

EPA notes improvements at Michigan oil spill site

August 2 2010, TIM MARTIN , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- A regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency said Sunday that significant improvement had been made at the site of an oil spill in a southern Michigan river, but the agency cautioned that it will take months to complete the cleanup.

Those efforts, along with air and water quality monitoring, continue to increase along the affected stretch of the Kalamazoo River, EPA regional administrator Susan Hedman said during a media briefing in Marshall.

The oil flow was stopped and contained in a 25-mile stretch of the river from Marshall westward past Battle Creek. Several hundred workers are on crews along the river devoted to the cleanup.

"Containment is adequate now," said Mark Durno, the EPA's deputy incident commander. "Now it's a matter of recovery and removal of the remainder of the sheen and small patches of oil that remain on the Kalamazoo River."

The EPA estimates it will take weeks to get the oil out of the river and months to clean it off river banks and the flood plain. It could take several months to clean up the marshy area where the spill began near a creek that flows into the Kalamazoo River, the agency said.

Officials with Enbridge Inc., which owns the pipeline, estimated Sunday that the company had recovered slightly more than half the oil that had

leaked.

Enbridge officials said they detected the leak July 26. Investigators are reviewing 911 calls to Marshall area fire departments made the previous evening by residents complaining of a strong gas odor to try and determine if the leak might have begun earlier.

The EPA estimates the spill at more than 1 million gallons of crude, while the Canadian company estimates the total at 820,000 gallons. The leak came from a 30-inch pipeline, which was built in 1969 and carries about 8 million gallons of oil daily from Griffith, Ind., to Sarnia, Ontario.

The cost of the cleanup hasn't been determined. Enbridge is responsible for the cleanup bill, including money that the EPA and other government agencies will spend on its response.

"Our goal is to return the river to the state it was in before this incident," Enbridge CEO Patrick D. Daniel said.

The EPA and other government officials have scheduled a public meeting for residents at Marshall's high school on Monday evening. A similar public hearing will be scheduled for Battle Creek residents later in the week.

The section of the pipeline where the leak occurred could be removed early this week. It's expected to be taken to a National Transportation Safety Board lab for testing to try and determine the cause of the incident.

The EPA on Saturday said it had rejected the Calgary, Alberta-based company's long-range cleanup plan because of "deficiencies in content and technical details." It ordered Enbridge to submit a revised version by

Monday. Daniel said the company will modify the plan to meet EPA requirements.

U.S. regulators earlier this year demanded improvements to the pipeline network that includes a segment that ruptured in southern Michigan. The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, the U.S. Department of Transportation's regulatory arm, said it had summoned Enbridge Inc. executives in February to discuss problems with the 1,900-mile Lakehead system.

The agency has cited Enbridge or its affiliates for 30 enforcement actions since 2002.

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