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Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Chairman Mike Faith Pushes Back Against DAPL False Claims

Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Chairman Mike Faith announced that the Tribe has submitted a 300-page report to the Army Corps of Engineers, which shows the potential impacts of an oil spill in the Missouri River from the Dakota Access Pipeline. The report, entitled *Impacts of an Oil Spill from the Dakota Access Pipeline on the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe*, indicates that a spill in the Missouri River could be far worse than anything previously disclosed. According to the Tribe, in estimating the worst case scenario for an oil spill, Energy Transfer Partners, which owns and operates the pipeline, has failed to utilize oil industry best practices, and instead relies upon optimistic assumptions for shut-down and response times.

“There are many problems with the information ETP submitted to the Corps of Engineers on DAPL,” Faith explained. “ETP estimates that 12,500 barrels of oil would be the worst case scenario, but that is based on a 9 minute shut down time. By looking at prior spills, we know that the true shutdown time is hours, and can even take days.”

The Tribe’s report documents the failure by ETP and the Corps of Engineers to adequately plan and disclose the methodology for calculating the worst case scenario, or even conduct a comprehensive analysis of the impact of a spill to the Missouri River for either a worst case discharge, or an undetectable leak. A smaller leak below detection levels could go on for a long time period, and seep into the ground water and ultimately the Missouri River, but this scenario has been totally ignored, according to Faith.

“The analysis relied upon by the Corps is based on rosy scenarios of quick response and shut down times, as well as good weather,” stated Standing Rock Emergency Management Coordinator Elliot Ward. “We know from prior emergencies that winter weather is a real impediment to emergency response in North Dakota, but Energy Transfer Partners appears clueless. This is a real concern to our Tribe.”

Landslide risks have also been ignored, according to Faith. The Tribe’s report includes an analysis by experts at the South Dakota School of Mines, Dr. Perry H. Rahn and Dr. Arden D. Davis. According to Rahn and Davis, who are emeritus scholars, “The steep slope and unstable soils at the crossing have resulted in landslides in the past. Numerous landslides from previous slope failures have been mapped in the area.”

Another concern to the Tribe is the potential impact that an oil spill would have on medicinal plants, which some Tribal members still gather and use for home remedies. The Tribe’s report discusses the significant cultural impacts that an oil spill will have on the historic, traditional, and customary food gathering practices, which were already severely compromised by the Corps of Engineers’ Pick-Sloan Project, created the Garrison and Oahe dams in the 1950s.

The Tribe is concerned with ETP's performance on other pipelines. On Wednesday, the Mariner East 1 Pipeline, operated by Energy Transfer Partners/Sunoco in Pennsylvania, was shut down by the state Public Utility Commission, over concerns with safety performance and pipeline integrity. Ohio regulators are also seeking penalties against ETP for the mishandling of waste fluid. The company's poor performance in other states is a significant concern to Standing Rock.

According to Faith, Energy Transfer Partners has failed to comply with federal requirements for DAPL. "ETP hasn't prepared a Spill Model as required by the Corps, and it is unclear if they have prepared a proper emergency plan. We haven't seen it, even though our community is most affected by an oil spill in the Missouri River."