Ark. Residents Begin to Return Home After Oil Spill

JEANNIE NUSS, Associated Press

MAYFLOWER, Ark. (AP) — Some people whose homes were evacuated when an oil pipeline ruptured in central Arkansas could go home as early as Thursday, officials said.

Federal on-scene coordinator Nick Brescia stands near a projection of a map as he talks to reporters on Thursday, April 11, 2013, about efforts to clean up after last month's oil spill in Mayflower, Ark. Some people whose homes were evacuated when an oil pipeline ruptured in central Arkansas could go home as early as Thursday, officials said. Authorities evacuated more than 20 homes in Mayflower, about 25 miles northwest of Little Rock, after an ExxonMobil Pipeline ruptured here on March 29, spilling thousands of barrels of oil. **(AP Photo/Jeannie Nuss)**

Authorities evacuated more than 20 homes in Mayflower, about 25 miles northwest of Little Rock, after an ExxonMobil pipeline ruptured March 29, spilling thousands of barrels of oil.

The residents of four of those homes could be allowed back on Thursday, federal on-scene coordinator Nick Brescia said Thursday. The residents of eight or nine more homes could return in the coming days, Brescia said.

It's not clear when the rest could come back, but some people may not want to return as cleanup crews and their heavy equipment are still trying to get rid of what's left of the spill.

"We have not had a strong interest to get back into homes," Karen Tyrone, ExxonMobil's on-scene coordinator, told reporters.

So far, crews have recovered about 28,200 barrels of oily water and about 2,000 cubic yards of oiled soil and debris, according to a statement from ExxonMobil and local officials. Officials estimate that about 5,000 barrels of oil spilled, though a final

number isn't expected until the pipeline has been repaired and refilled.

Officials hope to remove the ruptured part of the Pegasus pipeline in the next few days, Tyrone said. Then, investigators may be able to piece together why it burst.

"You cannot know what happened until you get this piece of pipe out and you get it to a lab," she said.

ExxonMobil said the spill has not affected Mayflower's drinking water supply, which comes from a lake about 65 miles northeast of the city. But that hasn't put a stop to concerns about drinking water in other parts of the region.

Officials with another water system — Central Arkansas Water — are slated to meet Thursday afternoon to discuss asking ExxonMobil to move the Pegasus pipeline away from an area that drains into a drinking water source.

"We understand their concerns," Tyrone said. "We have spoken with them. They understand that we're in a recovery effort right now and our focus right now is the Mayflower community."

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