



The Honorable John Forbes Kerry
Secretary of State
Washington, DC 20520

November 12, 2013

Dear Mr. Secretary,

As leading Canadian environmental organizations, we are writing to draw your attention to the ongoing failure of industry and governments in Canada to manage the detrimental impacts of the Alberta tar sands on air quality in northern Alberta. While industry has embarked on lobbying and public relations campaigns in an effort to paint themselves as responsible resource managers, the situation in Alberta is worsening as toxics in air increase.

Like many of the major environmental impacts resulting from the operation of the tar sands, air pollution in the tar sands is not adequately regulated, monitoring data is not transparent or accessible to the public and experts, and the impacts of air pollution on the surrounding ecosystems and people are not well understood. What is known, however, is that toxics are being released into the air and that if the tar sands expand; it is probable that the amount of chemicals released will surpass legal limits.

A study released in October from UC Irvine and the University of Michigan found cancer-causing Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) at concentrations 6,000 times higher than normal in air samples taken in northern Alberta. The same study found increased incidences of rare cancers associated with these high levels of air pollution, including leukemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

A tripling of tar sands production, contingent on the approval and construction of pipelines like Keystone XL, would result in a 230 per cent increase in nitrogen oxides pollution, a 160 per cent increase in sulphur dioxide emissions and a 190 per cent increase in particulate matter. Current air pollution from the tar sands is already reaching Alberta's existing limits on air pollution, limits which are less health protective than those set by the World Health Organization as well as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In Alberta, tar sands companies frequently break existing environmental rules without consequences. A recent study by Timoney and Lee (July, 2013) uncovered evidence that the enforcement rate was less than one per cent for the thousands of environmental infractions reported in the tar sands between 1996 and 2012. Of the data analyzed, two-thirds of the broken rules related to air quality. The study also found that companies are not on a trajectory of improving their performance. This approach does not reflect responsible resource management.

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Industry and government have promised to introduce a new world class monitoring initiative titled the Joint Oil Sands Monitoring Program (JOSM). This is welcomed, but introducing a new monitoring system won't help if industry continues to fail to adhere to the existing standards and if the province does not ensure consequences for breaking these rules.

Improvements are required, not just in terms of enforcement of current standards but also with regard to modernization to match current and projected production levels. We urge you to consider the above facts in your review of materials submitted to you by tar sands companies and government representatives. For your information we have included a newly released backgrounder on air pollution in the Alberta tar sands entitled, *Reality Check: Air Pollution and the Tar Sands* with further details on materials referenced in this letter.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please don't hesitate to be in touch with any further inquiries or comments.

You may also be interested to visit: www.tarsandsrealitycheck.com.

Sincerely,



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Executive Director
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Ben West
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