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Enbridge's Line 5 Releases an Estimated 1.3 Million Gallons of Natural Gas Liquids in Iron County, Wisconsin

The initial estimated spill would be one of the largest releases of its kind. The operator temporarily paused reroute construction for 48 hours before resuming on Sept 3.

Bellingham, WASHINGTON - [Sept. 3, 2026] – On Aug. 25, a parked, unoccupied truck, which Enbridge says belonged to a subcontractor, rolled into an open excavation site along Line 5 and struck the pipeline. This strike damaged the pipeline, which led to a release Enbridge currently estimates at 31,000 barrels, or 1.3 million gallons, of natural gas liquids (NGL), which included propane, butane, and other undisclosed hazardous materials. As of late last week, Enbridge said roughly 2,000 barrels, or 84,000 gallons, of liquid product remained pooled in the excavation, and the company has been flaring off vapors from the isolated section.

The accident occurred as Enbridge worked to reroute Line 5 around the Bad River Reservation. The truck struck the existing pipeline, built in the 1950s, at a valve site near the reservation boundary. The valve was added to the existing pipeline as part of the reroute project.

A release of this size raises questions about how quickly the line was isolated and how far apart its shutoff valves sit. Pipelines built after the federal pipeline regulator, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration's (PHMSA) 2022 "Valve Rule" are required to install and use Rupture Mitigation Valves (RMVs) with defined valve spacing based on the location of the pipeline, safeguards that can reduce how much product is released during a rupture. But the Iron County leak occurred on the original 1950s-era section, which predates many of those new requirements. PHMSA's investigation should establish whether those safeguards would have limited this release.

According to PHMSA data, three other NGL accidents share notable similarities with Enbridge's Iron County release. A 2013 Chevron spill, a 2018 DCP Midstream leak, and a 2024 Energy Transfer rupture each released over 1 million gallons of natural gas liquids, and all three stemmed from some type of strike on the pipeline. One key factor sets the Enbridge accident apart: ignition. All three comparable accidents ignited, and in both the Chevron and Energy Transfer cases, someone died.

A 1990 tragedy in North Blenheim, New York shows what ignition could mean for a community. A ruptured propane pipeline released a vapor cloud that drifted into the town, settled, then found an ignition source. The explosion and fire killed two people, injured seven, and destroyed more than a dozen homes. Federal investigators found the operator failed to promptly detect the rupture because the line was monitored at too few locations and traced the accident to poor oversight of repair work on the pipeline.

"The only reason this accident wasn't a catastrophe is luck. Not Enbridge's safety practices and not our pipeline safety regulations," Pipeline Safety Trust Executive Director Bill Caram said. "And there are still tens of thousands of gallons of hazardous liquid product sitting in an open trench which can soak into the soil and move toward groundwater, and its vapors can reach nearby communities. We need to know what's in that liquid, what the monitoring shows, and what the cleanup plan is."

It is not yet known why the truck rolled into the pipeline. More information about the accident is expected to be released within the next few weeks, as Enbridge is required to submit a 30-day accident report to PHMSA.

“While we don’t know exactly why the truck struck the pipeline, we do know that Enbridge is ultimately responsible for the oversight of its contractors and the accidents they cause,” Caram said. “In the aftermath of this accident, Enbridge’s pipeline safety management system (PSMS) needs to be reviewed.”

A PSMS is a framework focused on continually improving safety efforts and safety culture. Unlike safety management systems in some other industries, those for pipelines are voluntary, meaning there are no regulatory requirements for what an operator’s PSMS must contain.

“All pipeline operators should have robust pipeline safety management systems to keep our communities and ecologically sensitive areas safe, including oversight of third-party contractors,” Caram said. “We need PSMS to be required to prevent future accidents.”

This is not the first incident off of Line 5, in 1999 Line 5 dumped over 226,000 gallons of NGL and crude oil in to a marsh in Crystal Falls, Michigan. And, this is also not the first Enbridge accident in the Midwest to release such a large amount of hazardous liquid. In 2010, Enbridge’s Line 6B ruptured and dumped nearly a million gallons of heavy crude oil into the Kalamazoo River near Marshall, Michigan, a watershed moment for hazardous liquid pipeline safety.

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About Pipeline Safety Trust: The Pipeline Safety Trust is a nonprofit public watchdog promoting pipeline safety through education and advocacy by increasing access to information, and by building partnerships with residents, safety advocates, government, and industry, that result in safer communities and a healthier environment.