TAR SANDS FACTS

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The Proposed Keystone XL Tar Sands Pipeline:
Why Mayors Are Challenging This High Carbon Project

Mayors care deeply about climate change, and are leading the way to reduce greenhouse gases and improve air quality, and they don't want to see their labors erased by high carbon fuels like tar sands oil." **– Former Mayor of Seattle, Washington and Former President, United States Conference of Mayors Greg Nickels**

As conventional sources of oil decline, oil companies are focusing on exploiting sources that are more destructive to extract and result in higher greenhouse gas emissions. The leading source of "higher carbon" oil is tar sands—or bitumen—that is strip-mined or drilled from deep under Canada's great Boreal forest. Currently, the United States imports approximately one million barrels of tar sands per day from Canada, but the proposed Keystone XL tar sands pipeline would lock the country into nearly another million barrels per day of this risky, high-carbon fuel. Mayors from all regions of the country are challenging this project and its potential for undermining local community efforts to move toward a healthier and more sustainable clean energy future. Local communities are at the forefront of reducing U.S. demand for oil and know that we have cleaner choices for our transportation needs than tar sands oil.

Transporting tar sands across the American heartland to U.S. refineries is risky business; diluted bitumen—raw tar sands mixed with a substance to dilute it—is more corrosive to pipelines than conventional oil and thus more likely to result in pipeline failures. The July 2010 spill of almost 1 million gallons of tar sands bitumen from Enbridge's pipeline into the Kalamazoo River in Michigan was one of the largest ever in the United States.

The Keystone XL pipeline, carrying high carbon fuel in the form of tar sands crude, undermines local clean energy efforts and is now being challenged by mayors and other local government leaders. Expanding tar sands imports would deepen an oil addiction that many communities are trying to break. Local governments are working hard, every day and in every area of the country, to reduce dependence on oil, and lower greenhouse gas emissions to move the nation forward toward a clean energy future. Reliance on high-carbon oil sources, such as tar sands to help fill America's gas tank undermines local-level efforts to reduce greenhouse gases and other harmful transportation emissions, and provide citizens with cleaner, healthier, and more affordable options. Thus, local communities are speaking out to ensure that their citizens have a chance to enjoy the myriad benefits of a low-carbon, clean energy future—from cleaner air and economical transportation at the local level, to preservation of vast areas of wilderness that provide critical habitat and help keep the planet cool.

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"The tar sands of Canada constitute one of our planet's greatest threats. They are a double-barreled threat. First, producing oil from tar sands emits two to three times the global warming pollution of conventional oil. But the process also diminishes one of the best carbon reduction tools on the planet—Canada's Boreal Forest."
– James Hansen, director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, February 16, 2009.

The Keystone XL pipeline would carry tar sands, a toxic and corrosive form of raw crude, across critical American water resources on its way from Montana to the Gulf of Mexico.

The United States Conference of Mayors adopted a resolution in 2008 supporting measures that discourage the use of high carbon fuels such as tar sands oil.[1]

What local communities can do:

- Reduce demand for oil with local clean transportation solutions such as ramping up public transit, supporting bike and pedestrian options for daily transportation, greening municipal fleets, and supporting electric vehicle and plug-in hybrid infrastructure.
- Support state and regional efforts to establish a clean fuels standard in place.
- Support stronger fuel efficiency standards that reduce our demand for oil.
- Say no to expansion of high carbon fuels, such as tar sands, and to high carbon fuels infrastructure such as the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline.

Reducing oil consumption brings the added benefit of improving energy security—clean energy is the best answer to concerns about U.S. vulnerability to world market oil price swings and oil dependence from areas of conflict. While Canada is a friendly country, increasing our reliance on Canadian oil still leaves the United States tied to the global oil market, with all of its risks. And increasing our reliance on a high carbon fuel such as tar sands increases climate change and the many risks that it brings to local communities on the frontlines of the damages caused by extreme weather. Expansion of tar sands and projects such as the proposed Keystone XL tar sands pipeline are not in the interest of local communities and therefore are not in the national interest. Local communities are leaders in reducing our dependence on oil and can also be leaders in saying no to tar sands.

[1] The text of this resolution is available at: http://docs.nrdc.org/air/air_08060601.asp.

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