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## Northern Gateway pipeline: Why American environmental groups are funding Canadian ones in the fight against it.

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## **NORTHERN GATEWAY PIPELINE: WHY AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS ARE FUNDING CANADIAN ONES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST IT.**

**The following was submitted to the London Free Press (a Sun Media paper) but never published. See article re these organizations listed in the 'Contents' section of this website.**

Federal Ministers Joe Oliver (Natural Resources) and Peter Kent (Environment) as well as the right wing press have been railing against interference in Canadian affairs by foreign environmental groups who have been funding First Nations and others fighting the Northern Gateway pipeline intended to carry oil sands crude to Kitimat for export by ship. More recently these foreign interests have been 'infiltrating' the public hearings on the matter with a view (according to Oliver et al) to jamming up the process and delaying it; but here's the thing. Pollution is no respecter of international boundaries. Witness the mercury pollution of our Arctic. An oil spill off our coast could devastate the salmon fishery on both sides of the border and impact negatively on the whole Pacific seaboard. Rather than hint darkly at some environmental conspiracy perhaps they should recognize that all of North America has a stake in protecting the environment and some are trying to protect their livelihood as well.

But pipelines are safe, right? There's no need to worry. Wrong. The Northern Gateway pipeline is being constructed by Enbridge; the company that brought you the Michigan oil spill that dumped 3 million litres of crude into the Kalamazoo River last summer. This company has publically admitted (one must credit their honesty) that leaks and spills are a fact of life with oil pipelines. A less noted occurrence, as news media were preoccupied with the federal election, was the spill that occurred on April 26 when a pipeline owned by Plains Midstream Canada leaked 5 million litres of crude within 7 km of the Lubicon Cree First Nations reserve. Provincial health officials proclaimed that there was no health risk associated with the spill but school kids were experiencing headaches, nausea and dizziness after the spill, but even before they learned of it. This reserve has been so devastated by the oil development in the area that it has come to the attention of Amnesty International who declared it to be a human rights disaster.

Things are no better in the U.S. On last July 1<sup>st</sup>, an Exxon Mobil pipeline under the Yellowstone River in Montana ruptured and leaked 160,000 litres of crude that was carried downstream to wetlands. Ironically the proposed Keystone pipeline route would cross the Yellowstone at this very spot. An article in the New York Times (Sept. 9, 2011) states that since 1990 110 million US gal. (416 million litres) of crude oil have been spilled on American soil. Shoddy workmanship was implicated in some of these spills.

But pipeline leaks are not the only hazard associated with the Northern Gateway proposal. Everyone remembers the Exxon Valdez disaster. Fewer may have heard of the Port Arthur Texas one. On January 23, 2010, an oil tanker collided with a barge in the Port Arthur ship canal. The resulting gash in the tanker leaked 462,000 US gal (1,748,670 L) of crude oil, and polluted nine miles of shoreline. Imagine a stream of tankers loading up at Kitimat to transport crude to China. It would seem to be not a question of if there would be an accident but rather when.

We need a better way of doing things. We need to reduce our dependence on oil, force the petroleum industry to improve construction techniques to minimize spills and show more respect for people's, especially aboriginal peoples', human rights and quality of life.