives to natural gas.

Husky CEO John Lau said Tuesday his company is exploring nuclear as an option, but Total is not interested and has never actively considered nuclear power for oilsands development, said spokeswoman Christianne Wile.

"The company is very aware of the oilsands' dependence on natural gas and we are actively looking at ways to reduce our energy consumption," said Wile.

Alberta

By **RENATO GANDIA**

Today staff

and **The Canadian Press**

Alberta's new energy minister is supporters of new oilsands projects have consolidate their plans and could start with a "solid upgrading capacity in Alberta."

The issues surrounding planning for projects in the oilsands are not yet complete, Knight told **Today** in a telephone interview from Edmonton. "Certainly Husky and other companies have finished their plans and some of them will certainly be integrated and will end up with a solid upgrading capacity in Alberta."

Knight said the province is looking for a 20 per cent upgrading capacity in the province, leaving 20 per cent of the province's borders.

It's early days yet but with the early upgrading capacity seen in the approval queue for the Fort Saskatchewan area, Knight said, Alberta is a solid choice for upgrading.

On Monday, John Lau, chief executive of Husky Energy, warned of an infrastructure gap and that the province's foot-dragging on costs of building projects. Lau also said the province must deal with budget cuts and shortfalls in services in the McMurray region, otherwise companies will join the likes of EnCana, ConocoPhillips and locate their upgrading south of the border.