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ONLY

# True Crime Case Files:

## Shutting Down the Tar Sands Pipelines

Where: 4 Locations

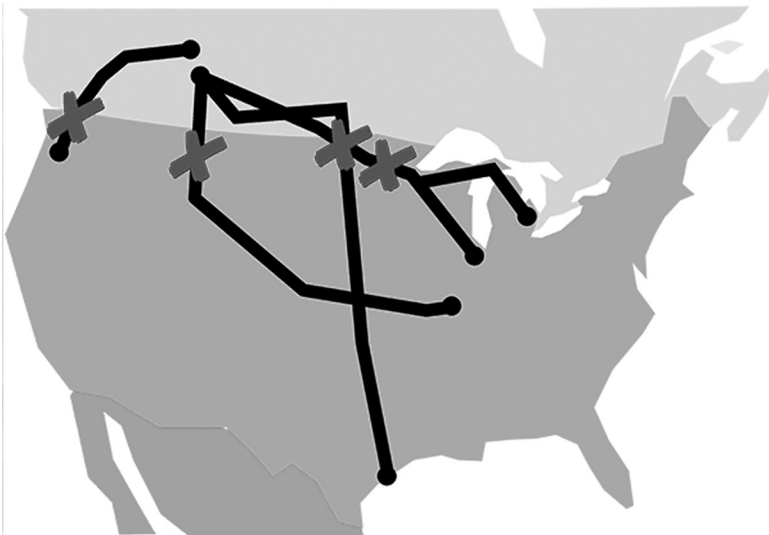
When: October 11, 2016

In the early morning hours of October 11, 2016, a group of five activists took part in an important act of direct action. Armed with bolt cutters, they cut their way into the enclosures for the following pipelines: Enbridge Line 4 and 67 in Leonard, Minnesota; TransCanada's Keystone pipeline in Walhalla, North Dakota; Spectra Energy's Express pipeline in Coal Banks Landing, Montana; and Kinder-Morgan's Trans-Mountain pipeline, Anacortes, Washington.<sup>1</sup>

Once they were in, they cut the chains on the manual overrides on each pipeline, shut the valves and then relocked the shut offs. This act shut off the flow of *all* tar sands crude into the United States from Alberta, Canada.

*All of it.*

The direct action was well documented and public. The five activ-



ists, aged 50-64, were all arrested immediately along with four other crew members. A statement was issued that the action was in solidarity with the protector camp at Standing Rock and a fairly lofty letter to President Barack Obama.<sup>2</sup> Their demands were as follows:

1. *Invoke the National Emergencies Act and continue the shut-down of the tar sands pipelines we have initiated;*
2. *Immediately begin a process for federal closure of all US coal and tar sands oil extraction, and;*
3. *Put before Congress a plan for a national mobilization to transfer US energy use from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, maintain and expand natural carbon sinks, and undertake a US-led and financed global campaign to meet the 1.5°C international target.*<sup>3</sup>

Now, I would think that none of our readers would be shocked to hear that Obama did none of these things. I would trust the activists involved anticipated that outcome as well.

Nonetheless, the action was a solid one. Effective? Doubtful.

But it did shine a light on one thing in particular: if so inclined, *one could manually shut down pipelines.*

That's pretty interesting to hear.

Now, if you follow this feature in *Black and Green Review*, then you should be familiar with acts of sabotage against pipelines, historically speaking. There are many ways that people have tried attacking these structures before they are constructed. In most regards, once the pipeline is there, it might be too late.

However, what we are learning here is that a pipeline, even in the ground and in use, is not impervious to sabotage. Particularly, it's not immune to sabotage that doesn't require blowing or bleeding the line.

Thanks to our friends at the Sierra Club, we know that automatic pipeline monitoring systems only go off when the line is pumping more than 2% less than usual.<sup>4</sup> How quick and accurate they might be for shut offs is hard to say. What we do know is that, in this case, the intent of the direct action was to have it known and, with that understanding, the activists involved would be arrested. In fact, the activists gave the corporations a 15-minute heads up prior to their actions. At least two of the activists simply waited for the authorities to show up.<sup>5</sup>

Hilariously enough, that's got industry talking heads in a tailspin. David Holt, president of the Consumer Energy Alliance (CEA), the "leading national consumer advocate on energy issues," issued a statement in response to the action:



*The steps taken by these individuals to sabotage pipelines – in addition to the threats, intimidation, and cyber-bullying tactics they are using – clearly show that their agenda has nothing to do with protecting the environment and everything to do with shutting down the American economy and hurting everyday Americans, families, small business, and our economic way of life...<sup>6</sup>*

The idea of America's energy corporations and consortiums feeling the brunt of "cyber-bullying" aside, this raises an interesting hypothetical question: are the pipelines, in particular, really this vulnerable? More broadly speaking, is the American economy this fragile?

Naturally there's a lot of bravado and chest pumping here with a dash of victimization. But there's still some truth. In 2011, energy (in the form of utilities and mining) made up 4% of America's GDP. That might not sound like a lot, but it's just under half of the percentage of state and federal government's GDP combined.

It's also a bit misleading. In 2013, three of the top four US corporations by revenue were energy related. That is a list that includes Exxon Mobil, Chevron, and Conoco Phillips.<sup>7</sup> When it comes to energy, time is most certainly money. Considering that the Enbridge pipeline alone carries an average of 1.4 million barrels of crude daily, any slowing or stopping of that flow quickly adds up.

Holt is inadvertently showing his cards. While the energy industry is a behemoth, it is not on sturdy ground. If minor acts of symbolic sabotage threaten such a beast, it's clear that more clandestine counterparts could wield far more significant results. Had the participants opted for more permanent ways of locking down the manual shut offs instead of use chains and locks it could have posed far more damage to the system.

What keeps people like Holt up at night though is that the activists, out of an untold number of options, specifically chose these locations. There are hundreds of thousands of miles of pipelines throughout the United States. And they all have regular manual safety valves. What protects them? From what we can gather, simply a chain link fence and, seemingly often, a locked chain around the valves. These things are everywhere that pipelines run.

For these activists, it seems to have taken effort to get arrested and they did it for a reason.

With the genie out of the bottle, it seems unlikely that others would do the same.

### **Endnotes**

1 [http://www.democracynow.org/2016/10/11/breaking\\_activists\\_reportedly\\_shut\\_down\\_five](http://www.democracynow.org/2016/10/11/breaking_activists_reportedly_shut_down_five)

2 <http://www.shutitdown.today/oct11>

3 <http://www.shutitdown.today/dearobama>

4 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dakota-access-pipeline-protests-water\\_us\\_57d85a51e4b0aa4b722d12b1?section=&](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dakota-access-pipeline-protests-water_us_57d85a51e4b0aa4b722d12b1?section=&)

5 <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-canada-pipeline-activists-idUSKCN12D2R7>

6 <http://consumerenergyalliance.org/2016/10/cea-issues-statement-extremists-manual-shutdown-pipelines/>

7 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_the_United_States)



*Tar sand mines in Alberta. Hell on Earth.*