

Riverkeeper Calls for Immediate Halt to AIM Pipeline Because of Catastrophic Consequences for Indian Point

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Westchester County, NY — Riverkeeper and a coalition of groups has filed a Motion for a Stay asking a federal court to stop the construction of Spectra Energy’s Algonquin Incremental Market (AIM) pipeline project before high volumes of fracked natural gas begin flowing through the pipeline located in close proximity to the aging Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant. The AIM project is just the first of three expansions planned for the Algonquin pipeline (AIM, Atlantic Bridge, and Access Northeast). Together they are intended to bring fracked gas from the Mid-Atlantic region to New England and to Liquefied Natural Gas terminals in Canada for shipping overseas.

A lawsuit challenging the project’s approval by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is currently pending in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. The Motion seeks to immediately stop the pipeline construction while the Court considers the appeal. The same Court reprimanded the regulatory agency in 2014 for approving a similar unlawful segmentation of a pipeline project. In that case, the construction was already finished by the time the Court reached its decision — a result the Motion hopes to prevent for the AIM project.

FERC’s approval of the high volume gas pipeline close to Indian Point accepted a faulty analysis done by the plant owner (Entergy) and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. In papers filed with the Court, noted nuclear safety and pipeline safety experts detail how the analysis greatly underestimated the blast radius of a pipeline explosion. Their chilling analysis shows that an explosion might engulf the entire Indian Point nuclear power plant site.

“If the AIM pipeline explodes, Indian Point will go with it,” said Jennifer McCave, Staff Attorney with Riverkeeper. “FERC has a legal responsibility to protect public safety by requiring an independent engineering analysis of the catastrophic safety risks of placing a pipeline next to a nuclear power plant.”

“Federal law requires a thorough look at the consequences to our community of the failure of a gas pipeline next to Indian Point,” said John Parker, Riverkeeper’s Director of Legal Programs. “In this case it simply was not done, and we intend to hold the project and the federal agency

accountable for a failure that could have dramatic consequences for New York City and the Hudson Valley.”

The Motion filed by the coalition is also based on new evidence that the company approved by FERC to analyze the project’s impacts on the environment has a financial conflict of interest. With FERC’s approval, the company is reviewing the three segments separately in order to downplay their environmental impacts even though Spectra marketed these segments as one project from the beginning. The reviewing company has a financial incentive to approve the pipeline because of ongoing business with Spectra as well as business from the next two phases.

For years, many organizations and governmental officials have been demanding that FERC cease rubber-stamping pipeline projects without adequate environmental and safety analyses.

With regard to the AIM pipeline, the Senators of New York and Massachusetts, the Governor of New York, Congressional Representatives, New York State legislators, and local officials have recently called on FERC to stop the AIM project until there has been an independent analysis of the risk to public safety and an investigation of the contractor’s conflict of interest. Yet, FERC has refused to do either.

“Today, we are demanding an immediate halt on construction of the Spectra AIM pipeline before fracked-gas starts flowing in November,” said Greta Zarro, Food & Water Watch’s New York Organizer. “Approval of this dangerous project was based on inadequate risk assessments; there is simply no way to safely build a high-pressure gas pipeline adjacent to a leaking nuclear power plant positioned on top of two earthquake fault lines.”

The coalition of groups includes Riverkeeper, Food & Water Watch, the Sierra Club Lower Hudson, Stop the Algonquin Pipeline Expansion (SAPE), the Reynolds Hills Community and other environmental and community activists.