

Fowler geologist resigns over pay

40-YEAR VETERAN: Announcement won't affect review process.

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WASILLA -- Veteran petroleum geologist Arlen Ehm, claiming he wasn't paid for his services, has resigned from the company that touts a new kind of coal bed methane boom for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Ehm announced Friday that he had resigned as president and chief operations officer of Fowler Oil and Gas Corp. Chairman and chief executive Bob Fowler did not return calls seeking comment on Ehm's resignation.

Ehm described his decision Wednesday in a terse, two-sentence statement: "I am a firm believer that compensation for services should be made in a full and in a timely manner. Fowler Oil and Gas did neither."

The 30-year geological consultant would not disclose how much Fowler owed him.

Ehm's Alaska reputation began 40 years ago as one of the geologists who worked on the first well on the first offshore platform for Shell Oil Co. in Cook Inlet in 1965.

Since then, Ehm served as an expert witness and co-authored geologic studies of Cook Inlet, the North Slope and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. A partial list of clients on his eight-page resume lists 84 oil and gas companies, Native corporations and government agencies.

Fowler Oil and Gas Corp. is headquartered in Las Vegas but operates out of an Alaska field office above the Wells Fargo bank in Palmer. The company in October secured permission from the borough to drill the first coal bed methane well under a law enacted in 2004. The law came in response to public outcry over attempts by Evergreen Resources of Colorado to scatter industrial wells across the Valley in residential neighborhoods.

Fowler describes what would be his company's first well, on privately owned farmlands near the intersection of Trunk and Bogard roads, as a different kind of methane operation: on property owned by willing parties who stand to gain royalties, with a kind of horizontal drilling that is quiet and protects water.

He still needs approval from the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission.

The three commissioners got word last week of Ehm's resignation, said commissioner Cathy Foerster.

The announcement doesn't change the commission's review process, unless Fowler notifies them he plans to do something differently because of Ehm's departure, Foerster said.

"People come and go from companies all the time," she said. "We don't let personnel changes affect what we do."

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