

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For comment, contact:

Michigan Residents Against the ET Rover Pipeline (MRAtETRP) - overwithrover@gmail.com

Matthew S. Borke (resident and MRAtETRP member) – (734) 263-0592

Terry Lodge (MRAtETRP's attorney) - tjlodge50@yahoo.com, (419) 205-7084

Jen (life-long Pinckney-area resident) - (248) 982-1167

Energy Transfer Spills Hundreds of Gallons per Minute of Gasoline-Laced Water into Michigan Wetland

Today's discovery is the newest addition to a long record of alleged misconduct during construction of the controversial Rover pipeline, which is 50.1% owned by Energy Transfer, the company also behind the Dakota Access pipeline.



Photos by anonymous resident - Oct. 11, 2017

This morning, a senior official at the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) confirmed by nose the presence of gasoline in an ongoing, days-long spill of hundreds of gallons of water per minute into a Pinckney, Michigan wetland. The spill occurred during construction of the controversial and accident-prone Rover pipeline.

The Rover pipeline is a project of Energy Transfer, the same company behind the controversial Dakota Access pipeline. If completed, the 42-inch-diameter Rover pipeline is slated to carry 3.25 billion cubic feet of odorless, radioactive, hydraulically-fractured natural gas per day from shale formations in Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia. In Michigan it will cross Lenawee, Washtenaw and Livingston counties before joining the Vector pipeline near Howell (Livingston County) to export the gas to the Dawn Hub in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada.

On Monday (Oct. 10), local residents noticed an ongoing water spill on the Rover pipeline construction easement at a place where the route construction crosses a wetland. The residents estimated that hundreds of gallons of water per minute were spilling over the silt-fence reservoir (pictured above) meant to temporarily contain water moving from one wetland to another. On Tuesday (Oct. 11), the residents noticed that the still-spilling water smelled strongly of

gasoline. They bottled a sample, took photos and video, and reported the smell to the Michigan DEQ, the federal EPA pollution hotline, and FERC.

A MDEQ representative arrived on the scene shortly thereafter. He did not have a water testing kit with him, and said he could not collect a sample without the kit, but he confirmed that the still-spilling water smelled like gasoline.

This morning (Oct. 12), MDEQ Senior Environmental Quality Analyst Rebecca Taylor arrived at the easement to test the water, and confirmed by nose with certainty that the leaking water contains gasoline. The chemical test result that is expected to substantiate her finding will be available next week.

Matthew Borke, a local resident, expressed frustration that in the meantime, “there is no movement to contain [the spill], no movement to stop it. There was barely any movement to even study it. No one showed up with a test kit until more than 24 hours [after it was reported] as they continued to pump the fluids into the stream.”

The MDEQ has yet to investigate the extent of the damage to the wetland and the water system, or the source of the gasoline spill. Residents are concerned about the danger that gasoline poses to the wetland’s wildlife in the meantime, while the MDEQ awaits the chemical test result. They are also concerned that the wetland in which the gasoline spill occurred flows into the Huron River watershed, which supplies drinking water to the city of Ann Arbor.

Life-long local resident Jen (who declined to give her last name) said: “Our fears are coming to life. It’s actually happening, and nobody’s acting fast enough. We’re just disappointed about how slow the response [has been]. The left hand doesn’t seem to do what the right hand’s doing throughout this project. We hope that MDEQ will come out strong on our behalf to protect our water.”

The spill is located near the border between Livingston and Washtenaw counties, at the easement on Dexter Townhall Rd. near Cedar Rd, and near the YMCA Camp Birkett.

A History of Alleged Misconduct

This is not the first time the Rover pipeline’s construction crews have spilled petrochemicals into a wetland.

In April, Energy Transfer spilled [5 million](#) gallons of drilling fluid in Ohio during construction of the disaster-prone Rover pipeline that destroyed a pristine wetland near the Tuscarawas River. Subsequently, the Ohio EPA discovered [diesel](#) in that spill.

FERC is investigating a pattern of seemingly reckless conduct on Energy Transfer’s part during the Rover pipeline construction process, including the [demolition of the historic Stoneman House](#) in Ohio.

Rover has consistently neglected [or refused to](#) pay fines that states have levied in response to such offenses, arguing that only FERC has the authority to discipline them, and that the laws of states in which they operate do not apply to them.

Local residents in the Pinckney, Michigan area –where today’s spill took place—point out that, even within their small geographic area, today’s confirmation of the presence of gasoline in the ongoing wetland spill is part of a larger pattern of irresponsible and untrustworthy behavior by Rover and Energy Transfer.

On May 8, the Department of Transportation’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSSA) issued Rover a warning letter stating that the company “probably violated” safe welding standards during pipeline construction in Pinckney, and also in North Baltimore, Ohio. Weak welds are dangerous because they are a pipeline’s “weakest link”: the spots most likely to give way to a leak and explosion.

[C. Rhodes, P.Eng., PhD](#) calculates that an explosion of a pipeline of Rover's diameter and pressure would create an "area of spontaneous combustion" of 3,170 meters (about 2 miles) in perimeter, 1.24 miles in diameter. Within this area, "the fire storm and consequent loss of life and property would be comparable to the WWII fire storms in Dresden, Hamburg, Tokyo and Hiroshima."

Pinckney-area residents are also upset that the pipeline company waited until months after the public environmental review process had closed to request an unexpected route-change in Washtenaw and Livingston Counties near Silver Lake in September 2016. FERC then quietly approved the change without ever notifying key stakeholders (including the Ann Arbor YMCA) or giving the public an opportunity to comment on the switch. The new route is concerning because runs through a populated area including a YMCA children's camp, and in the event of an accident, would leave residents and campers with no escape route. The citizens say they believe Energy Transfer misled FERC into making the switch. More information on the switch can be found here:

http://annarborobserver.com/s/pipeline_protest_full_article.html

Even though the pipeline runs through a populated area, residents also say Rover has reneged on verbal assurances its employees gave to property owners at a meeting early in the permitting process that odor would be added to the gas once the pipeline is running. Odorant is a safety feature commonly added to natural gas—which is otherwise unscented—so that people may detect leaks early and evacuate to safety before an explosion occurs. Not only is natural gas highly explosive and flammable, but it can also cause asphyxiation even in the outdoors. Rover now claims it never intended to odorize the gas. Residents argue that by not adding odorant, Rover is cutting corners in a way that puts local people's lives in danger.

A local citizens' group, Michigan Residents Against the ET Rover Pipeline, has filed legal challenges with FERC and the Army Corps of Engineers calling for the revocation of Rover's construction permit in light of their multiple violations of the public trust. FERC has dismissed the group's challenges on a technicality for falling outside the statute of limitations. The group members object to the double standard, pointing out that FERC accepted a fateful September 2016 filing by Rover well after the allowable period had closed. They believe FERC's rejection of citizens' concerns is unfair. They point out that FERC's decision fails to take into consideration that they are non-specialists who had to pore through thousands of pages of documents unaided to discover the anomalies that form the basis for their objections, and were unaware of the time limit until after the statutorily-limited period had expired for a legitimate reason: because they had no access to a lawyer during that time.

To find out more the ET Rover pipeline, visit www.overwithrover.com, or on Facebook, follow "Michigan Residents Against the ET Rover Pipeline" at www.facebook.com/OverwithRoverPipeline/. To make a tax-deductible contribution to the legal fund opposing the Rover pipeline, visit www.fwap.org/donate.