

Algae could tackle CO₂: Minister

Provincial gov't brainstorms ways to combat AB's greenhouse gas emissions

TOM WAGNER
News Writer

In conjunction with Bill 3, the provincial government's new environmental bill focusing on climate change and emissions, Alberta might be looking to go green by using algae to capture carbon dioxide (CO₂).

Rob Renner, Alberta's Minister for the Environment, believes that despite our province's high emissions output, the tiny organism could, in fact, do the job.

"I was told that it's not unrealistic to think that they could scale up the production of this algae to the point where they could absorb 100 million tonnes of CO₂ a year," Renner said.

This statement follows the introduction of new technology-centered legislation by the Tories, which targets industries and businesses that emit more than 100 000 tonnes of greenhouse gases annually. Bill 3 calls on these companies to reduce their emissions intensity, the amount of greenhouse gases produced per unit of production, by twelve per cent beginning 1 July, 2007.

But while this legislation is expected to affect over 100 companies, representing almost 70 per cent of Alberta's industrial emissions, Renner admitted that most of them won't be able to meet the legislation's target by July.

If a company can't meet the twelve per cent in CO₂ reduction required by the legislation, they're given two options by the government. They can choose to either purchase "offsets" from other Alberta-based sources that have reduced their greenhouse gas production, or they can contribute \$15 per tonne above their target to a technology fund. That money would be used for the development of technologies such as carbon sequestration, which is essentially pumping CO₂ underground, or CO₂-absorbing algae.

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**ROB RENNER,
AB ENVIRONMENT MINISTER**

However, not everyone is happy with this new legislation. David Eggen, an NDP MLA for Edmonton-Calder, voiced his concern over the use of intensity based, rather than

absolute, reduction targets, saying that as a result the bill was essentially meaningless.

"[Because Bill 3] bases its targets on intensity rather than absolute reductions, as long as an emitter is expanding and as long as the economy is growing, then CO₂ output increases," Eggen explained.

However, Renner, who advocates the technological approach to greenhouse gas reduction, predicts that scaling down industrial production in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would spell doom for Alberta's resource-based economy.

"It's incumbent upon us to recognize that a reduction of energy production in Alberta is not going to substantially harm anyone other than Alberta," Renner said.

According to Eggen, however, the equation isn't that simple. He said that by focusing on untested and undeveloped technology instead of actual emissions reductions, the government risked lost time in the fight against global warming, as well as lost money.

"The [government's technology-centered] scheme has a surreal element to it, except for the sober and unpleasant reality that the government would waste billions of dollars on it," Eggen said. "[It's] a boondoggle that would make the gun registry seem modest."

Science journalist using scholarship to raise public awareness on climate issues

SARAR TRETT
News Writer

With the federal government's announcement of emission reduction plans last week, climate change debate has recently been getting a lot of attention. However, Edmonton's Ed Struzik contends that the scientific community has recognized the issue since the '80s.

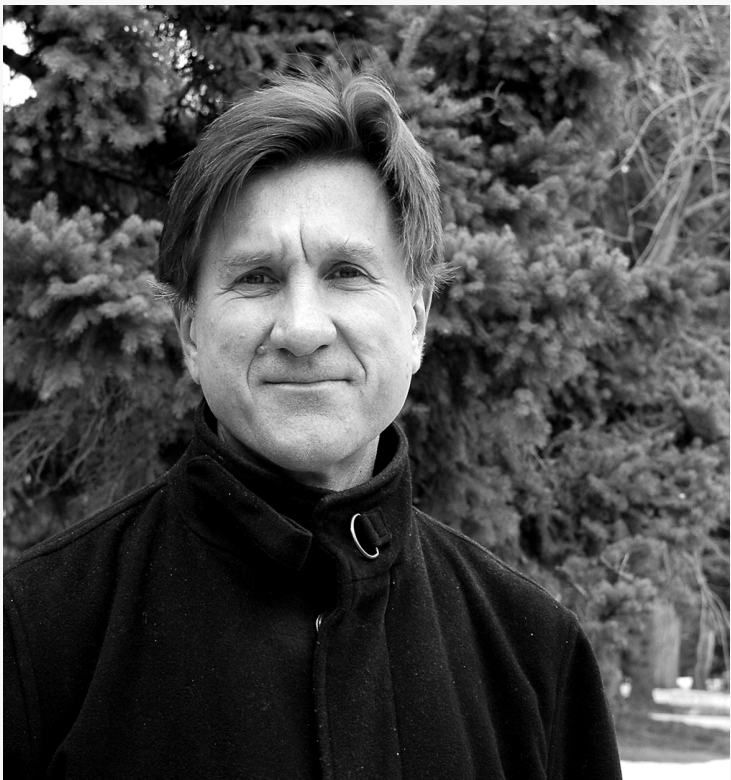
Struzik, who has just reached the halfway mark in his one-year Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy, is currently focusing on climate change in the Arctic. The fellowship, worth \$100 000, is granted to one Canadian journalist each year to focus on an issue of national significance.

As an established science journalist, Struzik has been following issues of global climate change and travelling to the Arctic for 30 years—experiences that he says have allowed him to see first-hand some of the rapid changes taking place in Canada's north.

"The changes are happening so fast up there and are so catastrophic in nature that it just seems like maybe most of the rest of the country is kind of oblivious to what's going on," Struzik says. "Here the effects are much more subtle, comparatively, but up there it's so obvious."

Struzik is currently focusing not only on the effects of climate change, but also on possible remedies. He said that, although reducing greenhouse gas emissions is a vital first step, more is needed.

"The idea is not only to describe what's happening, but also to come up with some solutions," he says. "A lot of experts out there have



LAUREN STIEGLITZ

TIME TO CATCH UP Struzik says public knowledge's lagging behind research.

got some ideas ... beyond simply reducing greenhouse gas emissions—there are a lot of other things we need to do to mitigate the damages," he says.

One of the goals of his fellowship will be to shape public policy in a way that catches up with the science. Struzik says that the barriers to finding solutions to the climate crisis aren't only scientific, but also largely political.

Up until very recently, we had essentially governments that paid lip service to this issue ... [an issue to which] some of the answers are pretty obvious," he says. "We can't

keep spewing all of these greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and think that nothing's going to happen."

Struzik says he hopes to be able to bridge the gap between science and public policy. He credits students at institutions like the University of Alberta for helping increase awareness about the issues of climate change over the past few years.

"There has been a new awareness at a much younger level, and it's kind of inspiring to see. [Students] are getting really worked up about it," he says. "It's that kind of enthusiasm and motion that's starting to spill over into the rest of society."

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