

Pipeline upgrades affect Rock, Walworth counties

Enbridge, the Canadian energy company, is upgrading pumps that service the oil pipeline that travels through Wisconsin. Some officials and residents are concerned about the possible impact.

By Catherine W. Idzerda

TOWN OF LIMA--More crude oil will flow through the northeast corner of Rock County and Walworth County if a Canadian energy company gets the go-ahead for upgrades.

Enbridge, an energy company based in Calgary, Alberta, hopes to complete upgrades to four pumping stations--including one in northeast Rock County--in 2014 as part of a project to increase its ability to move crude oil from Canada and North Dakota to refineries in the Great Lakes region. A second phase of pump station upgrades is planned in 2015.

Supporters see the Wisconsin pipeline and the proposed Keystone XL pipeline from western Canada to the Gulf Coast as critical tools in reducing U.S. dependence on foreign oil.

Enbridge's Delavan pump station is located off Highway 59 in the town of Lima in Rock County, about 25 miles northwest of Delavan.

From that station, the pipeline heads in two directions: southeast through Walworth County toward Chicago and south.

The pipeline, which is referred to as Line 61, has been in use since 2009.

“Around that time, there was an economic decline, and the economy was a little slack,” said Becky Haase, Enbridge spokesperson. “Things are changing. The economy is getting back on its feet.”

The pipeline has been carrying about 400,000 barrels per day.

Demand is up, and the company wants to increase the flow to the pipeline's capacity of 1.2 million barrels per day. The revamped pipeline is scheduled to be in operation in 2016.

According to Enbridge, its pipelines are:

- Built with high-quality steel pipe and are factory- and field-tested.
- Inspected at every weld, “far exceeding the required 10 percent sampling mandated by federal regulation.”
- Pressure-tested with water “at levels above the authorized operating pressure.”
- Monitored 24 hours a day by computerized systems and controllers. Flow-rate alarms and abnormal changes in pipeline pressure would prompt either a computerized shutdown of the line, or control room operators would shut down the system “within minutes.”

The last statement doesn't reassure environmentalists and others who remember the 2010 pipeline spill in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

On July 25, 2010, alarms went off in Enbridge's control room indicating that a pipeline had burst.

Three shifts of pipeline operators misinterpreted those signals, according to a 2012 report from the National Transportation Safety Board.

The safety board blamed the company for failing to follow its own safety protocol, and it also blamed the federal government for failing to give its Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration the “staff or regulatory muscle to safeguard the public,” according to a 2012 National Public Radio story.

At the time, Deborah Hersman, NTSB chairwoman, said it wasn't until “17 hours and 19 minutes after the rupture that a worker from a local gas utility found the spill and notified the Enbridge control center.”

More than 800,000 gallons of crude oil spilled into wetlands, a creek and the Kalamazoo River.

As of April 2013, the spill has cost more than \$1 billion to clean up. That's in part because the pipe was carrying tar sands, a type of crude that is much heavier than regular crude.

In order to travel through the pipeline, the crude oil is diluted with a lighter hydrocarbon mixture that is not unlike gasoline, said Stephen Hamilton, the Michigan state ecology professor who serves as a science adviser for the Kalamazoo spill.

When a spill occurs in water, that material evaporates quickly, he said, and the remaining crude floats briefly before sinking to the bottom.

That evaporation releases a variety of chemicals, including benzene, a substance that causes health problems ranging from nervous system issues to cancer.

Enbridge also paid \$1.1 million to settle claims by the DNR and the state Department of Justice that numerous environmental laws were broken during construction of the initial phase of its pipeline system in Wisconsin in 2007 and 2008. The forfeiture involved more than 100 environmental violations in 14 counties.

An Enbridge spokeswoman told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel that the company has spent more than \$4 billion in the past two years to upgrade safety and inspection of its pipeline system and other related costs.

For Jefferson County Board Supervisor Walt Christensen, “it's kind of hard to rank” the potential dangers of the pipeline.

“My understanding is that the pipeline was built to handle the volume and pressure described in documents as 1.2 million barrels per day,” Christensen wrote in an e-mail. “However, that was six years ago, and since then we have seen a lot of pipeline failures.

“I believe the high number of failures reveals a greater risk than anyone planned for and so the risk-benefit ratio should be re-examined before allowing the pipe to be stressed at full pressure.”

Christensen's resolution opposing a DNR air permit for the project and asking for an environmental assessment passed at the Jefferson County Board's May meeting.

Among the resolution's points:

- The pipeline passes under the Rock River south of Fort Atkinson just north of Lake Koshkonong.

- The material transported in the pipeline is tar sands, which is more corrosive and acidic than traditional oil and leads to about 3.6 times more spills per mile.

-The DNR only held one public hearing on the issue, and that was in Superior.

-Failure would constitute a “significant threat to the waters and property values of Jefferson County because at peak operation, this pipeline will carry more oil than the proposed Keystone Pipeline.”

Along with the possibility of a big spill, Christensen is concerned that the pipeline could be—and perhaps already is—an “oozing menace.”

Given the amount of crude traveling through the pipeline, even the most sensitive system might not pick up small leaks, he said..

The only approval that Enbridge needs is from the DNR for an air permit for work on its Superior pumping station. The comment period on that request has ended.

The DNR has 60 days to make a decision, according to a story in the Journal Sentinel. The decision would be delayed if the DNR conducts an environmental analysis, the story said. .