176,000 Gallons+ Pipeline Leak Less than Three Hours From Standing Rock Protests

Activists in Standing Rock have been protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline for months now, claiming the pipeline will pollute the Missouri River, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe's source of drinking water. The scenario that the Water Protectors are protesting is taking place less than three hours away in Billings County, ND. According to CNN:

> *State officials estimate 4,200 barrels of crude oil, or 176,000 gallons, have leaked from the Belle Fourche Pipeline in Billings County. Of that amount, 130,000 gallons of oil has flowed into Ash Coulee Creek, while the rest leaked onto a hillside, said Bill Suess, spill investigation program manager at the North Dakota Department of Health. Built in the 1980s, the pipeline is 6 inches in diameter and transports about 1,000 barrels of oil daily, he said. The leak happened December 5."*

The North Dakota Department of Health says the cause of the break is not known. The pipeline was immediately shut down upon the discovery of the leak. According to Belle Fourche Pipeline spokeswoman Wendy Owen, "Electronic monitoring equipment failed to detect the leak… and the pipeline may have ruptured when the hillside slumped."

Proving the Protesters' Point

An electronically undetected pipeline spill so close to the Standing Rock protests reinforces the protesters' argument. With the operating company unable to detect the spill, who knows how long it might have continued and how much

environmental contamination could have happened?

Supporters of the DAPL and the oil companies have claimed that this is a not indicative of the overall industry, claiming True Companies (the owner of Belle Fourche Pipeline) is unsafe, citing their record of 50 environmental incidents and over 200,000 gallons of oil leaked in the last 10 years. Ironically, throwing True Companies under the bus due to their safety record also proves the protesters' point. If a company with 50 leaks and spills in 10 years doesn't represent the industry's safety standards, then where in that those standards does a company with over 200 incidents in the last six years fit? That second company is Sunoco, a subsidiary of Energy Transfer Partners, the company responsible for building the DAPL. Sunoco, one of the largest gasoline distribution companies in the U.S., is also the company responsible for an October leak of 55,000 gallons into a tributary of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania and is the leader in spilling crude oil in the U.S.

Just Because the Pipeline is Moved Does Not Mean It's Safe

In a victory for the Water Protectors at Standing Rock, the U.S. Department of Army does not approve of building the pipeline underneath the Missouri river. But the pipeline is almost built. The damage will be done, and if Sunoco's safety record is accurate, that damage will occur over and over again. Is "reducing the U.S. dependence on foreign oil" worth this certain environmental degradation? Why aren't we working toward reducing our dependence on oil, period?

Sources

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