

# Law center prepares lawsuit over Mich. oil spill

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(AP) -- A public interest law firm prepared Monday to sue the owners of a pipeline that ruptured in southern Michigan and dumped hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil into a Kalamazoo River tributary, while residents voiced concerns to government officials following a community meeting.

The oil flow has been stopped and government officials say it's been contained in a 25-mile stretch of the river from Marshall westward past Battle Creek. But the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) estimates it will take weeks to get the oil out of the river and months to clean it off banks and the flood plain.

"Everybody important right now is paying attention," said Britani Lafferty, 23, whose Marengo Township home near Marshall backs up to the river. "What's going to happen when ... it's no longer a hot story and there's still animals and people still affected?"

Patrick Daniel, chief executive of pipeline owner Enbridge Inc., said claim workers would be set up at a Battle Creek storefront office that would be "open long after cleanup is complete."

Officials from Enbridge, the EPA and other government agencies met with about 500 local residents inside Marshall High School gym Monday evening.

Gina Sterett, 37, of Marshall said the smell of benzene fills the air in her

neighborhood along the Kalamazoo River. She and her husband have been sending their three children to stay at her parents' house because of the spill.

"Oh gosh! Half the geese we see, if not 50 percent covered, then they're completely covered with oil," she told The Associated Press. "The shorelines are all black, and you see the oil sheen on the water. It's an ugly sight. It's sad, it's very sad."

People likely will continue to see small patches of oil sheen on the water for some time, EPA deputy incident commander Mark Durno told the meeting. He also said his agency would be in the area for months.

The crowd was polite, even lightly applauding after each official spoke.

Earlier Monday, the Great Lakes Law Center sent Enbridge a notice of intent to file a lawsuit if a settlement isn't reached within 60 days. The letter accuses the company of violating the Clean Water Act. Daniel said he needed to review the letter and would reserve comment until Tuesday.

The Detroit-based law center says Enbridge could face more than \$26 million in civil penalties based on the EPA's estimate that the spill exceeds 1 million gallons. The Canadian company estimates it at 820,000 gallons.

About 1.8 million gallons of oil and water mixture had been recovered as of Monday afternoon, Durno said. About 546,000 gallons had shipped away from the site.

Meanwhile, National Transportation Safety Board officials said Enbridge had shut down its pipeline for planned maintenance on July 25, hours before 911 calls started coming in about gas odors in the area. Federal officials said an area Consumers Energy worker reported finding

oil on the ground near the pipeline the following morning, July 26. Enbridge said it detected the leak that day.

But the NTSB said it could not link the shutdown to the pipeline rupture and hadn't determined a cause for the rupture itself.

The EPA said it has received approval for up to \$13 million to pay for the federal government's response to the spill and can request more money if needed. The government will seek full reimbursement for the money from Enbridge, and company officials have said they intend to pay for cleanup costs.

The cleanup has included rescuing reptiles, mammals and birds. More than 90 oil-covered turtles, birds and animals such as muskrats have been brought to a nearby wildlife animal rehabilitation center and several more have been taken to area wildlife refuges.

Many who attended Monday evening's meeting stayed afterward to speak with experts from various local, state and federal offices. Some left more disappointed than angry.

"We wanted more detailed information. What we got was a recap," said Julie Taylor, whose Marshall home is about 600 feet from Talmedge Creek. "I'm concerned about the long-term effects."

Bobby Lewis, 67, said his chief concern was how the spill and cleanup would impact the value of his \$200,000 home just 30 feet from the creek.

"My life is invested in that," the retiree said. "I wanted to know if it's going to be worth two cents."

Many people had questions about water quality and groundwater

contamination, said Kimberly Fish of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

"We're trying to gather data as quickly as we can," she said.

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