

# 800,000 gallons of oil spilled into Michigan river

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29 July 2010

Late Sunday, July 25, a section of the Lakehead system crude oil pipeline began to leak at a pumping station near Marshall, Michigan, in Calhoun County. An estimated 19,500 barrels, or over 800,000 gallons of oil spewed out into the Talmadge Creek, subsequently making its way into the Kalamazoo River. The spill is reportedly the largest in Midwest history.

A state of emergency has been declared in both Kalamazoo and Calhoun counties, and Michigan governor Jennifer Granholm has declared a “state of disaster.”

The causes of the leak are at this point unreported. The pipeline is owned by Houston, Texas based Enbridge Energy Partners, and is part of a 1,900-mile long Lakehead pipeline system that is the primary route for transporting crude oil from Western Canada into the United States. The 30-inch wide pipeline moves an estimated 190,000 barrels of oil per day.

The Lakehead system feeds oil refineries in Detroit, Michigan; Toledo, Ohio; and Sarnia, Ontario.

Enbridge has reported that it has shut down the pipeline and dispatched clean-up crews with absorbent and containment booms, skimmers, and vacuum trucks.

As of Wednesday, July 28, oil could be seen up to 16 miles downstream, in neighboring Kalamazoo County near the Fort Custer State Recreation Area. Authorities are currently attempting to keep the spill from reaching Morrow Bay, which is a popular recreation spot along the Kalamazoo River. They are hopeful that the oil will not reach Lake Michigan, which lies 60 miles down river of the spill origination point. This would send the oil into the Great Lakes, the largest system of fresh water in the world.

Weather, however, may pose a problem for clean-up crews. With the Kalamazoo already near flood levels, additional rain—which is expected on and off

throughout Wednesday—could increase the flow of the river and extend run-off reach. Authorities estimate that if not stopped, the oil could reach Lake Michigan by Sunday.

Local and state authorities have already begun to criticize the slow reaction and insufficient clean-up efforts of Enbridge.

Local police have reported that they received complaints from nearby residents on Sunday night around 9:25 of a strong oil smell. The police dispatched officers to investigate but did not determine the source. CEO and president of Enbridge, Patrick Daniel, told the media they had become aware of the leak at 8:45 am Monday. Although they claim to have reported it immediately, reports indicate it may have not been reported until later in the morning on Monday.

According to these reports, oil may have been leaking for 12 hours before the pipeline was shut down.

Granholm, who toured the area by helicopter on Tuesday, complained that not enough resources were being dispatched to contain and clean the spill. Granholm also speculated that Enbridge might be underestimating the amount of oil that was released in the leak. She told the media, “I worry that we were undersold about the amount of crude that was released.”

Michigan Congressman Mark Schauer also criticized Enbridge for their slow response. Schauer’s chief of staff, Ken Brock also told the media that the amount of oil released in the spill could be up to three times the amount originally estimated by Enbridge.

The spill has already created immediate health and environmental concerns for the people and animals in and around the towns near the Kalamazoo River.

Thirty families were relocated after the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) detected significant oil fumes and benzene, a carcinogenic

substance occasionally used as an additive in gasoline.

Doris Harris, who lives a street from the Kalamazoo River told the *Battle Creek Enquirer* her great-grandson woke up vomiting and complaining of a headache. She said the smell of oil was very strong in her home. Harris' neighbor, Marcus Adams, also complained of breathing difficulties.

Authorities also worry about the long-term possibility of oil seeping into the ground water supply around the river—many homes in the area rely on well water for their household supply. Kalamazoo County has already taken the precautionary measure of shutting down water wells in the areas threatened by the spill.

Oil has soaked the vegetation along the 16 miles of affected area along the Kalamazoo, and rescue crews have begun rounding up oil-covered waterfowl, Canadian geese and other animals to be cleaned. Scores of dead fish have also been reported along the river.

Daniel, the oil company's chief executive, told the media, in response to criticisms of Enbridge's cleanup response, the corporation's response borders on "overkill."

Daniel's arrogant comments are in-line with the attitude of BP taken towards the spill in the Gulf of Mexico; an attitude that puts private-profit ahead of the health and safety needs of the population.



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