



# International Joint Commission United States and Canada

August 6, 2010

The Honorable Lawrence Cannon  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
125 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton and Minister Cannon,

Last week a pipeline ruptured causing a significant and damaging oil release into a tributary to a Michigan river. The pipeline failure that has captured public and regulatory attention illustrates the continued vulnerability of the Great Lakes basin to significant environmental impacts. Under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, the International Joint Commission is responsible for providing information, advice and recommendations to Federal, State, and Provincial government agencies to assist them with protecting the Great Lakes. As a result of this incident, the Commission wishes to re-emphasize some of the specific findings made in its *Report on Spills in the Great Lakes Basin*. The 2006 report noted that better monitoring, accurate detection and speedy notification are required to reduce harmful human and ecosystem impacts.

The rupture of the Enbridge pipeline caused the release of some 800,000 gallons of crude oil, with much of it leaking into a tributary of the Kalamazoo River, which flows to Lake Michigan. The Commission is aware there are many pipelines carrying hazardous liquid substances across the Canada /U.S. border. This pipeline failure raises questions about the integrity of the vast network of pipelines crossing between the two countries and reminds us of the potential for a release of hazardous polluting substances that could result in large economic and ecological costs for both countries. The Commission urges Federal, state, and local governments to take every safeguard and precaution available to try and prevent further pipeline failures and to ensure rapid response plans are in place.

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We acknowledge receipt of a July 30, 2010 letter from 23 members of the U.S. Congress expressing concern about oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes (attached). The Commission looks forward to being of service to both countries as essential failsafe systems are developed to further protect the Great Lakes from any future spills that could otherwise be caused by the transport of or drilling for oil and gas and other hazardous polluting substances in these environmentally critical areas.

The Commission is aware that drilling and the vast network of pipelines crossing between the two countries and through other transboundary basins pose a risk to shared waters. As a result of both sets of concerns, the Commission is in the process of gathering further information on pipelines, drilling, and the rigor of government oversight and industry practices in the Great Lakes basin. We plan to issue recommendations which may be applicable to other Canada/U.S. transboundary basins.

Sincerely,



Hon. Joe Comuzzi  
Chair, Canadian Section



Hon. Lana Pollack  
Chair, U.S. Section

Enclosures: 2006 IJC Report on Spills in the Great Lakes Basin  
Letter dated July 30, 2010 from Members of Congress