

Why Council Must Oppose Pipeline.

On Monday, May 29, Thunder Bay's city council will once again consider a resolution asking members to vote in principle against the TransCanada /Energy East Ltd.'s Energy East Pipeline. This resolution has been deferred for two years due to concerns about lack of complete information (as well as unforeseen administrative delays).

A group of representatives from five local groups have been working on understanding the implications of the Energy East pipeline for five years now, and are adamantly opposed to the development of such a pipeline.

The Energy East pipeline would be the largest oil pipeline in North America. It is to be partly newly constructed, and partly be repurposing an old natural gas pipeline. The part passing through Northwestern Ontario is the old to-be-converted pipe, some of which has been in the ground for 50 years.

TransCanada has a very troubling safety record, in spite of its claims to the contrary, and the record shows that all pipelines leak. When oil pipelines leak, they tend to spill a great deal of oil, partly because the leaks are often not discovered until they have been going on for some time. The majority of leaks are discovered by passers-by rather than by the 'state-of-the-art' monitoring system based in Calgary.

In parts of Northwestern Ontario, there is a waterway of some sort every 500 metres; most of the area north of Thunder Bay has a waterway at least once every kilometre. These waterways are all interconnected, and are the lifeblood of the several aquifers which exist in this area.

The Lake Superior Watershed pours its water into Lake Superior: a spill would threaten the drinking water of many citizens in our area and downstream.

In total, the proposed Energy East pipeline threatens almost 3,000 lakes, rivers, streams and aquifers - the source of drinking water for over 5 million Canadians. To say nothing of the other life forms in all of the areas crossed by this pipeline. Safety for people and wild areas is the first of our major concerns with allowing this pipeline to proceed.

The second major concern is with the effect that such a pipeline would have on our climate. We have all felt, and seen in other places, the effects of extreme weather events. We now understand that these are part of the result of climate change: the warming of the earth's atmosphere due to the buildup of 'greenhouse gases' (largely carbon dioxide) in the atmosphere.

Over 99 per cent of the world's scientists agree that this buildup is due to human activity, largely the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, natural gas).

Canada spoke very loudly at the Paris Climate Summit about our commitment to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions: the development of the oil industry in the Alberta tar sands is the largest contributor to those emissions. And yet, the Canadian government has approved the development of two major pipelines, and is preparing to hold hearings to decide whether or not to approve Energy East.

The building of this pipeline would necessitate the expansion of the operations in the tar sands, and would produce greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to putting 17 million new cars on the road!

We cannot afford to do this. Climate change is expensive and destructive. Thunder Bay has seen floods, and is plagued by ticks which can cause Lyme disease. Thunder Bay has spent a huge amount of time and money to 'climate proof' the city, but cannot keep ahead of the rapidly changing climate.

Many studies, as well as on-the-ground experience in countries such as Germany and Denmark, have shown that there are a huge number of jobs to be had - good, permanent, well-paid jobs - in the transition to clean energy. The Renewable Energy Agency reports that there were 9.8 million clean energy jobs created in this sector worldwide in 2015-16. It predicts 24 million jobs worldwide in the clean energy sector. We need to move there as quickly as possible.

If Thunder Bay's city council votes to disapprove in principle the Energy East pipeline, this will be an act of leadership which will indicate our forward-thinking nature and our readiness to move into the future, away from fossil fuel dependence and into clean, renewable energy sources.

I would urge everyone who reads this to write or call the mayor or a city councillor and ask them to vote against Energy East on Monday night.

Ruth Cook

Ruth Cook is a member of the Coalition Against Energy East, representing the Thunder Bay Council of Canadians. The other local groups represented in the coalition are: Environment North, CUSP, Ontario Nature, and the Environmental Law Students Association.

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