

Supporters of underground route not reassured

POWER LINE

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Members of the group want the line to be buried.

June McNeil, a vice-president of RETA, said she wasn't relieved about the decision Wednesday. "I have a heavy heart for the people who live over there," she said about people living along the proposed route. "That's a lot of angst for the people who live there and a lot of worry. Getting it out of my backyard doesn't make it good. I don't think any Albertan should have it in their backyard. "I still think we need to all unite and have a very strong voice that wherever the line is, that it be buried."

John Kristensen, RETA's vice-president technical, said they're somewhat encouraged that an underground option is in the proposal, even if it is only 20 kilometres of the planned 65-km east route. But ultimately, that's not enough, as there are still lots of houses and environmentally sensitive areas along the remainder of the route, he said.

The main concern for many of RETA's members is electromagnetic fields. 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, specifically to children.

The report on the feasibility of burying the lines should be available in mid-February, said Neil Brausen, director of 500-kV transmission system planning for the Alberta Electric System Operator. The Heartland project team expects to submit its facility application to the Alberta Utilities Commission in May. If approved, construction could start in mid-2011 and be completed by early 2013.

"I think they took the time that was necessary to have open houses and have people understand, and I believe that will continue. To me that indicates the process is in fact working," Alberta Energy Minister Mel Knight said.

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With files from Gordon Kent