Roanoke Times

Limpert: Mountain Valley Pipeline will be a health hazard

- **William Limpert**
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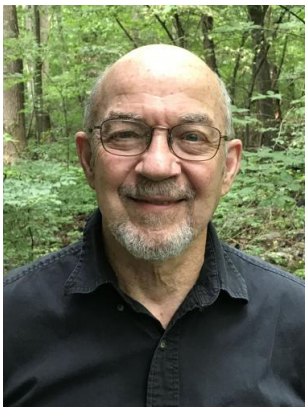

The Mountain Valley Pipeline project's work is seen on Brush Mountain in Montgomery County outside of Blacksburg recently.

The Mountain Valley Pipeline would pose a significant public health risk to those nearby if it becomes operational.

The Aliso Canyon natural gas storage facility in California leaked an estimated 4.62 billion cubic feet of natural gas several years ago. More than 8,000 families in nearby areas, including the affluent Porter Ranch area, had to be temporarily relocated from their homes because of the threat to their health from toxic substances and other pollutants that are carried along with natural gas. Settlement damages came to $1.8 billion.

Howard Elliott, administrator for the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) stated “The Aliso Canyon incident was one of the largest natural gas releases in U.S. history, and affected the lives of thousands of Americans living and working nearby.”

Nearby residents complained of headaches, bloody noses, vomiting and rashes. Several years later the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health said that many residents were continuing to suffer long-term health impacts.

More than 5 years after the leak over 100 homes and two schools were tested for pollutants. An analysis of surface dust revealed low levels of metal contaminants consistent with those found in well drilling fluid, which suggests they originated from the Aliso Canyon gas storage facility.

Impacts to the health of persons living near the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission-approved MVP could be similar, and possibly worse.

Natural gas transmission pipelines, like the MVP, leak and intentionally discharge large volumes of natural gas, toxic substances, and other pollutants. A recent study by Alvarez, et al., estimates a 0.35% volume loss from natural gas transmission systems. MVP cited this study in computing their own losses.

FERC has approved the MVP to transport 2 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day. At a 0.35% loss rate the MVP would leak and intentionally discharge 7 million cubic feet per day. It would discharge the same volume as the Aliso Canyon leak in 660 days. Those discharges would continue. In less than 7 years and 3 months it would discharge 4 times as much, and in its 50 year lifespan, it would discharge over 27 times greater volume than Aliso Canyon.

The Aliso Canyon leak discharged at a higher rate than the MVP would, it discharged from a single location, and it discharged into a more populous area than the MVP would discharge into.

Nevertheless, the MVP would discharge a much greater volume over time. PHMSA records indicate that the discharges would be mostly concentrated at compressor stations, although they could occur anywhere along the line. The MVP discharges would be cumulative as long as the pipeline is operational. Pollutant deposition would occur to nearby residents' land, crops, homes, and lungs.

Toxic substances and other pollutants in the MVP discharges would be similar to Aliso Canyon, including volatile organic chemicals, and benzene.

However, the MVP discharges would include much more radioactive radon.

Radon is brought up from the earth during fracking, and is transported along with natural gas in transmission lines. Radon has a half life of 3.8 days. Almost all of the radon stored at Aliso Canyon would have decayed in storage before the leak.

Most of the radon in the MVP gas stream would remain. It would be discharged along with the other toxins and pollutants.

A compilation of studies indicates that natural gas transmission lines, like the MVP, carry radon concentrations of 40-60 pico-curies per liter.

That's 100 to 150 times higher than natural air levels. EPA has estimated that radon causes 21,000 lung cancer deaths per year in our country.

People near the MVP, and especially those close to the compressor stations, would be at risk from the negative health impacts of radon, toxic substances, and other pollutants for a very long period of time. Some families could be at risk for generations. Some persons could be at risk their entire lives.

This is a serious public health issue.

People near the MVP have not been paid to relocate, or compensated for the threat to their health. Most of our fellow citizens near the MVP are hard working Americans of modest means. They cannot afford to hire high powered attorneys to receive $1.8 billion in damages.

FERC and the MVP should know that if this unjust, unneeded, and dangerous pipeline becomes operational, and the health of our fellow citizens along the MVP is damaged, We The People will be knocking hard on your door, and we will be demanding full justice.

Limpert is a retired environmental regulator who formerly lived in Bath County along the route of the since-canceled Atlantic Coast Pipeline. He now lives in Maryland.