

North Dakota oil spill cleanup to last at least two more years

By Nick Smith

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BISMARCK, N.D. _ An oil pipeline spill that happened near Tioga last fall could take about two years to clean up while remediation at the site of a train derailment near Casselton could be done this summer, state lawmakers were told Tuesday.

Members of the interim Energy Development and Transmission Committee heard updates on both incidents and had questions about the lessons learned from them.

David Glatt, head of the environmental section of the North Dakota Health Department, said work has continued at the Tioga site where a pipeline owned by Tesoro Corp. began leaking crude oil on a wheat farm on Sept. 29. Approximately 20,600 barrels spilled, one of the largest spills in state history.

“The contamination has gone down at least 30 feet,” Glatt said.

The water table is approximately 150 feet beneath the ground, he said.

So far Tesoro has recovered approximately 6,000 barrels of oil. The spill has been contained by French drains, a security fence and cut-off walls to ensure that the oil doesn't migrate beyond its current boundaries.

Glatt said Tesoro has submitted a plan in which it proposes to excavate the soil, treat, replace and rejuvenate it.

“It's a long process,” Glatt said, and estimated it could take approximately two years.

The pipeline is under the jurisdiction of the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration. Its size, pipeline pressure and location put it beneath the minimum threshold for monitoring and testing requirements.

Glatt said the Dec. 30 derailment near Casselton resulted in a total of 9,000 yards of soil being excavated at the site so far. Of that, 1,400 yards have been disposed of in -state. The rest is expected to be disposed of out of state as a cost-saving measure.



Eric Dille, government relations director for EOG Resources, Inc. in Denver, Co., testifies in front of the Energy Development and Transmission Committee Tuesday at the state Capitol in Bismarck. Dille asked state legislators to consider not limiting multi-well pads in the Bakken because the action may discourage private investment and hurt revenue for North Dakota. 2-11-2014

A train carrying grain had derailed near Casselton. Shortly after this a train traveling the opposite direction carrying crude oil derailed and collided with the first train.

The BNSF Railway derailment caused several explosions, a leak of approximately 400,000 gallons of crude and a large plume of smoke which prompted a voluntary evacuation for nearly 24 hours.

“They’re hopeful to have it done this summer,” Glatt said.

“What were the lessons learned from each of these events?” asked Sen. Connie Triplett, D-Grand Forks.

Glatt said it became evident that information on spills needs to be released sooner. He said the Health Department had been working on creating a database with information on spills, and the Tesoro incident expedited it.

Triplett said some form of increased regulatory oversight of pipelines or rail is needed on the state level if North Dakota wishes to promote its growing energy industry.

“We can’t just say it’s up to the federal government,” Triplett said. “We also have to accept some responsibility.”

Committee Chairman Sen. Rich Wardner, R-Dickinson, said he also thinks the state needs to do more.

He also said he thinks the federal government uses its resources to involve itself in areas where it shouldn’t be involved. Wardner didn’t elaborate as to what specific areas he meant.

Wardner said he was in favor of the Public Service Commission taking on a lead regulatory role over intrastate hazardous liquid pipelines.

The PSC recently had a discussion with federal regulations about what it would take to create a program to take on oversight of such pipelines. It would require legislation and adoption of federal pipeline guidelines and a program likely could not be up and running before the latter half of 2015.