Red Head: end of the line for Energy East oil pipeline?

By TRACY GLYNN

Lynaya Astephen, a resident of Red Head, participating at the Act on Climate March in Quebec City in March 2015. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

Lynaya Astephen settled in Red Head seven years ago because of its natural setting along the Bay of Fundy. Astephen describes the East Saint John community as family-friendly where 1,500 people co-exist with wildlife. She never imagined that an oil tank farm would move in and be her neighbour.

“The field and forest that surround our home will be replaced with an oil tank farm, part of the Energy East tar sands pipeline,” says Astephen. “We’re the end of the line for Energy East. Many people in our community oppose it because of fears of cancer and the wiping out of nature.”

Astephen is part of a new association called the Red Head and Anthony’s Cove Preservation Association that aims to protect Red Head in the face of TransCanada’s Energy East proposal.

TransCanada plans to pump 1.1 million barrels of crude bitumen from the Alberta tar sands to a new marine terminal in Red Head. Besides a marine terminal, an oil tank farm is planned to be built to store the oil prior to export. TransCanada plans to lease land from Irving Oil for the oil tank farm. The tank farm would receive pipeline and rail line crude oil. Irving Oil has already purchased 16 properties in the Red Head area.

Premier Brian Gallant is an ardent supporter of the Energy East pipeline. But according to the Red Head and Anthony’s Cove Preservation Association, the risks of the pipeline will outweigh the benefits, noting that the pipeline will create only a handful of permanent jobs after its construction.

What is planned for the “end of the line”

Red Head is already affected by the oil and gas industry. Besides oil and gas pipelines, a total of 11 million barrels of crude oil is already stored in large tank farms at the Irving Marine Terminal and the Irving Oil Refinery within a 9-km radius of Red Head. Energy East would add another 6 to 8 million barrels of bitumen in heated oil tanks.

Volatile gases build up in the heated tanks full of bitumen. Once vented into the air, the toxic fumes can travel for miles downwind. According to a 2003 Shell Bitumen Handbook, bitumen fumes from heated storage tanks can “result in the irritation to the eyes, nose and respiratory tract and headaches and nausea.” Emissions from storage tanks can include benzene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and hydrogen sulfide, a deadly neurotoxin.

A 2004 World Health Organization study on bitumen fumes reported that health effects are understudied yet serious. Workers exposed to fumes can suffer from a variety of respiratory and skin ailments. Studies on road workers exposed to bitumen fumes say long-term health effects can include cancer, reduced lung function and DNA damage.

Residents of Red Head and East Saint John, including Champlain Heights and Forest Hills, already breathe air with benzene and other VOCs at levels that exceed safe human health guidelines.

Air quality monitoring done in 2012 and 2013 revealed that air in the Red Head area had benzene levels of around 0.45 ppb. Ontario has set safe benzene levels at 0.14 ppb. New Brunswick, like Canada, has not established a safe guideline for the amount of benzene, a known carcinogen, in the air.

“Residents of Saint John are already subject to 38 times the industrial pollution released in Fredericton and 243 times the amount released in Moncton,” says Inka Milewski, an independent researcher who has studied the links between cancer and industrial pollution in New Brunswick.

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Six families moved away from Alberta’s Peace River region after similar oil tanks moved near their community and affected their health. “I see the health effects on my boys, the tremendous traffic on the roads and I can smell the bitumen,” Thea Breau told Andrew Nikiforuk for a story for The Tyee in 2013. Air pollution from Baytex Energy’s heated bitumen storage tanks south of Peace River is believed to have sickened many people, including farmers.

Back in Red Head, Astephen’s local fight has made her a climate activist. She promotes the transition to renewable energy and has joined the Peace and Friendship Alliance, a newly formed alliance of indigenous people and allies in New Brunswick that are working to honour the Peace and Friendship Treaties and fight destructive projects like Energy East. Astephen marched for climate action with 25,000 others in Quebec City in March.

“Being with 25,000 all for the same reason made me realize that we are all fighting for our environment together. What moved me was the urgent yet positive vibe that made me feel there is hope. All of us had the same purpose that day to move our provincial and federal governments to take action,” says Astephen.

Tracy Glynn is a news writer and editor with the NB Media Co-op.
St. Ignace – Two Rogersville area men, Romeo Martin and Laurie Richard, have been sentenced to six months probation by a Miramichi court for their part in a protest last fall against the spraying of glyphosate herbicide on provincial forests. Charges of mischief against the pair were dropped during their April 30 court appearance. Protests against the use of glyphosate are increasing.

Opponents to glyphosate take little comfort in provincial government claims that New Brunswick’s forestry spraying program is safe. A March 2015 report by an agency of the World Health Organization (WHO) says the herbicide glyphosate is, in fact, a serious threat to public health, labeling it a “probable carcinogen.”

That report is fueling increased public opposition to and demonstrations against the use of glyphosate in New Brunswick. A demonstration dubbed the ‘March Against Monsanto’ and scheduled for Moncton City Hall on Saturday, May 23, at 1:00 p.m. was already being planned when news came that glyphosate had been linked to cancer in humans.

The provincial government is ignoring the cancer warning and continuing to insist that spraying glyphosates over vast tracts of the province is nothing to worry about. In contrast, the report by WHO’s International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) declared that glyphosate (which has been sprayed on forests and farmland across New Brunswick for years) damages human DNA and chromosomal. IARC, respected internationally for its expertise on cancer, also found convincing evidence that glyphosate causes cancer in animals. It also linked the herbicide to non-Hodgkins lymphoma in people.

Glyphosate use has increased sharply since the marketing of both genetically modified seeds and genetically modified foods and seeds. Ross chairs a design team working on a documentary examining the dangers of GMOs. The documentary is designed to help educate people about the dangers of genetically modified foods and seeds, Ross chairs the Moncton Chapter of the Council of Canadians and says the Council wants “a ban on GMO food and seeds or, at the very least, a requirement that such foods be labeled” so that people know what they’re eating.

Glyphosate and other herbicides are manufactured by the Monsanto Company, an American multinational corporation headquartered in Missouri. Monsanto’s development and marketing of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have sparked opposition around the world.

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