

Byhalia Pipeline: What is going on?

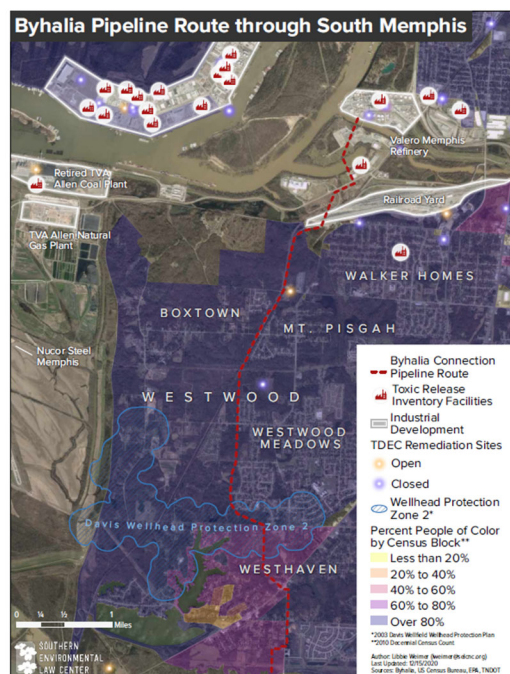
Two companies, Plains All American Pipeline, L.P. and Valero Energy Corporation, are trying to build a pipeline through southwest Memphis neighborhoods to transport crude oil for export.

How does it impact my community?

The Davis Wellfield, an area where water is pumped from the aquifer, supplies drinking water to areas of southwest Memphis, including Westwood, Boxtown, and White Chapel. MLGW has established Wellhead Protection Zones to guard the wellfield from potential contamination, but despite these precautions, the pipeline is slated to plow through Wellhead Protection Zone 2. Because crude oil is known to contain cancer-causing hazardous chemicals such as benzene, Memphis residents would be at risk if a leak or spill occurred near a breach in the aquifer's clay layer. One pound of crude oil can contaminate 25,000,000 gallons of groundwater.¹

The pipeline route goes through predominantly Black communities in Memphis. Boxtown is a Black community that was named after formerly enslaved people used scraps of wood and metal from train boxcars to build their homes.²

Many Black Memphians were outraged after hearing a representative connected to the project describe the decision to route the pipeline through South Memphis as a “point of least resistance.”³ The pipeline company has been claiming that it has the right to take the property of Black landowners, but several landowners are fighting back in court with pro bono legal assistance from local law firm Burch, Porter & Johnson.⁴



This is not the first time that southwest Memphis residents have been forced bear the risks of environmental pollution and industrial intrusion. A 2013 study identified the area as an air pollution hotspot due to the quantity of industries and emission sources, noting that the cumulative cancer risk in Southwest Memphis “was four times higher than the national average.”⁵ Once again, local residents face shouldering environmental and health risks that we did not ask for, but together we can build the social and political power needed to stand up to these companies.

What can I do to protect my community? Get involved! Learn more and receive important updates on social media. Follow:

- **Memphis Community Against the Pipeline (MCAP)** on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).
- **Protect Our Aquifer** on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

¹ <https://www.southernenvironment.org/news-and-press/news-feed/hydrogeologic-report-warns-of-pipeline-threats-to-memphis-drinking-water-source>

² <https://cohen.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/congressman-cohen-asks-biden-administration-rescind-byhalia-connection>

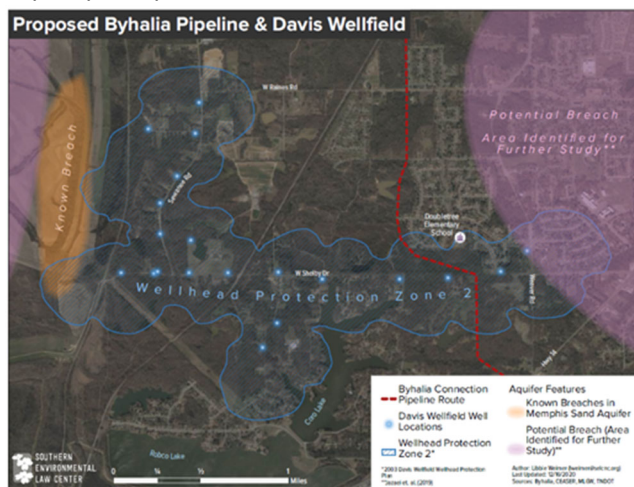
³ *Id.*

⁴ <https://mlk50.com/2021/01/22/southwest-memphis-landowners-mount-legal-defense-against-oil-pipelines-use-of-eminant-domain/>

⁵ Chunrong Jia and Jeffery Foran, *Air toxics concentrations, source identification, and health risks: An air pollution hot spot in Southwest Memphis, TN*, 81 *ATMOSPHERIC ENVIRONMENT* 112-16 (2013).

What could go wrong?

Memphis is one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world that gets all of its municipal drinking water from an underground aquifer, the Memphis Sand Aquifer. Groundwater from the Memphis Sand Aquifer is pumped up to the surface and distributed all over the city. Much of the aquifer is protected by a layer



of clay between the groundwater and the surface, but recent studies show the clay layer has several known and suspected breaches, holes, and leaks. Plus, some areas surrounding Memphis that are not protected by the clay layer are considered recharge zones for the aquifer where surface water soaks through the soil to replace the water that is pumped out.

The planned route for the pipeline passes near suspected breaches in the protective layer of clay in Memphis and crosses over the aquifer's recharge zone in Mississippi.

Pipeline companies have a long history of leaks and spills, which are exceedingly expensive and difficult to clean up. Plains All American alone experienced ten oil spills between June 2004 and September 2007, which totaled about 273,420 gallons of oil.⁶ Plains estimated that another spill in California in 2015 cost the company \$390 million to clean up the oil, cover damages to natural resources, and fund settlements, fines, and fees.⁷ Restoration of the affected area is still ongoing nearly six year later.⁸

Although Plains representatives have said that well maintained pipelines can last for decades without issues,⁹ the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) has recorded over 4,000 oil and fuel spills just since 2010. Even though pipeline companies are now required to install leak detection systems, these do not always work as planned. Only about 7% of the recorded spills were discovered because of leak detection systems.¹⁰

Just last year, a Valero facility near Memphis experienced an 800-gallon oil leak, which included 10-pounds of the hazardous chemical benzene, due to corroded pipes.¹¹ Their monitoring system failed to detect the leak.¹²

Spills could occur for any number of reasons, including faulty construction, defective materials, poor maintenance, seismic activity, or someone simply digging in the wrong place without calling first. Alarmingly, the proposed route lies within a known earthquake zone. The New Madrid Seismic Zone is the most seismically active area in the central and eastern United States,¹³ yet the companies still plan to construct an underground pipeline through residential areas over a crucial drinking water source.

⁶ <https://www.epa.gov/enforcement/plains-all-american-pipeline-settlement>

⁷ Plains All American 10-K filing for FY2019, page F-64.

⁸ <https://www.environmentaldefensecenter.org/refugio-oil-spill-what-restoration-looks-like-5-years-later/>

⁹ Byhalia Presentation, Memphis City Council Meeting Notes, February 2, 2021.

¹⁰ <https://www.eenews.net/stories/1063725961>

¹¹ <https://www.commercialappeal.com/story/news/local/2021/03/02/planned-byhalia-site-valero-leaked-800-gallons-crude-oil-2020/6885232002/>

¹² *Id.*

¹³ https://www.usgs.gov/natural-hazards/earthquake-hazards/science/new-madrid-seismic-zone?qtscience_center_objects=0#qt-science_center_objects