

CWCWC Questions Safety and Need for Massive Spectra/Algonquin Pipeline Expansion

If Spectra gets its way, critical areas in both Westchester and Putnam Counties will witness vast increases to existing natural gas pipelines, together with increases in capacity of compressor stations that push the gas along over its 1,000-mile journey through parts of New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts.

This enterprise, known as the Algonquin Incremental Market (AIM) Project, owned by Spectra, hopes to win approval by January 2015. Following an approximately 2-year construction period, the project should be ready to start up by December 2016.

In addition to the currently three gas pipelines that cross the Hudson river, (two are 24 inch and one is 30 inch that will continue to be used), Spectra will add a 42 inch pipeline; 21.7 miles of construction; 78,540 extra horsepower in 5 existing compressor stations; and replacing the present 26 inch pipe-line by a 42 inch pipe-line. Spectra/AIM assures us that only 440 landowners will be affected. Another, potentially high-risk feature is the intersection of this natural gas pipeline with a planned 1,000 megawatt DC high-voltage power line (Champlain Hudson Power Express) underground just a few hundred feet from the spent-fuel pool at the Indian Point nuclear power plant.

Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition, Inc. (CWCWC) questions whether this massive enterprise that will undoubtedly disrupt our lives not only now but also in the future, is truly needed. We demand such proof by the lead federal agency, namely, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), which is responsible for conducting the project's environmental review according to the regulations promulgated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). To quote from Spectra Energy's own explanation of the regulatory process: "FERC is charged with determining whether proposed projects are needed ... Pipeline companies (Applicants) seeking project authorization must file an Application for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity with FERC. The Application describes the purpose and commercial need for the project...FERC will review the project, evaluating the need ..."

To quote from the Spectra/Algonquin submission, "In evaluating necessity FERC works with federal, state and local agencies. Citizen activist groups may become involved at any of these levels."

In reviewing the approval process, CWCWC questions the need for the proposed huge expansion of pipeline capacity. The Application asks for a 14% increase in the amount of gas to be conveyed through the expanded pipeline. However, the increase from a 26-inch pipe to a 42-inch pipe corresponds to a 38% increase in pipeline cross-section. This seemingly disproportionate increase requires

explanation. Furthermore, Spectra/Algonquin maintains that the requested increase is to ensure adequate heating for homes in New England during the cold winter months. However, an analysis of the needs in New England are far below those presented by Spectra/Algonquin.

A cause for deep concern is that the pipeline will be receiving Pennsylvania Marcellus shale gas at a location situated between Mahwah, NJ and Ramapo, NY. Pennsylvania's natural gas wells are known for their dangerously high levels of radioactive materials. One of these, Radon, is a decay product of Radium-226 that has been shown to have concentrations, in Pennsylvania's Marcellus shale, up to one thousand times safe levels. Furthermore, Radon is a gas with characteristics similar to natural gas, and gets transported along with natural gas along the pipelines into homes and kitchens. However, unlike natural gas, it does not burn, but remains in enclosed spaces unless vented. Its danger comes from inhalation – Radon is the second highest cause of lung cancer in the U.S.

In view of the hazards that this area's public will be facing – huge pipelines near or under individual properties, property value decrease, noise and dangerous air emissions from compressor stations, and possible leaks of radon from the pipelines, without any of the benefits from this enterprise, we ask that Spectra/Algonquin present the public with a detailed forecast of its projected needs over the next twenty years.

Four years have passed during which the plans were made. Now, the public is being invited to comment at the last minute in the approval process and given very little information to learn about the problems with which they will be living in close proximity: the construction phase, the operations phase, and the aging of the infrastructure. Many residents have lived in the area for generations and expect their families to continue to do so. For assistance with your comments, go to efiling@ferc.gov; or call (202) 502-8258; or see www.newyorkwater.org. FERC claims that there is still time to comment, at least for a couple of months.

Finally, we ask our elected officials to be fully cognizant of the possibly serious consequences of this proposed expansion, and that they use their power and authority to protect their constituents' safety, health, and future well-being.