



WESTERN RESOURCE
ADVOCATES

For Immediate Release

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September 27, 2010

Tar Sands Mining Permit Appealed

SALT LAKE CITY – A controversial permit to mine tar sands in Utah has been appealed to the Board of the Utah Department of Oil, Gas, and Mining. Western Resource Advocates (WRA), acting on behalf of Living Rivers, contends that threats of water contamination for both groundwater and surface water in the Colorado River Basin have not been adequately evaluated.

Earth Energy Resources (EER), the Canadian mining company seeking the permit, states they will use citrus-based solvent to separate the tarry bitumen from the rocks in which it's found. However, they have yet to disclose the contents of the solvent they intend to use, or its environmental impacts, claiming their process contains proprietary information.

"EER's secrecy is troubling to Utahns. While they say their chemicals are non-toxic, it is strong enough to dissolve the pavement from underneath our feet. The state has not done enough to make sure that this stuff, whatever it is, does not wind up in our water," said Joro Walker, Utah Office Director for WRA.

EER plans to create large tailings piles by dumping residual sand from their processing operation back into the pits from which it would excavate the tar sands. The waste sand will still be wet with chemicals that can leach into groundwater. The numerous springs and seeps in the PR Spring mine location indicate that groundwater is close to the surface and the chance of contamination is high.

Additionally, stormwater permits necessary to operate the mine are not satisfactory for making sure that rain washing off of tailings piles will prevent the chemicals used from entering rivers and streams that flow to the Colorado River. WRA plans to challenge the state's decision to forgo a robust permitting process.

“Any Utahn who wants to build a home must go through a more rigorous permitting process than an oil company hoping to use powerful chemicals to dissolve rocks,” said Living Rivers Conservation Director John Weisheit, “If homeowners are held to high standards of permitting for public safety, then oil companies should not get free passes from state regulators.”

WRA and Living Rivers are requesting that the Board revisit the Division’s decision to sidestep important water quality protections. Without disclosure, there is no proof that this secret, experimental process is truly benign or that there are adequate safeguards to prevent toxic chemicals from leaching into groundwater.

“The permitting process is moving forward in the absence of enough facts to know the impacts on human health and the environment,” said Walker. “EER and the state of Utah need to stop hiding behind a wall of secrecy and prove that they can protect our water from these solvents. Proprietary information should never trump public health and public accountability, but that’s what’s happening with this permit.”

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Western Resource Advocates is a regional non-profit conservation organization dedicated to protecting the West’s land, air and water. Visit us online at www.westernresourceadvocates.org.

Living Rivers/Colorado Riverkeeper empowers a movement to instill a new ethic of achieving ecological restoration, balanced with meeting human needs. We work to:

- *RESTORE inundated river canyons, wetlands and the delta*
- *REPEAL antiquated laws which represent the river's death sentence*
- *REDUCE water and energy use and their impacts on the river*
 - *RECRUIT constituents to aid in reviving the Colorado*

On the web: <http://www.livingrivers.org/index.cfm>