

The Canadian Impacts of the Tar Sands: Pipelines, Refineries, the Manufacturing Sector and Worker Migration

Northern Alberta's tar sands are home to 173 billion barrels of recoverable bitumen. The mining process spans an area twice the size of New Brunswick, where close to 1.4 million barrels are produced daily. But the impacts of this massive project stretch much further than just Alberta. Here is a cross-Canada look at how tar sands development is affecting our country.

The west coast and Northwest Territories

Plans are already underway to ship tar sands crude and refined products through B.C. to U.S. and Asia-Pacific markets. This involves significant expansions to existing pipelines (like Kinder Morgan's Trans-Mountain Pipeline Expansion) and building of new infrastructure (such as Enbridge's Gateway Project.) Pipeline leaks and spills risk contaminating local ecosystems and more refineries mean more toxic emissions. The Dogwood Initiative outlines five reasons to stop the use of Northern B.C. coastal waters as a hub for shipping tar sands. This includes the impacts of the inevitable spills on a unique ecosystem that is home to a number of endangered species as well as thriving tourist and fishing industries. Enbridge's Gateway Project will violate a moratorium in place to protect the Douglas Channel. Alberta is running low on natural gas, a relatively clean burning source of energy used to heat many Canadian homes that also helps fuel tar sands production. In addition to transporting gas from B.C., plans are being proposed, and some are underway, to bring natural gas to the tar sands from Alaska through B.C. as well as from the Northwest Territories via the Mackenzie Gas Project. These projects are dominated by, and will profit, corporate oil and gas giants and propose tapping into natural gas supplies in sensitive eco-systems. Groups like the Arctic Indigenous Youth Network and impacted aboriginal peoples such as the Dehcho First Nation have been voicing their environmental, social, economic and treaty rights objections to the Mackenzie Gas project.

Prairies

People living in Alberta and Saskatchewan are directly impacted by the pollution and contamination of their land, water and air, and



the social consequences of unbridled development of Alberta's tar sands. First Nations and Métis communities are not receiving adequate support, compensation or having a say in tar sands development and pipeline construction within or near their traditional territories. Downstream from the tar sands, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation is experiencing unusually high cancer rates, and the water they rely on from Lake Athabasca has high levels of carcinogens. Air quality in Fort McMurray and the tar sands region is deteriorating as massive amounts of pollution fill the air. Social services and infrastructure are lagging far behind the community needs, and health and environmental concerns with tar sands upgraders persist. The tar sands are responsible for both the depletion and contamination of water in Alberta and have long-standing impacts on people and the environment. The threat of deportation keeps the many temporary foreign workers in the tar sands in an unstable situation. Saskatchewan is experiencing acid rain as a direct result of the tar sands, which is bad for human and ecosystem health. There are also proposals moving forward for tar sands development in Saskatchewan.

Ontario and Quebec

The destructive pace of tar sands development has helped to increase the value of the Canadian dollar, which has had serious impacts on the manufacturing sector and jobs in the pulp and paper industry. This impact has been particularly harsh in Ontario and Quebec with job losses causing hardships on families. The possibility of expanding the transportation of crude oil to Ontario and Quebec is raising alarm bells. A report by the University of Toronto, *How the Oil Sands got the Great Lakes*, outlines the serious risks associated with expanded refineries in the area of the Great Lakes to process tar sand's bitumen, including concerns with severe water depletion and contamination, and a significant increase in greenhouse gas emissions. A refinery near Sarnia, Ontario that processes tar sands products is contributing to pollution that is impacting surrounding communities including the





Aamjiwnaang First Nation. In Quebec, debate has been spurred over Enbridge's proposed plan to reverse the flow of a pipeline from Sarnia to Montreal to give refineries in Quebec access to tar sands products as well as for shipment to U.S. markets. Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces rely heavily on imported oil, and increasing consumption of Canadian oil in these provinces is a more reliable strategy for meeting energy security needs. Energy expert Gordon Laxer argues that conventional oil could meet Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada's needs if matched by greater conservation efforts, bringing consumption of oil in line with production of oil in Canada. Currently close to 70 per cent of Canada's oil and 61 per cent of our gas is exported to the U.S.

Atlantic region

Worker migration from Atlantic Canada is not new. Faced with the collapse of local industries such as fisheries and coal mining, this region has a history of workers leaving their family and friends to seek employment in the current economic "boom" region of the country. *Hard Times Sold in Vending Machines* (January 2008) in *The Dominion: News From the Grassroots* addresses the impacts of the most recent migration of workers to the tar sands. In addition to drawing young workers away from local jobs – labour shortages are occurring in some sectors – this pattern causes hardships on families, exposes workers to dangerous jobs (workplace deaths in Alberta are one of the highest in the country), and contributes to low population growth rates in the region. In the end, the long-term impacts of this migration are largely unknown. In addition to the worker migration issues, Atlantic Canada also relies heavily on imported oil to meet the region's needs. Faced with diminishing reserves globally and Canadian commitments to export oil to the U.S. thanks to free trade agreements like NAFTA and free market rules, Atlantic Canada is in a vulnerable position in terms of oil energy security.

Take action!

To learn more about the tar sands and to add your voice to the call for no new approvals of tar sands development and a Canadian Energy Strategy that prioritizes policies that protect Canadian's energy security, our environment and plans for a transition to less harmful energy alternatives, visit www.canadians.org/energy

Resources:

www.canadians.org/energy
www.dogwoodinitiative.org/notankers
www.tarsandsfreebc.org; www.mackenziewild.ca
www.tarsandswatch.org; www.dominionpaper.ca/topic/tar_sands
<http://oilsandstruth.org/taxonomy/vocabulary/2>
<http://www.ienearth.org/cits.html>

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