

Mayflower, Arkansas Tar Sands Spill - 2013

On March 29, 2013, ExxonMobil's 95,000 barrel per day Pegasus Pipeline ruptured, sending roughly 5,000 barrels (210,000 gallons) of tar sands diluted bitumen through the community of Mayflower, Arkansas.¹ Some of the spilled tar sands crude flowed through people's yards and down their streets.² While some of the very closest homes to the spill were evacuated, many who lived just a few hundred yards from the spilled diluted bitumen were not – and were exposed to dangerous levels of benzene, along with other pollutants such as octane, cyclohexane, heptane, hexane, toluene, butane, pentane and more.³ Some community members experienced severe headaches, nausea, and respiratory infections following the spill.⁴ Even nearly a year later, residents still were facing headaches, dizziness, nausea and other health challenges – while being told it was safe to live there – so that some have abandoned their homes, unable to find buyers.⁵

The Pegasus pipeline runs from Patoka, Illinois through Missouri and Arkansas to Corsicana and Nederland, Texas.⁶ At the time of the spill, the pipeline was 65 years old, and had been built to transport lighter crudes at lower pressures in the opposite direction—but was reversed in 2006 to transport heavier tar sands diluted bitumen at higher pressures to the Gulf Coast.⁷ Until 2012, Exxon's 90,000 bpd Pegasus pipeline was the only pipeline to move Canadian diluted from the Midwest to the Gulf Coast.

Following the spill, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) issued a Corrective Action Order, requiring ExxonMobil to shut down the pipeline until certain conditions were met, and initiated an investigation of the spill. PHMSA found nine probable violations of safety rules that may have contributed to the spill, and ExxonMobil was fined nearly \$2.7 million.⁸ On March 31, 2014 – just over a year after the spill – PHMSA approved ExxonMobil's request to resume operations on the Pegasus Pipeline at a reduced pressure of 80% of the operating pressure at the time of the pipeline failure.⁹

As illustrated by the Mayflower spill and the 2010 tar sands spill into the Kalamazoo River, tar sands is risky to transport, and poses health risks and clean-up challenges when it does spill. Further, the pipeline companies are not doing their jobs to ensure that the communities through which they are transporting tar sands stay safe, and U.S. government regulation of tar sands transport is inadequate. Building more tar sands pipelines like Keystone XL and exacerbating these risks is the wrong path forward.

¹ PHMSA, ExxonMobil Pipeline Incident – Mayflower, Ark.,

<http://www.phmsa.dot.gov/portal/site/PHMSA/menuitem.6f23687cf7b00b0f22e4c6962d9c8789/?vgnextoid=1a9ab5676d5cd310VgnVCM100000d2c97898RCRD&vgnnextchannel=d248724dd7d6c010VgnVCM10000080e8a8c0RCRD&vgnnextfmt=print>.

² Exxon Pipeline Breaks in Arkansas, YouTube, March 31, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u30m8U6VP3E#t=12>.

³ Sam Eifling, Ark. Spill Victims on 'Wrong' Side of Fence Left to Fend for Themselves, August 7, 2013, Inside Climate News, <http://insideclimatenews.org/news/20130807/ark-spill-victims-wrong-side-fence-left-fend-themselves>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ RT, Exxon oil spill town 'deserted land', residents still getting sick, forced to abandon homes, February 11, 2014, <http://rt.com/usa/mayflower-keystone-oil-pipeline-410/>.

⁶ ExxonMobil Pipeline, Central North crude maps, http://www.exxonmobil.com/Images/EMPCo/central_north_crude2.pdf.

⁷ John H. Cushman, Jr., Federal Rules Don't Control Pipeline Reversals Like Exxon's Burst Pegasus, April 3, 2013, Inside Climate News, <http://insideclimatenews.org/news/20130403/federal-rules-dont-control-pipeline-reversals-exxons-burst-pegasus>.

⁸ Timothy Gardner and Alan Raybould, Exxon faces \$2.7 million fine for Arkansas pipeline spill, November 6, 2013, Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/07/us-usa-exxon-fine-idUSBRE9A603X20131107>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Transportation, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, Letter to ExxonMobil Pipeline Company, Re: CFP No. 4-2013-5006H, Approval of Restart Plan, Southern Segment of the Pegasus Pipeline, March 31, 2014, http://www.phmsa.dot.gov/pv_obj_cache/pv_obj_id_325C1FBC0A971C60C2DC5268CB2676A341960000/filename/420135006H_Approval_of_Restart_Plan_Southern_Segment_REV6_03312014.pdf.