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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

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February 26, 2014

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As the State Department makes its National Interest Determination on the Keystone XL pipeline permit, we are writing to request an immediate and comprehensive study on the human health impacts of tar sands and the proposed pipeline.

The Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement was woefully inadequate regarding human health impacts, and we believe it is critically important that peer reviewed research on these issues is fully considered before any decision is made on the Keystone XL pipeline.

We have already seen how communities along each step of the toxic tar sands oil process -- from the extraction to the transport to the refining to the waste disposal -- will be impacted.

Elevated levels of carcinogens and mercury have been documented downstream from tar sands extraction sites, and communities in these areas show elevated levels of rare cancer rates.

Tar sands oil is very difficult to clean up when a spill occurs, and a 2010 tar sands pipeline spill into the Kalamazoo River still has not been resolved.

Significantly higher levels of dangerous air pollutants and carcinogens have been documented downwind from tar sands refineries, and in these areas people are suffering higher rates of the types of cancers linked to these toxic chemicals, including leukemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

In neighborhoods in Detroit and Chicago, massive open piles of tar sands waste byproduct, known as "pet coke," have resulted in billowing black clouds containing concentrated heavy metals. Children playing baseball have been forced off the field to seek cover from the clouds of black dust that pelted homes and cars.

We believe that putting more Americans at risk for asthma, cancer, and other serious health impacts is not in our national interest. Clearly much more needs to be done before any final decision on the Keystone XL pipeline is made, and we urge you to complete a comprehensive human health impacts study – nothing less than the health of our families is at stake.

Sincerely,



Senator Barbara Boxer
Chairman



Senator Sheldon Whitehouse