

Neighbours, professors more reliable on energy issues: poll

8 JUNE 2017
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CALGARY As Canadians debate the merits of controversial westbound and eastbound pipelines, a new study from Canada's largest oil and gas industry group shows people trust university professors, their neighbours and environmental activists more than journalists and leaders of energy companies with information about oil and gas.

"Clearly there is a bias to the white lab coat, the person who is the thoughtful, independent researcher," said Jeff Gaulin, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' vice-president of communications.

CAPP released the results of a wide-ranging survey Wednesday, conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs, that showed respondents' attitudes toward various forms of energy, countries that produce energy, and the trustworthiness of energy information sources.

The study showed respondents from around the world placed the most trust in oil and gas information from university professors, with 69 per cent of respondents trusting them, 59 per cent feel the same way about scientists and engineers at oil and gas companies, while 56 per cent considered environmental activists trustworthy.

The results demonstrate how Canadians evaluate information amid debates about pipelines like Kinder Morgan's \$7.4-billion Trans Mountain expansion project or Trans-Canada Corp.'s Energy East project between Alberta and New Brunswick, Mount Royal University political science professor Duane Brat said.

"People are not evaluating the evidence, they're analyzing the source of the evidence," Brat said, adding the source of the evidence becomes more important in cases where Canadians are presented with competing or conflicting data.

Less than 45 per cent of respondents said they trusted journalists, industry associations or company CEOs as information sources on oil and gas issues. Political leaders ranked last with 37 per cent finding them trustworthy.

Keith Stewart, senior energy strategist with Greenpeace, said the results confirmed previous studies done by public relations agencies but added, "I'm kind of surprised that CAPP is releasing it."

Financial Post
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