

Oilsands can go green, new book says

BY DAVE COOPER, EDMONTON JOURNAL OCTOBER 1, 2009

Alberta's oilsands can become a green energy source, producing carbon-neutral energy with little water use or environmental impact, says a new book.

"I am so frustrated that this enormously rich province has everything in the world going for it, and we've seen so little action," said consultant Satya Das, whose book, *Green Oil*, is being published today.

"We know we have got to get to a low-carbon economy, but how do we get there? Well, we use the \$15 trillion in oilsands wealth that we are sitting on right now."

Das, a co-founder of Cambridge Strategies and a former writer and editor with *The Journal*, wants to provide the facts for a public debate on the oilsands, and get Albertans to press the provincial government to demand the latest technology for all oilsands projects.

Recent developments--such as dry tailings and underground combustion methods that heat deep deposits without expensive steam --need to come on the scene much more quickly, he said Wednesday.

"The citizens own the resource, and it is up to the citizens to tell the government that they want environmental stewardship," he said.

"So we really need the dialogue, about what does responsible development of the oilsands mean in the context of stewardship."

Das thinks Greenpeace "is brilliant at getting media coverage, but how does that resolve the problem?"

The provincial government, he adds, seems "unable to keep up with the proliferation of social media, and is not able to respond to a sophisticated international campaign.

"As soon as Al Gore called the oilsands oil dirty oil, my first reaction was yes, Al, but we can clean it up. I never heard anyone in government say that. It was always comments like, 'No the oil isn't dirty, why are you picking on us.' "

Das uses water use as an example of what his book aims to accomplish. "Everyone uses the average of about three barrels of water to make a barrel of oil. But I quote a leading water expert who says the range is actually one barrel to 5.5 barrels. So this 3.5 average is a lie. We can't

average progress against archaic methods, so if the best case is one barrel then everybody should get to one, and there should be real penalties for those who don't."

Das hopes his book educates the public enough to question the government at a deeper level. "We need to give government some backbone, and the message of the book is that we citizens can't sit back and say this is the fault of this company or that minister. You, citizen, must step up to the plate."

He advises governments to copy the program used to kick-start the oilsands plants in the 1990s, in which construction costs were deducted from royalties. "If we pro-rate environmental costs over 20 years, it would be very affordable. But let's do the analysis to find out." Green Oil is available online at greenoilbook.com, with a print version available at local independent booksellers. A book launch will be held Friday from 4 to 7 p.m. at Audreys Books.

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