

Alona Steinke

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Good afternoon, my name is Alona Steinke. I'm a retired RN and I'm speaking today on behalf of Physicians for Social Responsibility and also as a member of Friends of the Columbia River Gorge. I'm asking that Ecology require the strongest protections to our waterways. This update of the rules does not adequately address the protections that we need. The scope is too narrow and it doesn't establish the greater response that is required for tar sands crude, which is unique. We are presently at risk to oil spills from tankers passing through the graveyard of the Pacific that is the Columbia River Bar. Tankers and barges have already harmed our orcas with their mere presence in the Salish Sea. The salmon that is their food source is being decimated by the effects of climate change. There are numerous pipelines that cross tributaries and wetlands, and now we are threatened by proposals that would vastly increase this activity. We currently receive about 1.3 million barrels of dilbit, heavy tar sands crude daily from Canada's tar sands region. Producers hope to quadruple that amount by 2025. The most infamous tar sands oil spill was the one that put more than 1 million gallons of oil into the Kalamazoo River in Michigan in 2010. Enbridge knew of the defects in the pipeline where the rupture occurred five years before. But they were able to delay making repairs without breaking the rules. Their leak detection system didn't work as advertised. They said it could detect and shutdown a leak within 10 minutes. It took the operators and Enbridge's Canadian control room 17 hours to realize the pipeline had ruptured. Leak detection problems are widespread. Oil spill data from federal regulators show that over a ten-year period, advanced leak detection systems identified only one out of 20 reported pipeline leaks. It is vitally important to have a sufficient number of trained personnel to respond to these spills. Responders have the added danger of dealing with hydrogen sulfide, which kills first one's sense of smell and then kills them. Responders must be prepared to wear full scuba respirators. The authority of a study by the National Academy of Sciences, sorry the authors of a study by the National Academy of Sciences have several policy recommendations. They say that the oil companies need to inform regulators which type of crude they are transporting in every pipeline segment before a spill occurs. Operators should design different spill response plans to fit the oil type. When a spill occurs, they must identify the oil type by industry name within six hours, and if requested, analyze the sample within 24 hours. Once they know it is dilbit it is likely sinking and too late to clean up. Earlier I mentioned our beloved southern resident orcas. The standards for wildlife response need to be elevated. It should be a requirement to monitor and keep whales, including the orcas, away from a spill. These amazing animals are already teetering on the brink and an oil spill could very well mean extinction for them. The Columbia Gorge is a precious national scenic area and the Columbia River, that vast international Highway for ships and barges, has been named among America's most endangered rivers, a river that is at the crossroads where key decisions will determine its fate. Please establish the strongest policies to protect our waters from these heavy oils. Require more equipment, more appropriately trained personnel and a way to deploy them more quickly. Thank you for updating this plan and for protecting Washington's waters and thus the lives and the jobs that depend on it.