

Residents confused by Heartland power-line letters

BY DARCY HENTON AND HANNEKE BROOYMANS, EDMONTONJOURNAL.COM JANUARY 21, 2010

EDMONTON — Residents living along the preferred route for the Heartland transmission project are outraged and confused about letters they've received telling them they live along an eliminated route.

The controversy arose the same day the Alberta Utilities Commission announced a change meant to make the Heartland decision process more open and transparent.

The Heartland transmission project will bring electricity from coal-fired power plants west of Edmonton to the industrial area northeast of the city.

The project team, consisting of Epcor and AltaLink, recently announced that of the four potential routes it was considering it preferred the one that runs east along a transportation and utility corridor (TUC) south of Anthony Henday Drive and then north between Edmonton and Sherwood Park.

Recently, some residents living within 800 metres of the preferred route have received letters that included the following all-caps note in a highlighted box: "According to our records, your residence or property has been identified as being on one of the eliminated routes."

Recipients of the letter include members of the group Responsible Electricity Transmission for Albertans, some of whom live along the preferred route.

SURE TO CONFUSE

The letter is sure to confuse residents, many of whom may have originally intended to attend an open house on the project in Sherwood Park on Wednesday night, said Bryan Bradley, a RETA secretary.

"I really feel they did it on purpose and are just trying to throw off all the efforts that we've done. People who get that in Sherwood Park now will just look at that and go, 'Oh, wow, cool. I thought there was an article in the paper the other day saying it was coming this way and now it's gone.' To get everybody turned around and stirred up again is going to be a huge effort on our part."

Bradley lives along the east TUC route and received the letter advising him his residence is along an eliminated route. Other members of the RETA executive and board of directors living along the route received the same letter.

Epcor spokesman Tim le Riche acknowledged the team has received questions regarding covering letters on stakeholder packages that were recently sent out.

"We sent out 50,000 packages," he said in an e-mail. "We don't know yet how many people are affected, but it appears the issue is related to postal codes. We are working now to determine what happened."

He said the team regrets any confusion that may have been caused. RETA's members want the double-circuit 500-kilovolt line to be buried. One of their concerns has to do with the electromagnetic fields generated by the lines. Both the World Health Organization and the U.S. National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences have said exposure to electromagnetic fields cannot be considered entirely safe because of weak scientific evidence that exposure may pose a leukemia hazard.