

Worried residents question Enbridge

By Lydia Statz, Union staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, June 25, 2014 9:39 am

JEFFERSON — The message to Enbridge officials was clear Monday, as dozens of area residents gathered in Jefferson to voice their anger over an expansion project slated to increase pressure on an oil pipeline running through Jefferson County.

Enbridge Energies' Line 61 runs through Wisconsin from Superior to Illinois, crossing into Jefferson County near Waterloo. It travels through the southwestern corner of the county, crossing beneath the Rock River south of Fort Atkinson and just north of Lake Koshkonong.

Currently it carries approximately 400,000 barrels of tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada, per day, but 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.

That likely would make it one of the largest pipelines in the country by volume, a prospect about which local residents attending the "Coffee and Conversation with Enbridge" event were not pleased.

"What happens when our well water is contaminated with poisons?" one man asked. "Who's going to clean it up?"

The prospect of a pipeline leak or spill, and the consequences it would have for neighboring homeowners have been the chief concerns among those opposing the project upgrade.

Though tar sands oil has been flowing through the pipeline since it was constructed in 2007, many contend the possibility of a leak is that much greater as the pressure through the pipeline is increased to 1,200 pounds per square inch (psi) with the addition of the new pumping stations.

Though Enbridge representatives provided answers to many of the questions and concerns brought forward at Monday's gathering, the information provided was unsatisfactory to many.

"Any leak we respond to, we have several people in the community who respond to it. We have a state-of-the-art control center that all valves in the area can be closed from the control center and can isolate the section and minimize any impact," said Aaron Madsen, Enbridge's supervisor for engineering construction. "And then we contain and clean up any oil that we can right away."

Many of the company's statements throughout the evening were met with laughter and accusations about the company's environmental record.

It was a combative format Enbridge was attempting to avoid when it originally organized the meeting to be an



Coffee with Enbridge

Shown above are scenes from the "Coffee and Conversation with Enbridge" event Tuesday. View all available photos here. — Daily Union photos by Lydia Statz.

open-house format, with residents asking questions one-on-one with Enbridge representatives. However, some of the more than 75 attendees, including many political candidates who empathized with the crowd, were unhappy with the format and quickly began setting up chairs for a group presentation, succeeding in turning the session into two-hour group question-and-answer session.

The group, closely monitored by two Jefferson police officers, then proceeded to drill the company representatives on everything from the company's safety procedures to the pipeline welds, the content of the material flowing through the pipelines and their environmental record.

Over the past five years, Enbridge has reported 490 spills or leaks, totaling 59,614 barrels of petroleum product.

It was this type of record, and a fear that a similar spill could happen here, that led the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors to pass a resolution on May 13 opposing a state Department of Natural Resources permit for a separate portion of the project located in Superior, and to urge the company to hold a public hearing in Jefferson County.

Although the permit already has been approved by the DNR and Enbridge said the project will move forward no matter what, Dane County passed a similar resolution last week. Shortly following that, 18 Wisconsin state senators and representatives sent a letter to Wisconsin DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp, urging her to require the Line 61 project to undergo a full environmental assessment.

It is difficult to say, however, whether those who attended the session felt it provided any benefit.

"A full environmental impact study was never done (on this project)," one woman said, though the company insisted it was. "Where is the environmental impact study? ... Why would you not want as much knowledge and information as to how much this is going to impact our environment?"

"I guess that goes back to your Legislature," Madsen said. "We follow the letter of the law."

His answer was met by more laughter.

"If we had a town-hall vote tonight on the pipeline, would you respect the outcome of that vote?" another man asked.

Becky Haase, a stakeholder relations specialist for the company, simply replied, "No."

Many times throughout the evening, members of the audience brought up the 2010 Kalamazoo River oil spill, in which an Enbridge pipeline caused the largest inland oil spill in U.S. history.

Enbridge representatives insisted that the company has learned lessons since then, but many attendees expressed fears of another such disaster occurring in their home territory.

"Are there any updates on these detection systems?" asked one man. "Are they fabulous now? Are they foolproof?"

"No, they're not infallible. But we've spent more than \$4 billion to make sure that we're getting to zero. That's our goal," Haase said.

Enbridge representatives discussed their regular maintenance system for the pipelines, ultrasound inspections that can detect irregularities, and the emergency management procedures intended to ensure a quick response in the

event of an accident. However, that didn't soothe people like Sue Handrich-Herr, who resides near enough the pipeline to have received a brochure titled "Pipeline Safety: A Shared Responsibility."

Other questions directed toward the company were more policy-oriented, dealing with the company's contribution toward global climate change and role in the economy.

"Where is the demand coming from? It's coming from us using the oil and plastic," said Jennifer Smith, a community relations manager for Enbridge.

"Enbridge is an energy transportation company. We move crude oil from one location to another via pipeline. That is what we do; it's inherent in our business to keep the product in the pipe because we get paid like a tollway as it goes through the pipelines."

Some just wanted the company to be accountable were any accident ever to happen.

"Would Enbridge be willing to sign some type of specific performance contract that would cover what they do when there's a spill?" one man asked "Because the easements are very vague and they don't hold up in court. So would there be a contract with the county or individual landowners that would say 'we would put this soil back exactly the way it was?'"

To that, the representatives said they would pass the suggestion along to their superiors.

All in all, though, attendees appeared displeased as they walked away from the event.

"I don't understand what you're doing here, because you're not providing any real information ...you're not really addressing the concerns of the citizenry in this room," said one.

"We're here simply to make sure, as any community would, that what goes along our property, what affects us and our neighbors, represents the common good," added Carl Whiting. "And I have not heard a single comment that you have made tonight that in any way helps us understand how we are receiving a benefit that intends to compensate us for the risks that we're being asked to take on."

And as they left for the night, many took up a chant to drill their message home. "Put the people before the profits! Put the people before the profits!"