

# Michigan River Remains Poisoned By Oil Five Years After Massive Spill

by [Natasha Geiling](#)  Jul 25, 2015 11:33am

Five years ago, a pipeline carrying crude oil from Canadian tar sands [ruptured in Michigan](#), spilling over 1 million gallons into the Kalamazoo River in what would become the largest inland oil spill in U.S. history. Now, as oil companies attempt to expand pipelines across the upper Midwest, and as the Keystone Pipeline that would carry similar crude waits for approval from the State Department, activists and residents are gathering to remember the historic spill — and add their voices to a groundswell of local pipeline opposition that began five years ago.

“It’s telling that when we have been citing pipelines, even in Minnesota, the Kalamazoo spill is brought up an awful lot,” Andy Pearson, Midwest tar sands coordinator for MN350.org told ThinkProgress. “Kalamazoo is not in the past. It’s still really in the present for the people on the ground there. It’s something that shows how wrong it can go.”

When the pipeline — an aging structure owned by Canadian oil company Enbridge Inc. — first ruptured, it was the middle of the night on July 25, 2010. It took more than 17 hours for Enbridge to cut off the pipeline’s flow, a delayed response compounded by the company’s dismissal of alarms as a malfunction and attempts to fix the problem by pumping more oil into the pipeline. By the time the pipeline had been shut off, more than 1 million gallons of tar sands crude oil had spilled into the Kalamazoo River, impacting nearly 40 miles of the river and 4,435 acres of the Kalamazoo River still isn’t clean,” Anthony Swift, director of NRDC’s Canada Project, told OnEarth. “The EPA reached a point where additional cleanup might do more harm than good. Much of the river is still contaminated.”

In May, Enbridge [agreed to pay \\$75 million](#) for its role in the spill, on top of the \$9.95 million it had already paid to settle previous fines and suits related to the disaster. The company could still face up to a \$40 million fine from the EPA under the Clean Water Act, which InsideClimateNews reports would be the [largest fine](#) ever related to a pipeline spill.

To Chris Wahmhoff, who grew up a mere 100 yards from the Kalamazoo River, the fifth anniversary — and any potential EPA fines — are just another step in the long fight to hold Enbridge accountable for the damage they caused. Wahmhoff remembers playing in the river nearly every day as a child — an avid kayaker, the river was an integral part of his life until the 2010 spill, when residents were told to stay away.

All of us on the ground, we definitely embrace the idea that we’ve been the canary in the coal mine

“The biggest thing I remember is the word ‘control,’” Wahmhoff told ThinkProgress. “All we ever heard about the spill was that everything was under control and safe, but not to go in the water.

