

Massive Russian Fuel Spill Shows Folly Of Environmental Extremists And Fossil Fuel Apologists

Forbes.com

June 17, 2020

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Norislk spill, Oil spill Russia, Thawing permafrost , Lake pyasino, Pyasina river, Artic oil spill, Fossil fuels, Fossil fuel companies, Renewable energy, Energy attorney, Daniel markind, Gas, pipelines, Shale gas, Marcellus shale, Building gas pipelines, Pennsylvania gas pipelines

On May 29, 2020, a diesel storage tank at a Russian power plant in the Siberian city of Norislk leaked about 150,000 barrels of fuel into nearby rivers. So huge and destructive is the spill that officials suggest it might take five to ten years to clean up. The Norislk spill is estimated to have released more than half as much petroleum as the Exxon Valdez tanker accident, which released about 260,000 barrels of crude oil in Alaska in 1989, and the recent spill has been called the Arctic's worst-ever environmental catastrophe.

While no consensus has yet been reached on what caused the tank to burst, a working theory is that thawing permafrost, caused by climate change, may have played a role in weakening the tank and causing it to rupture.

By June 9, the spill reached Lake Pyasino, which flows into the Pyasina River and then into the Arctic. A nearby nature preserve has also been threatened. As diesel is lighter than crude oil, officials have optimistically suggested that the spill most likely will evaporate instead of sinking. Still, it will remain toxic to clean up and could impact the environment for years to come.

Even the Russians, whose environmental record is dismal, admit that recent abnormally warm temperatures in the area could have played a factor in the disaster. For their own economic and ecologic future, they must deal with the impacts of climate change.

But while the Russians now address that issue, the extreme environmentalists must deal with the opposite issue - that their all or nothing policies are ironically making the world even more dependent on environmentally disastrous Russian energy extraction, rather than less so which is their actual goal. Germany's attempt to build a new gas pipeline directly from Russia in the Black Sea is evidence of the failure of their environmental policy. Despite divestment movement against fossil fuel companies and breathless headlines about how the cost of renewable energy keeps dropping, the scientific limitations of both solar and wind power remain. There is simply no way using current technology to store sufficient green generated

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power and transmit it to all places where it needs to go at all times when it needs to get there.

The events of the last two weeks amplify the foolishness of the American anti-pipeline movement. With renewable sources still only capable of providing intermittent energy, at best, the gap must be filled somehow unless and until renewable energy does, in fact, become steady and reliable.

Thanks to the efforts of the environmental movement and their supporters like New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, that gap now is more likely to be filled by Russian gas imports than by domestic natural gas from places like Pennsylvania produced and transmitted in a far more environmentally friendly fashion. How increased reliance on Russian energy benefits the world's environment remains unexplained.

In Massachusetts, natural gas heats 52% of homes and provides 70% of the fuel for electricity.

While Massachusetts politicians like Attorney General Maura Healey demand a full study of the natural gas industry and its impact on the intended switch to fully renewable sources by 2050 - an admirable goal if the science can be worked out - Healey also famously has said that importing Russian gas into Massachusetts is preferable to building gas pipelines from Pennsylvania.

The situation in the Arctic shows the intellectual emptiness of that position, which is unfortunately all too common among the environmental movement as a whole.

Both the COVID-19 shutdowns and the George Floyd situation and aftermath show the danger of substituting wishful thinking for clearly facing the reality staring us in the face. Those who deny climate change must appreciate the appalling environmental devastation that could result from its impact. But those who act as if an immediate change to all renewables is either feasible or environmentally beneficial are just as guilty of vapid thinking. It is time we all look at the facts and let that be our guide, instead of our own wishful thinking.