

Government CSR strategy is towards problem-solving, PDAC told

Brenda Dalglish

Resolving problems rather than assigning blame is the direction that corporate social responsibility is heading, Marketa Evans, the federal government's newly appointed CSR counselor, told the PDAC board meeting on Sunday. The meeting was one of the first events of this year's Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada's convention, being held in Toronto from March 7-10.

Evans' approach will be to focus on problem solving, performance improvement and prevention, Evans told the meeting during a discussion of the four pillars of the Canadian government's CSR initiative in the extractive industries.

"I'm not thinking of my role as investigatory," Evans said. "I don't have the power to impose sanctions. But it's clear that there's a tremendous value in problem solving and dispute resolution."

CSR accountability has been the subject of debate in Canada recently because of a federal private member's bill, Bill C-300, sponsored by Liberal MP John McKay. The bill proposes to invite complaints about mining and oil and gas company companies working in developing countries.

Passage of the bill into legislation would mean that, if a company had a written complaint filed against it, the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Minister of International Affairs would probably have to launch an investigation into it.

In response to a question, Evans said that her office, which was created as part of the federal government's *Building the Canadian Advantage* CSR strategy, would also have the ability to investigate complaints against agencies, including non-governmental organizations that harass the mineral industry.

Another of the four pillars is the federal government's commitment to help foreign governments build their capacity to better regulate and govern the extractive industries. According to PDAC Executive Director Tony Andrews, this is a critical component of the strategy.

As an example, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) worked with Bolivia to implement that country's policy to use extractive industry revenues to fund the country's new public pension plan, said Bill Singleton, CIDA's senior advisor on economic policy and corporate social responsibility.

Bolivia had established the policy but needed assistance to put the policy into action, Singleton said, and CIDA was able to help.

The board meeting also heard from Murray Duke, former head of the Geological Survey of Canada and contracted by the PDAC to conduct a study on the value of and need for increased spending on public geoscience.

More mapping and other public geoscience initiatives would reduce the costs and risks of mineral exploration, Duke said.

The PDAC will use the paper as part of its advocacy campaign to increase government awareness of the value of investing in public geoscience, described by Duke as a public good

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