Arkansas spill shows risks of Maine pipeline

In March, an ExxonMobil tar sands pipeline in Mayflower, Arkansas, ruptured, spilling between 200,000 and 420,000 gallons of tar sands oil and forcing 22 families to evacuate their homes.

ExxonMobil wants to pump toxic tar sands from Montreal to Casco Bay using an existing pipeline that cuts directly through the Lakes Region. But the spill in Arkansas offers a chilling glimpse of the potential for disaster that a tar sands pipeline in Maine would pose. Just like the project being contemplated here, the Arkansas pipeline is very old and was repurposed to carry Canadian tar sands oil.

The spill in Arkansas shows just how prone tar sands pipelines are to spills. Tar sands are much thicker than regular oil, so more pressure is needed to pump them through a pipeline, greatly increasing the risk of a spill.

While the ruptured pipeline in Mayflower was disastrous, a similar oil spill in Maine would likely be far more devastating. The Montreal-Casco Bay pipeline runs through the highly sensitive Lakes Region and comes within 1,000 feet of Sebago Lake, the source of drinking water for the Greater Portland area.

All-out push to block pipeline

We can’t let ExxonMobil put Sebago Lake, the Lakes Region, or Casco Bay at risk of a toxic tar sands oil spill. That’s why Environment Maine is making an all-out push this summer to stop this wrongheaded project from moving forward.

This spring, we petitioned the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Transportation to establish safety standards for pipelines carrying tar sands oil. And we’re continuing our campaign to convince President Obama to require a new permit and environmental review for the project, and to then reject it.

In addition, we’re working to block the pipeline in South Portland, the only municipality with the authority to stop it. This summer, we’re talking to 25,000 Mainers to educate them about the dangers a tar sands pipeline would pose and mobilize them to take action. Together, we can overcome the influence of ExxonMobil and stop this dangerous pipeline from becoming a reality.

Tar sands pipeline fight gains momentum

Mainers rally against ExxonMobil’s use of the old Portland-Montreal pipeline to carry highly toxic tar sands.

Take action

Take action to protect Sebago Lake and block the tar sands pipeline:
www.EnvironmentMaine.org

Sebago Lake, the source of drinking water for 200,000 Mainers, is so pristine that the water is only minimally filtered.
Recent action

LePage, Fredette attack clean energy

This year, Environment Maine has fought two major efforts to take us backward on clean energy. First, Gov. Paul LePage proposed a bill (LD 646) that would undermine Maine’s clean energy standard. Second, House Minority Leader Ken Fredette sponsored two bills (LD 1187 and 1262) that aim to build a new pipeline to bring fracked gas from the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania and surrounding states to Maine, and force Mainers—not the oil and gas industry—to pay for it. Fracking has left a trail of contaminated water, polluted air, and marred landscapes in its wake, and our future should be in clean energy—not environmental and public health destruction elsewhere.

Maine needs to break its dependence on dirty, polluting energy sources. We should use less energy overall and shift to clean, renewable energy made right here at home. Clean energy will cut pollution, safeguard our health, and create thousands of new manufacturing and construction jobs.

More progress on BPA, other toxic chemicals

In April, the Legislature’s Environment and Natural Resources Committee held a two-day hearing on bills that will guide Maine’s future actions to reduce children’s exposure to toxic chemicals in the home. During the hearing, the committee approved a ban on toxic BPA for infant formula and baby food packaging—a ban that Environment Maine, as a member of the Steering Committee of the Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Maine, has championed from the beginning.

On the second day of the hearing, dozens of parents, physicians, scientists and health advocates called for more action to protect kids from toxic chemicals—specifically, from 49 chemicals designated by the state as Chemicals of High Concern in 2012. These chemicals are proven to pose serious health risks to children, yet are found in toys, furniture, food packaging and more.
In February, Northeast and Mid-Atlantic state officials announced improvements to the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), the landmark program for cutting global warming pollution in nine states, including Maine. The improvements would reduce power plant pollution in the region by more than 20 percent over the next decade.

However, Gov. Paul LePage indicated he will propose legislation to redirect the revenue Maine receives from auctioning pollution credits under the program, which is currently invested in energy efficiency. Instead of putting the money back into energy efficiency, Gov. LePage would use it for other purposes.

Environment Maine has been working to pass the tighter pollution limits agreed to regionally into law in Maine, while ensuring that the revenue from the program continues to be invested in energy efficiency, despite the governor’s efforts.

New report: Stronger RGGI a win-win
A new report from the Environment Maine Research & Policy Center found that the Northeast states, from Maryland to Maine, are responsible for as much climate-altering carbon pollution as all but nine nations.

“Many of the changes we are making to our energy systems are not only good for our climate, but also our economy and our health,” said Environment Maine Director Emily Figdor. “This report shows that we can meet our climate goals while keeping our economy strong.”

The report, “A Double Success: Tackling Global Warming While Growing the Economy with an Improved Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative,” also shows that lowering global warming emissions is consistent with a growing economy. Between 2000 and 2010, the economies of the 10 Northeast states grew twice as fast per capita as other states while carbon dioxide emissions fell 25 percent faster per capita. Maine’s economy grew by three percent, while emissions fell by 20 percent. Recent analyses have also shown that strengthening RGGI could produce an additional $8 billion in economic benefits.

“By promoting a shift to clean energy and supporting programs to save energy, RGGI helps keep energy dollars in our local economy, while reducing the risk of costs associated with changes in our climate,” explained Figdor.

No time to waste
The agreement reached among the states participating in the RGGI program earlier this year will cut carbon dioxide pollution from the region’s power plants by 20 percent over the next decade. States are now revising their rules in order to carry out the agreement, and Environment Maine is committed to convincing state officials to quickly adopt the changes in Maine.

“There’s no time to waste in tackling the climate challenge, and it’s got to start right here and right now,” concluded Figdor. “The progress Maine is making in reducing emissions should give us the confidence that we can continue to lead.”

Northeast region makes progress on climate change

Interview with Ron Adams
Ron Adams is the Food Service Director for Portland Public Schools. We recently spoke with him about Portland’s use of local Maine foods and the benefits of using local ingredients.

How much of the food in Portland’s schools comes from local sources? And what are you aiming for in the future?

In 2012, we spent 30 percent of the budget on local foods, including: dairy products from Oakhurst Dairy, hamburgers from Harrington Brothers, haddock from Bristol Seafood, and fruits and vegetables from several sources—local farmers, Farm Fresh Connections, Crown of Maine Cooperative and Good Shepherd Food Bank.

The current discussions with the Mayor’s Subcommittee on a Healthy and Sustainable Food System are pointing towards 50 percent local foods in the schools. This would support fresher foods and healthier menus to help our students learn and excel.

Have you seen any benefits to serving more locally grown foods?
In addition to other benefits, the yield is typically better for local foods, with less waste. And the publicity from using local foods encourages more families to eat school meals as the food quality and made-from-scratch recipes are tested by students with success. More students eating school meals drives down the cost for all meals and reduces the tax burden of the food service program on the city.
Environment Maine

Our mission
We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That’s the idea behind Environment Maine. We focus exclusively on protecting Maine’s air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

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Spearheading a bill for local food in schools

Environment Maine is spearheading a bill to increase the use of locally produced food in Maine’s schools. The bill, LD 1185, is sponsored by Assistant House Majority Leader Jeff McCabe and enjoys wide support from parent-teacher associations, local farm organizations, health associations and more. At a hearing in April before the Legislature’s Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, Environment Maine delivered 1,000 citizen petition signatures to the committee in support of the bill.

“Despite our rich agricultural tradition, Maine imports more of its food from outside its borders than any other state in the continental U.S.,” said Alexandra Fields, preservation associate with Environment Maine. Much of this imported food comes from factory farms, which pollute the environment and fuel global warming. “We have to fix that, and we should start by putting more fresh, local foods in Maine’s schools,” concluded Fields.

A new bill spearheaded by Environment Maine would help increase the use of fresh, local food in Maine’s schools. Maine currently imports too much of its food from out-of-state factory farms.

Visit www.EnvironmentMaine.org to learn more and take action.