

Den Wichar

I'm concerned about risks that tar sands crude oil poses to my community and communities across the state. I appreciate what Department of Ecology has done thus far to improve oil spill prevention preparedness, but am concerned that proposed updates to Washingtons Oil Spill Contingency Plan Rule do not go far enough to protect us from worst case scenario spill of tar sands crude oil.

Communities across Washington are already at risk from existing transport of tar sands crude oil, and we unprepared to respond. Currently, tar sands are transported by rail through Eastern Washington and along Columbia River, by barge across Puget Sound, and through Puget Sound Pipeline across Whatcom and Skagit Counties.

Proposed expansion of Canadian Trans Mountain Pipeline would worsen these existing risks and increase likelihood of a catastrophic oil spill of diluted bitumen. In addition to being one of the most climate-polluting fossil fuels on the planet, heavy tar sands crude oil sinks when spilled into water and is virtually impossible to clean up, causing irreparable damage to economy, communities, endangered orcas, and vulnerable ecosystems.

To address these risks, Ecology should require fast, aggressive, well-coordinated response to contain and recover potentially non-floating oils before they submerge and sink. Timeframes required in the draft rule provide no assurance that current response times and capability will be sufficient to respond to worst-case spill. Ecology should distinguish between all potentially non-floating oils and diluted bitumen, which is likely to sink quickly and therefore demands more stringent equipment and response time requirements.

Finally, I urge Ecology to enhance planning standards for wildlife response in the event of oil spill. It is essential that wildlife response actions are initiated as soon as possible with adequate personnel and equipment. Deterrence actions that keep wildlife from entering a spill must be underway immediately after. The Plan must require that monitoring and deterrence operations apply to all killer whales. This will provide greater certainty that Southern Resident orcas will be deterred from entering an oil spill. I urge Ecology to exercise its full regulatory authority and establish stronger protections from tar sands oil that Washington needs and deserves.