

Gleniffer oil spill could be bigger than estimated

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The leaked oil has stuck to debris collected by cleanup crews. (CBC)

The amount of sweet crude oil that leaked from a pipeline into the Red Deer River and Gleniffer Lake, north of Calgary, could be much higher than originally estimated, Alberta Environment says.

Spokeswoman Cheryl Robb said Tuesday the leak could have spilled as much as 200 barrels of oil, or about 32,000 litres, into the river and lake but admitted the figure can't be confirmed.

However, Calgary-based Pembina Pipelines, which owns the pipeline, said they are sticking with their original estimate of 75 to 125 barrels of oil, or as much as 20,000 litres.

On Wednesday, the province issued an environmental protection order to the company, which requires it to file a remediation plan outlining its strategy to mitigate effects of the spill on the water and shoreline.

"We are sorry that this happened," said Sandy Buchan, Pembina's district superintendent. "We're going to do our best and clean this up and make it back to how it was."

Pembina workers realized the line was losing pressure on Sunday. The pipeline, designed to run next to the Red Deer River, had become submerged because of recent heavy rains. The river is still too high for crews to inspect the line, and to determine what caused the leak.

On Tuesday, Alberta's Energy Resources Conservation Board said the number of pipeline breaks increased from 16 in 2006 to 23 last year. About two-thirds of 233 checks of pipeline operations were found to be non-compliant.

The agency said it's hiring 26 additional public safety and field surveillance staff this year, which will allow for more inspections and air monitoring.

Water being trucked in for residents

Two water treatment plants for Gleniffer Lake are temporarily closed. Pembina Pipelines is paying to truck in potable water for residents until the lake water is cleared to be treated again.

"They say they can clean it up, but can you really clean it all up? So will the water still be good? I don't

know," said Simone Jensen, who has a lot at the Carefree Resort.

People are being told to stay off the popular recreational lake while the cleanup continues.

Robb said there are no reports of wildlife or fish being affected by the spill, about 130 kilometres north of Calgary.

She said the spill is contained to a 33-kilometre stretch and that booms are in place to prevent it from spreading farther.

"We have been sampling to the water to make sure that drinking water in the communities downstream isn't affected," she said, referring to Innisfail and Red Deer.

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