

Critics cite explosion in ongoing pipeline debate

Friday

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Stories From Chatter Network

By Steve Hardy The Advocate (Baton Rouge)

BATON ROUGE -- Opponents of the proposed Bayou Bridge Pipeline are holding up Thursday night's fire on a natural gas line in St. Charles Parish as evidence of the danger pipelines pose, but regulators note that comparing the two are like "apples and oranges."

An evacuation of about 60 homes near the pipeline fire in Paradis, about 25 miles east of Houma and Thibodaux, was lifted, but a Phillips 66 worker remained missing Friday night, authorities said. St. Charles Parish authorities said the fire had significantly diminished by midday. A company statement said flow to the pipeline, which carried liquid natural gas components, had been blocked but product still in the line continued to burn. It was unclear when it would burn out.

The Venice-Paradis line that caught fire transported liquid natural gas, while Bayou Bridge would carry crude oil. Paradis-Venice, or VP01, is really only like Bayou Bridge "in the sense that it is a pipeline," said Department of Natural Resources communications director Patrick Courreges.

"In terms of the regulatory community, it doesn't have any bearing on (the Bayou Bridge debate)," said Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality press secretary Greg Langley.

Many of the concerns over crude oil have centered on whether it may leak into waterways. Liquid natural gas is transported in pressurized pipes and vaporizes into a gas when released, Courreges explained. The gas is highly volatile, much more than crude oil.

The Louisiana Bucket Brigade addressed those points in a statement.

"The oil industry and the elected officials they've bought off will have a thousand excuses about this accident," said Anne Rolfes, founding director of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade. "They'll say that this is a natural gas pipeline, not oil. They'll say that new technology would have prevented it. But the fire and the explosion speak for itself. Pipelines are dangerous and we don't want more in Louisiana."

There are risks associated with pipelines, but trains and other transportation have their own potential dangers as well, Langley remarked.

"Any method you use has some risk. ... The alternative is don't use any oil," he said.

The proposed Bayou Bridge pipeline is designed to run in Louisiana between Lake Charles and St. James Parish, cutting through the Atchafalaya Basin. Opponents have been calling on regulatory agencies like DNR and DEQ to the permits for the 182-mile project, which would connect Louisiana refineries with a major oil-and-gas hub in Texas.

Industry proponents have argued pipelines are a far safer way to transport oil than by truck, train or boat. They also have said the project will likely generate \$830 million in economic activity and create more than 2,000 direct and indirect jobs.

But the Gulf Restoration Network, another environmental group, noted that Phillips 66 owns the pipeline that exploded Thursday and is also an investor in the proposed Bayou Bridge Pipeline.

"Pipelines are touted by industry to be the safest mechanism for transporting oil and gas," said Cyn Sarthou, the New Orleans-based group's executive director. "This latest disaster illustrates that pipelines are not safe and that our communities are not safe when pipelines cut through them."

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The Holland Sentinel, Holland, MI

Police Go After Suspected Gaston Heroin Dealers

Gaston Gazette, Gastonia, NC

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