

# County opposes oil pipeline permit

By Lydia Statz, Union staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, May 14, 2014 9:53 am

JEFFERSON — The Jefferson County Board of Supervisors waded into a hot topic Tuesday when it voted to urge the state Department of Natural Resource to reject a permit to upgrade an oil pipeline that runs through the county.

Enbridge Energies Line 61, which runs through Wisconsin from Superior to northern Illinois, currently carries approximately 400,000 barrels of Canadian tar sands oil per day. The pipeline crosses into Jefferson County near Waterloo and runs through the southwestern corner of the county, crossing beneath the Rock River south of Fort Atkinson just north of Lake Koshkonong.

The company plans to increase the pipeline's capacity up to 1.2 million barrels per day by 2015 through construction of several additional pumping stations along the line, including a new one outside of Waterloo in Dane County.

On its website, Enbridge says the additional pumps, which typically are located every 40 to 60 miles, "maintain flow to keep the liquid petroleum moving at about walking speed."

The project, which does not require any additional pipeline construction, does need several permits from the Department of Natural Resources to move forward.

One of these, an air pollution control permit, is required to ensure that an additional constructed facility in Superior will fall within the state's pollution standards. That permit currently is in the application period, and the DNR is accepting public comment until May 18, giving the Jefferson County supervisors a short window of opportunity to register their voices on the matter.

A resolution brought forth during Tuesday's monthly board meeting by Supervisor Walt Christensen urged the Wisconsin DNR to reject the company's permit, undertake a full environmental assessment of the pipeline and conduct a public hearing or public information session in Jefferson County before authorizing Enbridge to increase the fluid pressure flowing through the pipeline.

Calls to Enbridge and to the DNR for more information on the project and permitting process were not returned by presstime.

Christensen pointed out that although the air quality permit only applies to the Superior facility, the public comment opportunity afforded by the open permit process presented an opportunity he brought to the board after several county residents voiced their concerns over the potential danger pipeline expansion could bring to the county.

"The issues that I am concerned about are the great number of spills that are occurring, and the increase in pipeline pressure going through this existing pipeline," he said. "I think it's risky business, and it's especially risky business when there's no offsetting benefit to the county."

Federal statistics show that on average, about 130 significant spills occur each year from hazardous material

pipelines, which include crude oil pipelines. In 2013, the total property damage caused by 156 spills exceeded \$230 million.

Approximately one-dozen Jefferson County residents gathered to support Christensen's resolution urging a reconsideration of the pipeline project Tuesday, fearing a similar fate near their home.

"My children grew up on Highway B and the intersection of Kroghville Road, which is right where that pipeline runs through. I no longer live there, but because it's not in my backyard doesn't mean I don't care," said Ronni Meyer. "I'm going to ask you, as elected officials of Jefferson County, what you're going to do to protect our farmland, our water, our health and our heritage. This pipeline isn't what we're about."

Sue Handrich-Herr said she lives near enough to the buried pipeline to have received literature from Enbridge on how to detect a pipeline leak. According to the company's website, the pipeline is monitored constantly by a computerized system to detect potential leaks, but Handrich-Herr said that doesn't make her feel any better.

"What this tells me is that despite their maintenance system ... accidents happen that they have no knowledge of, and they depend on the neighbors to report them," she said. "And to me, living .2 miles from the pipeline, that's a big concern. The risk is too great, so I really hope that you'll support and demand a full environmental assessment of this full pipeline system."

Still others brought up concerns over the chemical makeup of the tar sands oil flowing through the pipe. Tar sands oil is more dense than regular crude oil and is diluted with other chemicals, which many fear make it more corrosive to pipelines, increasing the risk of spills and leaks.

However, while tar sands oil spills can be more costly and more difficult to clean up, a 2013 study by the National Research Council found no evidence to support the idea that pipelines carrying this type of petroleum were more likely to leak than others.

Still, James Kerler and many others who spoke alluded to a recent, widely-publicized Enbridge tar sands oil spill near Kalamazoo, Mich., as evidence of how much damage a single leak can cause. In 2010, a rupture in the pipeline caused nearly 900,000 gallons of oil to spill into the Kalamazoo River, the largest inland oil spill in American history.

"Maybe Enbridge has answers to our concerns. Maybe yes, maybe no," Kerler said, wondering why the company hasn't been more involved in reaching out to the local community. "You don't know and I don't know, and therein lies the problem because we haven't been presented with the facts about this project. We've been kept out of the loop."

County board members debated the issue for some time, many of them with questions on the permitting process or the project specifically that could not be adequately answered by those in the room. Some wondered what cleanup plans would be if a spill does occur, what kind of comments were made during a DNR public comment session in Superior on May 5, and what the effects on the pipeline will be of increasing the pressure by such a degree.

"Just listen to your discussion here, folks. You're all asking questions of Walt, who's not the expert here; he just happened to bring the question forward," Supervisor Steve Nass said. "So there are enough questions in this room for a public hearing just from your supervisors, not to mention all the citizens sitting here. Anybody who's not

voting ‘yes’ on this is being disingenuous.”

Christensen said the answers to the questions brought up in Tuesday’s meeting are exactly what he intends to seek with this proposal.

“All I’m seeking in this resolution is to have some explanation by the authorities that are knowledgeable — Enbridge, the DNR, federal officials where possible — as to why there isn’t the risk that I perceive to be,” he said. “And then also to notify our federal and state officials that they really need to take another look at the rules regarding pipeline placement.”

Many supervisors appeared to agree, and were more inclined to vote for the resolution as it did not put the county on record as being necessarily opposed to the pipeline project, but simply asks for more information before a decision is made.

“I just want to point out that what this resolution does is not say that we’re opposed to this absolutely. What this resolution does is ask the Department of Natural Resources to do due diligence before approving anything like this,” said Supervisor Dick Schultz. “I would hope that’s the minimum that we can do.”

After the lengthy public comment session and debate, the resolution was adopted by a vote of 27-2, with only Supervisors James Braughler and George Jaeckel voting against it. Supervisor Jim Mode was absent from Tuesday’s meeting.

The resolution will be forwarded to the DNR before the public comment session closes on May 18, as an urging to deny the company its air quality permit for the Superior facility and conduct a full environmental assessment of the project. The county will be in touch with the agency to request a public information meeting to be held in Jefferson County regarding the project.

The resolution also will be forwarded to the county’s state and national legislative representatives.