Enbridge Energy Inc. has applied to increase the daily amount of Alberta Tar Sands Diluted Bitumen (DilBit) through the recently completed 36-inch Alberta Clipper pipeline. They are seeking approval for a “Certificate of Need” permit from the State of Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, and a “Presidential Permit” from the US State Department. These permits are to increase the flow of DilBit from 450,000 to 570,000 barrels per day, with another increase planned up to the pipeline capacity of 880,000 barrels per day. Alberta Clipper is a 1,607-km (1,000-mile) crude oil pipeline that provides service between Hardisty, Alberta, and Superior, WI. This expansion will not effect the Midwest in oil supply as Enbridge is currently seeking line reversals in Canada to get oil to Portland Maine, with other line reversals from Chicago, IL to Houston, TX. This will be done by installing additional 6,000 horsepower pumps in 8 pumping stations.

Located in northern Alberta Canada the Oil sands, tar sands or, more technically, bituminous sands, are a type of unconventional petroleum deposit. The oil sands are loose sand or partially consolidated sandstone containing naturally occurring mixtures of sand, clay, and water, saturated with a dense and extremely viscous form of petroleum technically referred to as bitumen. The crude bitumen contained in the Canadian tar sands is described by Canadian authorities as “petroleum that exists in the semi-solid or solid phase in natural deposits. Bitumen is a thick, sticky form of hydrocarbon, so heavy and viscous (thick) that it will not flow unless heated or diluted with lighter hydrocarbons. At room temperature, it is much like “cold molasses”. Making liquid fuels from oil sands requires energy for steam injection and refining. This process generates 12 percent more greenhouse gases per barrel of final product than extraction of conventional oil.

The Tar Sands are approximately the size of the State of Florida. The Tar Sands are collected by 2 types of methods. Surface mining and In-Situ. Surface mining is performed by removing the “overburden”, trees, swamps, bog and created a moon scape look. In-Situ consists of injecting steam into the ground, warming the Bitumen, causing it to separate from the soils and literally sucked out of the ground.

Why Tar Sands are not worth the risk
First, in a spill these are not like other oil spills. The DilBit is a heavier oil and does not float like conventional oil, which makes it more difficult to clean up. There have been several DilBit Spills in the US recently, the largest in Kalamazoo, MI, the Yellowstone River near Billings, MT, and recently in Mayflower, AR.

Health and Environmental Effects of the Tar Sands
Across the United States, oil refineries are seeking permits to expand their facilities to process heavy crude oil from the tar sands. Processing tar sands oil will mean more asthma and respiratory diseases, more cancer, and more cardiovascular problems. Many local communities are opposing the expansions. In Canada, the toxic burden on communities near the tar sands is already enormous. In addition to direct human exposure, oil contamination in the local watershed has led to arsenic in moose meat—a dietary staple for First Nations peoples—up to 33 times acceptable levels. Drinking water has also been contaminated from leaking tailing ponds. It takes 10 tons of dirt to make 1 barrel of oil and 4-6 barrels of water to make 1 barrel of oil.

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