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For 15 Years, Energy Transfer Partners Pipelines Leaked an Average of Once Every 11 Days: Report



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5 min read

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By Docket Room at 11/06/2023 4:31 p.m.



5,475 days, 527 pipeline spills: that's the math presented in a new report from environmental groups Greenpeace USA and the Waterkeeper Alliance examining pipelines involving **Dakota Access** ([//www.desmog.com/energy-transfer-partners-bakken-oil-pipeline-through-iowa](https://www.desmog.com/energy-transfer-partners-bakken-oil-pipeline-through-iowa)) builder Energy Transfer Partners (ETP). It's based on public data from 2002 to 2017.

All told, those leaks released 3.6 million gallons of hazardous liquids, including 2.8 million gallons of crude oil, according to data collected from the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA).

That doesn't include an additional 2.4 million gallons of "drilling fluids, sediment, and industrial waste" leaked during ETP's construction of two pipelines in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan. Also left out: air pollution and leaks from natural gas pipelines, which were beyond the scope of the new report but which play a significant role in climate change and can cause explosions.

Across the entire industry, hazardous liquid pipelines spilled a total of 34.7 million gallons during the past decade, directly causing 16 deaths and \$2.7 billion worth of damage. More than one in ten of those gallons came from ETP.

“That’s a red flag for a company that has an extensive network across the country and is building even more pipelines as we speak in Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and other states,” said Greenpeace USA research lead Tim Donaghy, PhD. “ETP and Sunoco’s track record of spills, including several striking examples of big spills, are indicators of a constant threat to communities and water. This could happen again to communities along the pipeline routes.”

A Long List of Spills and Accidents

ETP spilled crude oil over 400 times, “refined petroleum products” such as gasoline 92 times, and other flammable or toxic fluids 27 times, the researchers found. And many of the spills involved large amounts of oil – roughly one in four of ETP’s pipeline oil spills involved 2,100 or more gallons of oil.

In one 2005 incident, 436,000 gallons of crude oil spewed from a tank farm into a Delaware River tributary outside Philadelphia. That same year, a pipeline built in the 1950s dumped enough oil into the Kentucky and Ohio river to leave a 17-mile oil slick. And in 2009, a Texas pipeline caught fire and leaked over 140,000 gallons near Colorado City, Texas.

Cleaning up those sorts of spills is no easy job. Out of 3.6 million gallons ETP spilled, almost half – a total of more than 1.5 million gallons – was never mopped up, the report found. In addition, the company caused \$115 million in property damage, according to federal tallies.

Sunoco, which merged with ETP, is included in the report’s analysis. In 2012, ETP first merged with Sunoco, formally absorbing pipeline-wing Sunoco Logistics Partners in 2017. The combined companies operate over 70,000 miles of U.S. pipes. That’s “nearly long enough to encircle the earth three times,” the report notes.

The new report finds that ETP’s pipelines have a somewhat higher-than-average rate of problems. Twelve percent of ETP’s spills polluted water sources, finds **the report** (<https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/reports/oil-and-water/>), titled “Oil and Water: ETP and Sunoco’s History of Pipeline Spills.” That’s compared against a 10 percent national average. And three out of eight incidents nationwide where PHMSA specifically noted harm to drinking water supplies involved ETP pipelines.

The pipeline industry’s record has grown worse over time, the report notes, reaching a peak of 454 spills in 2015 before dropping “slightly” to 404 in 2017.

Bayou Bridge Pipeline

The company’s controversial pipeline construction projects across the U.S. include the **Bayou Bridge pipeline** (<http://www.desmog.com/conflict-cajun-country-bayou-bridge-pipeline-louisiana-standing-rock>) that would tie in to the Dakota Access pipeline and carry oil from North Dakota’s Bakken shale down to the Gulf of Mexico, the Mariner East 2 pipeline that will carry the plastic precursor ethane across Ohio and Pennsylvania to the Atlantic coast, and the 713-mile Rover pipeline, that will transport natural gas through Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania, where millions of gallons of drilling fluid have spilled during construction.

The Bayou Bridge pipeline’s route through wetlands and drinking water supplies for over 300,000 people has community and environmental advocates particularly concerned.

“Construction of the Bayou Bridge pipeline represents a high risk to hundreds of waterways across the entire state of Louisiana,” said Waterkeeper Alliance Clean and Safe Energy Campaign Manager Donna Lisenby.

The new report warns that if ETP's track record remains unchanged, the Bayou Bridge pipeline will experience multiple spills of 2,100 gallons or more of hazardous materials after it's built. "Assuming the U.S. system-wide rate for significant crude oil spills of 0.001 per year per mile, we estimate that the Bayou Bridge Pipeline would suffer eight significant spills during a 50-year nominal lifetime," the report concludes. Photographs of Bayou Bridge construction taken by photojournalist Julie Dermansky, who has **reported** ([//www.desmog.com/2018/04/06/bayou-bridge-protesters-arrested-louisiana-advances-bill-toughening-penalties-pipeline-protests](https://www.desmog.com/2018/04/06/bayou-bridge-protesters-arrested-louisiana-advances-bill-toughening-penalties-pipeline-protests)) on Bayou Bridge ([//www.desmog.com/2018/02/25/federal-judge-halts-bayou-bridge-pipeline-installation-photos-show-damage-inflicted](https://www.desmog.com/2018/02/25/federal-judge-halts-bayou-bridge-pipeline-installation-photos-show-damage-inflicted)) for DeSmog, are included in Greenpeace's report.

"We're not happy with Bayou Bridge because we know that Energy Transfer Partners is accident prone," said Harry Joseph, a pastor from St. James, Louisiana, where the Bayou Bridge pipeline will terminate. "We fear that something will happen in St. James – it's just a matter of time because of ETP's history. The company has had problems."

Sinkholes, Spills, and Suing

Those fears will sound familiar to some Pennsylvanians living near the Mariner East 1 and 2 pipelines, where the new report tallied over a hundred "inadvertent releases" and accidents, some of which contaminated locals' water wells, polluted local trout streams, or even caused massive sinkholes to open up. One of those sinkholes erupted just 300 feet from railroad tracks where Amtrak trains and local commuter rail operates, prompting the state to issue an emergency shutdown.

Many living near Mariner East's path are concerned about the risk of more accidents. "This is an organic farm," West Cornwall farmer Phil Stober **told ABC News** (<http://www.abc27.com/news/2nd-pipeline-added-to-project-planned-for-midstate/1037047235>), "and if it damages our groundwater, what recourse do we have?"

The company's most notoriously controversial project was, of course, the Dakota Access pipeline (DAPL), where an encampment by people calling themselves "water protectors" in Standing Rock, North Dakota, drew national attention as law enforcement used attack dogs, tear gas, and high-pressure water cannons in subzero temperatures against Indigenous peoples and allies who opposed DAPL construction.

"We all recall the Dakota Access pipeline construction process because of the inspiring resistance from Indigenous communities that wanted to protect their water," said Greenpeace's Donaghy. "Those Water Protectors were right; that pipeline alone leaked four times in 2017."

An additional three incidents along the full stretch of the Dakota Access-Energy Transfers Crude Oil pipeline were also reported to federal authorities, including a roughly 5,000 gallon oil spill in Tennessee.

Other ETP pipeline construction projects that have had a lower national profile also caused major spills. The Permian II Express pipeline dumped 361,200 gallons of crude near Sweetwater, Texas, in the **largest** (<https://www.reuters.com/article/north-dakota-pipeline/update-1-north-dakota-spill-sixth-largest-pipeline-leak-in-2016-data-idUSL1N1EF0V9>) pipeline leak of 2016.

Last August, **ETP sued Greenpeace, BankTrack, and Earth First!** ([//www.desmog.com/2017/08/22/dakota-access-trump-greenpeace-racketeering](https://www.desmog.com/2017/08/22/dakota-access-trump-greenpeace-racketeering)), claiming that anti-pipeline advocates were engaged in racketeering against the firm and demanding \$900 million in damages. Greenpeace is currently defending against those charges in court and **argues** (<https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/7-things-you-need-to-know-about-etps-lawsuit-against-greenpeace/>) that the case is what's known as a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation, or SLAPP suit, aimed at silencing discussion of harms caused by ETP. (This month, a federal judge effectively dropped Earth First! from that lawsuit, **following arguments** (<https://ccrjustice.org/home/what-we-do/our-cases/energy-transfer-equity-et-al-v-greenpeace-earth>).

first-et-al) that Earth First! is a philosophy and not actually an organization. ETP had attempted to hold a magazine called Earth First! Journal liable as representing Earth First!) The lawsuit against Greenpeace is still ongoing.

Main image: "Stakes mark the path of part of the Bayou Bridge pipeline through wetlands in Louisiana." Credit: © 2018 Julie Dermansky for Greenpeace USA.

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