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## CBC MARKETPLACE: ENVIRONMENT » DIRTY SECRETS

### Is something lurking in the land beneath your home?

Reporter/Producer: Erica Johnson; Associate Producer: Michael Gruzuk

Broadcast: Nov 21, 2001

Buying a new house is one of the biggest decisions in life. Paint, layout, location, location, location. Every aspect is carefully considered.

Usually.

But what about what lurks in the land beneath your home? *Marketplace* visited a neighbourhood in Calgary, where residents are getting the real dirt on their property.

It's called Lynnview Ridge — and after seven years of living there, Marj Smith and her family are moving out.

"This was our first purchase, so we were very excited to move in here."

The Smiths had planned to stay in their home for a long time. But they're leaving months after making a disturbing discovery about the Lynnview housing development.

The homes were built on a "brownfield." That's real estate contaminated by previous industrial use. Across the country, there are almost 3,000 undeveloped brownfields. As cities run out of room to build, these former industrial sites are being rezoned and cleaned up to make room for new houses.

In the spring of 2001, everything changed in Lynnview. That's when the first environmental tests were carried out. Now, teams of environmental workers are regulars in the neighbourhood. They take readings from up to 10 metres below the surface, testing for a host of chemicals. Some are known carcinogens.

Three of the bore holes are just steps away from Marj Smith's home.

"When you move into a new home, it's prudent to check the foundation and check the roof. But you don't think of doing a phase one environmental assessment on your property to make sure it's not contaminated," Smith said.

#### Don't ask, don't find out

Home buyers across the country often don't know what stood on the land before their houses were built. They rarely ask and real estate agents might not tell.



"You don't think of doing an environmental assessment on your property." Marj Smith, former Lynnview Ridge homeowner.

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Lynnview Ridge was home to an oil refinery built by Imperial Oil before it was a housing development. The refinery operated for 50 years before it was closed in the 1970s. The Lynnview development was built after the land was re-zoned for residential use.

Now, two-thirds of the properties at Lynnview have lead levels in soil much higher than the provincial guideline of 140 parts per million. In Marj Smith's yard, some readings were three times the acceptable limit.

Like everyone else in the development, the Smiths covered up exposed dirt in their backyard. Grassy areas are considered safe because the grass keeps children from coming in direct contact with the contamination.

Still, the Smiths are worried because their children played in the yard for years — before they knew about the high lead levels. Over time, high levels of lead can damage the central nervous system.

"You're fearful about what its done to your children...and we still really don't have answers yet if it has had an adverse effect on our family or not," Marj Smith said.

#### **Imperial's buy-out offer**

The discovery of lead contamination has filled people here with fear and anger. At a public meeting on June 27, 2001, the homeowners demanded a buyout package. Imperial Oil has offered 120 per cent of the homes' market value. For some that's not good enough. They argue they won't be able to recoup what they've put into their homes with that offer.

Imperial is also offering to replace the top 30 centimetres of soil. The company is arguing that it wasn't solely responsible for the contamination.

"We've been working cooperatively with the regulators and with the city to try and understand where the lead may have come from," Imperial's Andy Teale told Marketplace.


"We have clearly indicated that we believe there are other responsible parties as well. This should not be born solely by Imperial Oil."

Imperial suggests the high lead levels are due to piles of topsoil that were trucked in by a development company during construction. But that development company no longer exists.

The Alberta government doesn't buy Imperial's theory. Alberta Environment's Peter Watson says the oil giant polluted and in Alberta — like provinces across the country — the polluter pays.

"Really what we're asking Imperial to do is meet what would be the acceptable procedures today, and we think we need to do that to protect people's health there," Watson said.

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### CBC MARKETPLACE: ENVIRONMENT » DIRTY SECRETS **Lead limits should be increased: Imperial**

Reporter/Producer: Erica Johnson; Associate Producer: Michael Gruzuk  
Broadcast: Nov 21, 2001

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"There's no health issue." Imperial Oil's Andy Teale.

Imperial Oil is appealing a government order to bear full responsibility for cleaning up Lynnview Ridge. The company says the amount of lead allowed in residential areas is too low. The federal standard — also adopted by — is 140 parts per million. Imperial says the American standard of 400 ppm is more realistic.

Not only do people wonder if their children have ingested lead-contaminated soil, they also worry about lead dust — particles of lead floating through homes that people have been breathing day in and day out. Recent test results show dust in Lynnview homes has lead levels up to 10 times higher than homes on the other side of Calgary.

#### Health concerns won't go away: residents

There are also "hydrocarbons" to worry about. They're chemical vapours from oil products that can be carcinogenic. They've been discovered deep below some homes in this development.

So far, blood tests on 311 have not detected any health problems, except for one man who had elevated lead levels. Still, residents insist that something is not right.

They complain of cases of dizziness and headaches and migraines.

"The testing that's been done — and there's been a whole series of tests as far as blood lead levels in children and adults living in the area, as well as the indoor air quality testing — clearly show that there's no health issue," says Imperial's Andy Teale.

"Nausea, fatigue, headaches, learning disabilities. It's higher in this concentration of the city than it is anywhere else. So to me, that says okay, there's a problem somewhere. And it needs to be looked at," says one resident.

Imperial oil says not only is there no problem, but as soon as the soil is replaced, the homes will go back on the market.

"As far as Lynnview Ridge in the future? It looks very good," Teale said.

#### Homebuyer's checklist

Environmental lawyer Cindy Chiasson says there are plenty of questions people should ask before they buy a house. She has seen so many people struggle with contamination issues, she's written Get the Real Dirt, a guide for homebuyers.



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"It is not an easy thing for someone to find out if their property is clean or not. And to some extent, without doing testing, you are not going to know for sure," Chiasson told Marketplace.



*"It's not easy for someone to find out if their property is clean."  
Environmental lawyer  
Cindy Chiasson.*

Chiasson has created a checklist for new buyers. It's a tool Marj Smith wishes she had at her disposal before they bought into Lynnview Ridge.



"I would not have bought my house if we knew it was built on an old oil refinery," Smith said.

Smith and her family decided to accept Imperial Oil's buyout offer. They received more than they paid for their house. "I have lived on contaminated soil for almost seven years without my knowledge. That's what makes me angry. My kids have been playing in the yard. We thought we were living in a safe place," Smith said. "We hope that no Calgarians, or anyone will have to experience the nightmare we have."

Smith and her family are in their new home, across Calgary. Before buying, she asked who was there before and what happened on the land, ensuring that it really is a "home, sweet home."

**Note:** Of the 160 homeowners in Lynnview Ridge, 130 have accepted Imperial Oil's buy-out offer.

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# Imperial Oil holds permit to demolish homes: alderman

Last Updated: Wednesday, December 6, 2006 | 1:03 PM ET  
 CBC News

A Calgary alderman says Imperial Oil has a permit to demolish hundreds of abandoned homes sitting on contaminated land in Lynnview Ridge.

The southeast neighbourhood, which was built on the site of an Imperial Oil refinery, is nearly deserted. Imperial Oil started buying homes from residents in 2001 after tests revealed high levels of lead.

Today, families only occupy 11 homes on a ridge with panoramic views of downtown Calgary and the mountains. Another 235 homes and townhouses are vacant.

Crews are currently turning off gas and water lines to the vacant homes, while talks are underway between the City of Calgary and Imperial Oil about what will be done with the land.

Joe Ceci, the alderman for the area, said a demolition permit has been approved for the empty houses Imperial Oil owns.

Once those homes are torn down, they will not be rebuilt nor will the area be zoned for industrial or commercial use, he said.



Crews began cleaning up Lynnview Ridge in the summer. (CBC)

"Imperial doesn't want to re-engage in any residential rezoning or anything that would cause an ongoing liability. So we'll be looking at some passive use of the balance of the land. I don't know if that is park or whatever, but that is probably the direction in this case."

## Remaining residents prefer park

Pius Rolheiser, a spokesman for Imperial Oil, won't comment on the company's discussions with the city or its plans for Lynnview Ridge.

Rolheiser said a final decision on the fate of the empty homes has not been made.

Barry Bickford is one of the few people who chose to stay.

"We would like to see it turned into some kind of green space area, either a park of some kind or perhaps a golf course or ball diamonds."

## Cleanup moves slowly

Meanwhile, cleanup of contamination among the occupied homes is taking longer than expected.

Ridge resident Loren Guenette said Imperial Oil recently dug up his yard, but the company has yet to lay down sod, complete the deck, replace fencing or do any landscaping.

Guenette says he was told the work would be done by November.

"I think they found more contamination than they anticipated and to that extent it meant more cleanup," he said.

Alberta Environment spokesman Jay Litke said in addition to lead, three pockets of hydrocarbons were found in the neighbourhood.

"So it did slow the process down and as a result, we're not really completed on the ridge right at the moment."

## **Weather to blame for slow progress**

Imperial Oil spokesperson Pius Rolheiser blamed the environment for the delays.

"Recent cold weather is certainly a major factor. We were not able to complete the restoration work on the decks and fences etc. as we had anticipated," he said.

Rolheiser said Imperial Oil plans to have that work done sometime next year.

In the meantime, Alberta Environment is waiting for test results to determine whether the cleanup was successful.

Imperial Oil won't say how much the cleanup will cost, but it's expected to be in the millions of dollars.

The company has to replace at least the top 30 centimetres of soil around each of the properties still occupied, as well as lawns, decks and fences.

# Imperial Oil reaches deal to clean up Lynnview Ridge

Last Updated: Tuesday, April 5, 2005 | 3:56 PM MT

[CBC News](#)

Imperial Oil and the province have reached a deal to clean up a neighbourhood contaminated with lead and hydrocarbons, with the company paying to remove soil on about 20 properties.

The top 30 centimetres of soil on properties along the edge of Lynnview Ridge will be removed, Alberta Environment's Jay Litke says. Fourteen families still live on those properties and want to remain.

Imperial Oil either owns, or is negotiating to buy, the homes on the other side of the street from the ridge. The company will decide what it wants to do with the land before it determines what clean up will be undertaken at those properties.

Litke says Imperial Oil will remove any fences, decks, sidewalks or any other structures that are in the way.

"Then a sampling program will be undertaken where drill rigs will come onto the private properties and, on a three-metre grid, we will drill down to a 1.5-metre depth and we will sample the soil for lead," Litke said.

Any soil with lead levels above 140 parts per million must be removed.

Imperial Oil operated a refinery in the southeast Calgary neighbourhood until the 1970s. Tests show the soil is contaminated with lead and benzene.

With the deal, the Environment department is withdrawing clean-up orders it issued to Imperial in 2003. The clean up is expected to begin this summer, but depends on the ability to get civic permits and permission to access any private property.

An estimated cost of the clean-up program hasn't been released.

# Greenspace to replace contaminated neighbourhood

Last Updated: Thursday, July 19, 2007 | 12:13 PM MT

CBC News

The City of Calgary and Imperial Oil have reached an agreement to clean up contaminated Lynnview Ridge so the former residential neighbourhood can become a park, golf course or other recreation area.

Under a 25-year plan announced Tuesday, Imperial Oil will cover the cost of cleanup on company-owned land in the southeast neighbourhood, and cover 60 per cent of the tab for cleanup on city-owned land, leaving City Hall with a \$22- million bill.

Imperial Oil's land will then be leased to the city for 99 years at \$1 a year so it can become an outdoor recreation area, park or golf course.

"If we did not take action quickly, we would find ourselves, I'm sure, in the bad books of both Alberta Environment and the federal fisheries and oceans people. So doing nothing is not an option for us," said David Day, a spokesman for the city.

Since lead was discovered in 2001 at the former oil refinery site, Imperial Oil has bought and demolished 142 homes and several apartment blocks in the neighbourhood.

About a dozen families remain, mostly in the largest homes with the best views. The company began cleaning up those properties began last summer.

## 'City is trying to be proactive'

Signy Morton lived in Lynnview Ridge with her three children, but moved out after learning about the lead problem. She now lives nearby and says the plan is a welcome relief after a long wait.

"It looks like the city is trying to be proactive over a long-term basis to maintain some kind of integrity of the land and make sure the land is safe to use."

Under the cleanup plan, testing will begin immediately to look for contamination and determine if the nearby Bow River is threatened.

Liquid hydrocarbons will be removed from the ground and there is talk of installing an underground barrier to prevent chemicals from leaching into the river.

Nearby resident Bruce Falconer said the plan is short on details.

"I think it's going to be five to 10 years before we get much of anything going on here."



Crews began cleaning up Lynnview Ridge last summer. (CBC)



# Oil company begins cleanup of contaminated neighbourhood

Last Updated: Friday, July 28, 2006 | 2:42 PM ET  
CBC News

Imperial Oil has begun removing contaminated soil under a Calgary neighbourhood that was once the site of an oil refinery.

Heavy machinery is rumbling through Lynnview Ridge as part of an agreement reached with the province last year that ended a four-year fight by residents to hold the company responsible.

The southeast neighbourhood is full of vacant and boarded up homes, and only 11 families remain.

"Certainly it's taken longer than anyone would have wanted or likely expected," said company spokesman Hart Searle on Thursday.

Imperial Oil started buying up properties in 2001, after tests revealed high levels of lead. Today, 235 houses and townhouse sit vacant. The families that remain have the largest homes, with the best views.

Loren Guenette said he stayed in Lynnview Ridge because he didn't think he could find another view home.

"Right now, all I can say is my health is good and so it'll even be better once everything is cleaned up."

## Taken by homes with view

When François Fortin moved to Calgary five years ago, he was immediately taken by what he saw at Lynnview Ridge – a nice view of the city with easy access to a park and the Bow River.

Three months after he moved into his home, he learned the soil was contaminated.

"I am happy to see it is well underway. It has been definitely stressful for myself and my family, and all my neighbours," he said.

Imperial Oil won't say how much the cleanup will cost, but it's expected to be in the millions.

The company has to remove the top 30 centimetres of soil around each of the properties still occupied, replacing it with clean soil. Workers will dig even further down in places where contamination goes deeper. The company is also replacing lawns, decks and fences, and demolishing vacant homes.

Imperial Oil won't say what the future of the neighbourhood will hold.

"Tell you the truth, I'm hoping for a lot more green space around me and, if I'm lucky enough, a golf course," said Fortin.



François Fortin is relieved to see the Lynnview Ridge cleanup begin.  
CBC News

# Lynnview Ridge residents given pollution data

**Last Updated: Tuesday, June 26, 2001 | 6:42 PM ET**

**CBC News**

An official environmental assessment has been distributed to residents of Lynnview Ridge.

In May, residents were informed of higher than normal lead levels in their neighbourhood.

The city's official assessment document summarizes the lead testing done in the area over the past number of months.

"More reports will be forthcoming," says Owen Tobert, speaking for the municipality. "One, summarizing the remaining lead tests that were taken in the community, as well as one report on the dosimeter or the indoor quality testing that will be released in the next little while."

Tobert says the city has taken all of the precautions it can to date.

He says the responsibility now lies with Imperial Oil, which operated an oil refinery on the site until the 1970's.

The City has spent more than \$1-million on testing in Lynnview Ridge. But it says it has no plans to ask Imperial Oil to cover those costs.

Monday, the province ordered the company and a subsidiary to clean up the neighbourhood.

- RELATED STORY:[Province issues clean-up order to Imperial Oil](#)

# Lynnview Ridge cleanup plan deadline extended

**Last Updated: Tuesday, July 17, 2001 | 2:30 PM ET**

**CBC News**

Imperial Oil has a one-month extension from Alberta Environment on its deadline for presenting a cleanup plan to the residents of Lynnview Ridge.

The oil company operated a refinery in the southeast Calgary neighbourhood until the 1970s. Tests now show the soil is contaminated with lead and benzene.

"We felt that we needed the additional time to do a thorough and effective job of consulting with the Lynnview Ridge community," says company spokesperson Hart Searle.

Rita McMahon, who lives in Lynnview Ridge, says people are tired of waiting. "They have different ideas about how they are supposedly going to clean it up," says McMahon.

"I think the majority of people here just want to be bought out. We're all frustrated and ready for this to end."

There is still some dispute about who is responsible for the contamination in Lynnview Ridge. The Alberta government says Imperial Oil is the only responsible party. The oil company is appealing this decision, saying there may be others.

Hearings will be held in early September to settle the dispute.

**David G. Mackay**

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**From:** Gunner [gunner@accesscomm.ca]  
**Sent:** February 4, 2007 3:58 PM  
**To:** DG Mackay  
**Subject:** Emailing: Imperial Oil says no more money for Lynnview.htm

## Imperial Oil says no more money for Lynnview

**Last Updated: Tuesday, January 28, 2003 | 9:06 AM MT**

**CBC News**

Imperial Oil says it won't be increasing its financial offer to people who still live in Lynnview Ridge, on the site of its former refinery.

The company has agreed to buy out homes for 20 per cent above their 2001 assessed value, and most people in the area have taken the offer. The soil left behind by the refinery is contaminated with lead and hydrocarbons.

But one family who still lives there has produced a doctor's letter recommending they be moved out, saying they've been diagnosed with "chronic toxicity from heavy metals," caused in part by the soil. The Guenettes also say Imperial Oil's offer for their home is too low.

The Calgary Health Region says it's not changing its position on Lynnview Ridge as a safe place to live, and called into question the validity of tests being used to diagnose the family.

"The family has indicated that they want this evacuation to try and force higher compensation for their house and we think that's unfortunate," Imperial Oil spokesman Shawn Howard said. "You shouldn't be using health issues to try and force more money out of the company to buy your house."

The Guenettes, who have lived in Lynnview Ridge for 19 years, say they have been diagnosed with "chronic toxicity from heavy metals" and want to be removed from their home near the former Imperial Oil refinery.

Their doctor agrees, having written a letter to the Guenette's lawyer, saying they should be taken from their home for their own safety.

Lauren Guenette says he started suffering from tremors and vision loss about two years ago, but the CHR determined the level of lead in his blood was acceptable.

But Dr. Charles Masur says when the lead is combined with mercury in Guenette's system – from fillings – it left him with heavy metal poisoning.

"It's the possible synergy, between lead and mercury that is, I believe it's unhealthy for him to stay there and that's why I recommended he move," Masur said. "It's just my opinion that the effects I'm seeing in the people that I'm seeing are related to these toxic heavy metals."

"I'm not trying to tell the Calgary Health Region what to do. I'm not trying to tell Imperial Oil what to do. I'm just saying that my patients are sick and that I believe it's related to these heavy metals."

Renee Guenette has suffered symptoms as well and has received the same diagnosis as her husband.

The CHR doesn't agree with his findings.

05/02/2007

"The tests that he is using, there is a lot of scientific uncertainty about them," Judy MacDonald, Calgary deputy medical officer of health, said. "They haven't been validated. So, based on the test that we have used, and the information we know that has been scientifically validated, we're not changing our recommendations, which are still that there is no immediate health risk, provided people do limit their exposure to the soil there."

While the CHR says the area is safe for residents, the Guenettes want the health authority to do further testing of former and current Lynnview residents.

Seventeen home owners have launched a lawsuit against the company, claiming their properties have been contaminated with lead and hydrocarbons. They're asking for between \$500,000 and \$3 million in damages.

## High court hits Imperial: Lynnview lauds Quebec decision

Calgary Herald  
Friday, October 31, 2003  
Page: A10  
Section: News  
Byline: Kate Jaimet, and Robin Summerfield  
Dateline: OTTAWA  
Source: CanWest News Service; Calgary Herald  
Idnumber: 200310310148  
Edition: Final  
Story Type: News  
Length: 448 words  
Keywords: CONTAMINATION; HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES; REAL ESTATE; OIL; COMMUNITIES

In a decision that could affect the cleanup of thousands of contaminated sites, including one in Calgary, the Supreme Court of Canada has upheld the authority of Quebec's environment minister to order polluters to pay up.

As a result of the ruling, Imperial Oil must pay for the pollution it caused more than 30 years ago in what is now a residential neighbourhood in Levis, Que., the court ruled Thursday.

The court rejected arguments by the oil company that the minister was in a conflict of interest in issuing the order, which could lower his government's own costs and shield it from lawsuits.

In Calgary, residents of contaminated southeast neighbourhood Lynnview Ridge should take the Quebec decision as a victory, said the head of the local community group.

"It will have a definite impact. Alberta Environment will now be able to clearly recognize that they have the full right to use the legislation," said Tim Mather, president of the Lynnview Ridge Residents Action Committee.

"It clearly identifies, where necessary, work needs to be performed at the polluter's expense."

Imperial Oil's spokesman in Calgary, however, said the Supreme Court ruling has no bearing locally. "It doesn't change anything regarding Lynnview Ridge," said Shawn Howard. "It's a very different case than what we are dealing with in Lynnview Ridge. People need to keep that in mind."

The Quebec case revolved around a site on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, opposite Quebec City, where Imperial built and operated an oil depot from 1920 until 1973.

The oil reservoirs were dismantled after the depot closed and, in 1987, the site was sold to a developer. But excavation work uncovered petroleum contamination in the soil. A cleanup was initiated under the supervision of the Quebec Environment Ministry, which eventually gave the site a clean bill of health and allowed housing construction to proceed.

But in 1994 contamination resurfaced, which

prevented several owners from building houses on their properties. The lot owners sued the vendor, the City of Levis, and the Environment Ministry, alleging the ministry had been negligent in supervising and approving the initial decontamination work.

The Quebec decision will strengthen governments' ability to force polluters to clean up an estimated 30,000 similar sites across the country contaminated by industrial activity and subsequently sold or abandoned, said Rob Wright, a lawyer with the Sierra Legal Defence Fund.

Imperial Oil and Alberta are in mediation talks regarding Lynnview Ridge. A confidentiality agreement prohibits discussing details of the talks. In August, the company was ordered to come up with a cleanup plan and schedule by Oct. 15. That order included the cleanup of a number of occupied properties by October 2004.

rsummerfield@theherald.canwest.c om