



Oil Spill: How Is Air Quality Affected?

Enbridge Oil Spill

Marshall, Michigan

August 2010

For more information

If you have questions, comments or need more information about the Enbridge oil spill you can contact:

Don de Blasio

EPA Community Involvement
Coordinator

Cell Phone: 312-343-6666

Office Voice Mail: 312-886-4360

deblasio.don@epa.gov

On the Web

EPA has established a website at www.epa.gov/enbridgespill to provide daily information about the response.

More contacts

Public:

A toll-free number for the public has been established for this emergency:

800-306-6837

Media members:

888-363-8632

spillpress@epa.gov

On Monday, July 26, 2010, Enbridge Energy Partners LLP reported the burst of a 30-inch pipeline near Marshall, Michigan. The company estimates that more than 800,000 gallons of crude oil spilled into Talmadge Creek, a waterway that feeds the Kalamazoo River. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has not independently confirmed this number. The spill has affected up to 25 miles of the Kalamazoo River. The spill site, between Marshall and Battle Creek, includes marshlands, residential areas, farmland and businesses.

Here are some answers to frequently asked questions regarding air quality:

How has the oil spill affected the air?

People have certainly noticed a very strong odor especially near the broken pipe and near the waterways impacted by the spill. To ensure public safety, EPA has been continuously monitoring air quality throughout the area for a wide range of chemicals that are known to be associated with crude oil, including volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These same chemicals are also emitted by many other sources such as motor vehicles, industries, and paints or solvents.

EPA is monitoring the air with “real time” instruments that can provide immediate information about the levels of these chemicals in the air. **It is important to understand that these VOCs can be smelled at levels well below those that would cause health problems.** Some of the chemicals that cause the odors may be responsible for symptoms such as headaches, light headedness, nausea or vomiting. The air sampling results detected a specific chemical – benzene – at a level of concern for health. Based on these results, the Calhoun County Health Department issued a voluntary evacuation order on July 29 to protect the health of people living in the most highly impacted areas.

To evaluate the chemical monitoring information, public health scientists compare air sampling results to health-based screening concentrations (also called “screening levels”). These screening levels are developed from health effects information about each VOC, including information regarding exposure levels that might pose an increased risk of health problems. At this time, EPA is using screening levels that assume a person is breathing a pollutant continuously (24 hours a day, seven days a week) for as long as one year.

(continued on back page)

What is the current situation regarding air quality?

The results of the air monitoring over the past few days indicate benzene levels continue to decrease. However, as the cleanup process continues there may be situations where chemicals released from the oil into the air cause odors. EPA will continue to monitor the air to ensure that public health is protected during the entire clean-up process.

What if I have health concerns related to the oil spill?

If you live or work in an area affected by the spill and have a health concern, you should contact your physician. If you have questions about the potential impacts of air emissions on your health, call the Calhoun County Health Department, 269-969-6341.