

Legal Fallout Continues Over AR Oil Leak

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Lawsuits and alleged safety violations are mounting against Exxon Mobil Corp. following the rupture eight months ago of a pipeline that spilled thousands of barrels of oil in central Arkansas.

Since Exxon's Pegasus pipeline ruptured March 29 and spilled the oil in the Mayflower community about 30 miles northwest of Little Rock, there have been at least 17 lawsuits against Exxon or its subsidiaries in state or federal courts.

And on Nov. 6 the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration alleged nine "probable" violations of safety regulations related to the spill and proposed more than \$2.6 million in civil penalties.

Exxon Mobil has not said whether it will challenge the findings. Company spokesman David Eglinton told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (<http://bit.ly/1jTTEJF>) that the company "will directly engage" with the safety administration about the allegations.

Shortly after the company was notified of the safety allegations, Exxon Mobil issued a statement saying that was still reviewing the notice and had not determined what action it would take.

"Regarding next steps, we are still reviewing the NOPV (notice of probable violations) and have not yet determined our future course of action," according to the statement provided by spokesman Aaron Stryk.

Damon Hill, a spokesman for the safety administration, told the newspaper Friday that the agency had not received any response from Exxon Mobil.

The company has 30 days from the date of the notice, Nov. 6, to respond. It can also request an extension of time during that 30 days.

Court litigation likely will take much longer. A lawsuit filed by U.S. Attorney Christopher Thyer and Arkansas Attorney General Dustin McDaniel is not scheduled for trial until Feb. 24, 2015, after McDaniel, who is not seeking re-election, is out of office.

"There are many major efforts that will remain unfinished at the end of my term, including the Mayflower litigation," McDaniel said in an email sent by a spokesman. "I will communicate closely with both (parties') nominees for (attorney general) so that my successor will be able to easily transition into leading this office."

Exxon Mobil has asked the court to dismiss the case, a request that has yet to be ruled upon by U.S. District Judge James M. Moody.

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Mayflower business owners and residents in the area have filed the other lawsuits.

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