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SUICIDE RATE IN ALBERTA LEAPS 30% IN WAKE OF MASS OILPATCH LAYOFFS

'It says something really about the horrible human impact of what's happening in the economy,' counsellor says

The suicide rate in Alberta has increased dramatically in the wake of mounting job losses across the province.

The most recent data only goes to June, but according to the chief medical examiner's office, 30 per cent more Albertans took their lives in the first half of this year compared to the same period last year.

"This is staggering," said Mara Grunau, who heads the Centre for Suicide Prevention.

"It's far more, far exceeds anything we would ever have expected, and we would never have expected to see this much this soon."

Here are the statistics:

- From January to June 2014, there were 252 suicides in Alberta.
- During the same period this year, there were 327.
- If the trend continues,

Alberta could be on track for 654 suicides this year.

In an average year, there are 500, according to the Centre for Suicide Prevention.

In this year of mass layoffs in the energy sector, calls to the Calgary Distress Centre have changed tone and have become more frequent, says counsellor David Kirby.

"For me it says something really about the horrible human impact of what's happening in the economy with the recession and the real felt effect, the real suffering and the real struggle that people are experiencing," he said.

Kirby says demand for counselling services has increased by 80 per cent — and the problems people are struggling with are more complex.

"There might be substance abuse issues. There might be imminent financial collapse," he said.

"Anxiety, depression. Relationship conflict, maybe concurrent domestic violence. So there are many more things that people are trying to juggle I think at the same time."

Nancy Bergeron, who has answered distress centre phone lines for a few years, says this year has been the hardest.

"People are just at wit's end and they're contemplating it, right?"

However, Grunau is optimistic the trend can be curbed now that the province has increased its budget for mental health.

"In the budget we saw money specifically earmarked for mental health and we're hoping that some of it will be directly put into suicide prevention."

That could mean more resources for distress centre workers like Bergeron.

"We want to be able to interject and kind of break that thought process and say, "Hey, you know what? There are other things. You don't have to end your life."

NAIT NAMES NEW HEAD OF APPLIED RESEARCH FOR OILSANDS SUSTAINABILITY

The newly appointed applied research chair at NAIT's Centre for Oil Sands Sustainability is a veteran industry scientist who admits she gets excited talking about oilsands tailings.

"People have told me in the past I get a light in my eye when I talk about tailings, because I enjoy the challenges that are related to tailings,"

Andrea Sedgwick said in an interview Wednesday. "It is not an easy subject."

Sedgwick was named Wednesday as NAIT's new Ledcor Applied Research Chair in Oil Sands Sustainability. The position was held previously by Haneef Mian, who resigned in 2014.

"We are thrilled to have a scientist of Andrea's calibre leading applied research at our Centre for Oil Sands Sustainability," Neil Fassina, NAIT's provost and vice-president academic, said in a news release. "She will be a great asset to our team as we continue to build and expand our applied research capabilities to find real-world solutions for Alberta industries."

The NAIT centre is a 6,000-sq.-ft. laboratory in the Edmonton Research Park where scientists, engineers and technicians work with business and industry to develop technologies to improve the oilsands industry's economic and environmental performance.

The work focuses on helping industry in three areas: remediating tailings ponds and slowing their growth; reducing the use of fresh water and improving water treatment, management and disposal; and improving technologies to reduce the cost and environmental

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impact of oilsands operations. "This role is a fun one because we're going to be able to take technologies from their infancy, or moderate development, and move them to — hopefully — commercial readiness," Sedgwick said.

"That, to me, is very exciting. In the past I've seen a lot of technologies get stalled because they just don't have that ability to move forward. That's going to be our main focus in our group."

She said she plans to foster collaboration between the NAIT centre and other research-oriented organizations, including universities. "If there are technologies coming out of the universities that we can help them move forward, we are very happy to do that."

Sedgwick has more than 20 years of experience in all aspects of upstream surface oilsands development, including mining, extraction, tailings and water management.

Before coming to NAIT, she was the research and development mining manager at Total E & P Canada, directing research nationally and internationally. She worked for Total for eight years, and before that worked as a consultant to industry on several large oilsands projects.

Sedgwick holds a master's degree in engineering management and a bachelor of science in mining engineering, both from the University of Alberta.

NAIT's Centre for Oil Sands Sustainability was founded in 2011 through a \$1.5-million endowment

from Ledcor Group, matched by the Alberta government. Other funding comes from industry partners.

CANADA CLIMATE PUSH SPELLS UNCERTAINTY FOR OIL SANDS

Canada's newly elected government is committed to being a strong ally in global efforts to curb climate change, but it is unclear yet what that will mean for its vast oil patch, Environment and Climate Change Minister Catherine McKenna said on Wednesday.

"We are committed to moving to a low-carbon economy and we need to look at what that means," McKenna said at a briefing on the sidelines of the U.N. climate conference in Paris.

Canada's oil sands are among the largest petroleum reserves in the world, but efforts to expand their production have been stymied by a lack of pipeline capacity, heavy environmental opposition, and a recent slump in oil prices. [O/R]

The industry suffered a setback last month when U.S. President Barack Obama rejected TransCanada's proposed Keystone XL oil sands pipeline into the United States citing environmental concerns.

TransCanada has also proposed a bigger, all-Canadian pipeline east to the Atlantic province of New Brunswick, called Energy East, which would link some 1.1 million barrels per day of western Canadian oil to global markets by 2020.

McKenna said that project was being reviewed.

"But I don't like just looking at

one particular development. We are looking at how we are going to make progress toward a low-carbon economy. We are going to be looking at a whole range of solutions so that we ... have an ambitious, pan-Canadian plan to do our part," she said.

She said that plan would be drawn up with input from provincial, territorial and indigenous leaders.

The province of Alberta, home to the oil sands industry, recently announced plans to tax and limit carbon dioxide emissions, in a way

that still gives more efficient oil-producing companies room to grow.

Other provinces have also put forward carbon dioxide emissions reduction plans.

Recently elected Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has sought to break with his long-serving predecessor, Conservative Stephen Harper, by embracing the fight against climate change. He announced at the opening of the Paris talks last week that "Canada is back, my friends."

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OIL-RICH CANADIAN PROVINCE TO IMPOSE TAX ON CARBON EMISSIONS

The carbon tax is one of the pillars of Alberta's new climate change strategy, unveiled Sunday by Premier Rachel Notley and Environment Minister Shannon Phillips.

The plan comes at a challenging time for coal and oil producers in western Canada that are struggling to cope with low commodity prices.

She adds that the plan will help "access new markets for our energy products, and diversify our economy with renewable energy and energy efficiency technology". "That is the reputation that mistaken government policy in the past has earned for us".

If you wash those sands with superheated water under high

pressure, you can squeeze out enough all to nearly equal the energy that goes into recovering it. That was the oil - said to be some of the dirtiest on earth - that was supposed to flow to the Gulf of Mexico in the now defunct Keystone XL pipeline. They are proud to have worked with leading environmental organizations to better understand each other's views and recommend solutions for the oil and natural gas industry that helped inform the policy.

An economy-wide carbon tax of CAD \$20/ton will be introduced in January 2017 and rise to \$30/ton in 2018.

That tax will be extended across the province's economy by instituting levies on sales of gasoline and on household utility bills.

Notley appeared taken aback by some industry speculation about how costly it'll be for those owners

of coal-powered electricity plants.

Well, he consulted with the provinces Monday, and all that came out of it was a photo op and the sense the current premiers and the prime minister like each other so much they may sing Kumbaya around a campfire at their next meeting. "Climate change is real, it is caused by human activity".

Instead of contributing further to global emissions, Alberta chose to promulgate a new plan for the province.

The Canadian Wind Energy Association (CanWEA) applauds the Alberta government for its commitment to use new clean, reliable, and cost-effective renewable energy to replace two-thirds of the electricity now produced by coal-fired electricity generation in Alberta's electricity supply mix.

The plan imposes a 100-megaton limit on carbon from oil sands projects; plus its share of a strategy to reduce Alberta's methane emissions by 45 percent from 2014 levels by 2025.

It said this plan was endorsed by several major oil companies, including Suncor Energy, Cenovus, Canadian Natural Resources and the Canadian division of Royal Dutch Shell.

Notley is joining a delegation from Canada for the United Nations Climate Change conference in Paris, and will be touting the benefits of the \$3 billion per year carbon tax and the cap system on oil sands emissions when it begins on November 30th. Previous Progressive Conservative governments in Alberta sought

to shield the dominant industry from costly emission limits.

Under former prime minister Stephen Harper, B.C.'s Clark said Canada tended to "talk about economic growth more than the environment on the global stage". "At no point during the provincial campaign did the Premier Notley promise that every single Albertan would see prices at the pump jump another seven cents a litre if the NDP were elected-and that's on top of the gas price increases in the budget".

OREGON OYSTER GROWERS PROTEST PROPOSED LNG PIPELINE

Activists and oyster growers are opposing a proposed natural gas pipeline that would go through Coos Bay.

Dozens of people protested Tuesday outside the State Land Board meeting in Salem, the Statesman Journal reports. Oyster growers say that 157 miles of pipeline would damage oyster beds and other opponents say it would cross private property.

Canadian company Veresen Inc. wants to build the export terminal. The Jordan Cove Energy Project would receive natural gas through a new, 232-mile pipeline.

Supporters of the proposal say it will bring jobs to the community as well as millions of dollars in tax revenue.

The Department of State Lands is one of several state agencies that can deny permits for the terminal and pipeline. It did not make any decisions Tuesday.



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