

News Release

University of Toronto

Munk Centre for International Studies Program On Water Issues

Canada's Oil Sands: Pollution Delivery to the Great Lakes?

New report and expert panel call for tougher refinery rules, more focus on health, air and water quality

TORONTO, October 8, 2008 – New transcontinental pipelines from Alberta's oil sands and massive refinery expansions in the U.S. Midwest are creating a "pollution delivery system" that threatens air and water quality and human health in the Great Lakes Basin, expert panelists at the University of Toronto said today.

Piecemeal, poorly regulated, haphazardly planned refinery expansion to bring "dirty" bitumen-based oil to the Midwest and Eastern Canada is not the economic or energy panacea its proponents claim, said participants at the University's Program On Water Issues at the Munk Centre for International Studies.

"Research indicates that the issue of what the oil sands do to the environment in the Great Lakes Basin – and its people – needs more public attention, greater policy focus and more consistent regulatory oversight, in Canada, the United States and by state governments and the Ontario government as well," said Adèle Hurley, Director of the Program on Water Issues. "Pipeline and refinery expansions are taking place with too little oversight and too little information. We need to know and understand – and measure – how much additional pollution this will bring to the Great Lakes Basin, what it means for water quality, climate change, and acid rain, and how it will affect human health."

The day-long discussion began with a presentation from environmental writer David Israelson, whose paper, *How the Oil Sands got to the Great Lakes Basin: Pipelines, refineries and emissions to air and water*, was released today by the Program On Water Issues. His paper examined proposed and current increases in refinery expansion at numerous sites in "PADD II" – the United States Petroleum Administration for Defense District that encompasses the U.S. Midwest. His research included estimates of additional emissions to the region's airshed, water use, the effects on water quality and increases in greenhouse gas emissions.

One refinery alone, British Petroleum's facility in Whiting, Indiana (near Chicago), is contemplating a more than 60 per cent increase in refining Canadian "heavy" crude oil, predominantly from the oil sands. The increase in carbon emissions from the Whiting refinery process alone (before any of the refined oil is used as gasoline or other products) is the equivalent of putting more than 300,000 cars on the road per year.

"We need to slow down this exploitation of the oil sands," Israelson said. "A lot of respected experts – not only environmental activists – agree. We need to be more consistent in recording and reporting refinery emissions, and we need a better understanding of how expanding refineries could affect the receiving end, here in the Great Lakes region. This is not the time to launch a marketing campaign about the oil sands; it's time to get better answers to key questions about sustainability."

For further information

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