

July 9 Whatcom County Council Comments

The Oil companies in our County have had a free pass to do whatever they wanted for 60 years. Luckily there haven't been any major disasters in our refineries, but there have been in Skagit County. Still our County has the right and authority to protect the public safety of it's residents and the environment we live in. These actions should not be viewed as a threat to jobs or any of the current operations at the existing refineries.

Since the federal government approved the export of unrefined fossil fuels in 2015, the US has become the world's leading supplier, displacing Saudi Arabia and Russia. Canada's recent purchase of the Trans Mountain Pipeline includes ownership of the 69 mile Puget Sound Pipeline that runs through our county now. They envision that spur as another outlet for their toxic tar sand bitumen and will probably try to expand it.

So the prospect of turning Cherry Point primarily into a trans-shipment terminal for Canadian products as well as the very volatile Bakken Crude oil, "fracked" gas, and propane is very real. This would substantially increase the risk to our towns, farmland and waterways. And there would be no value-added by local workers thus reducing the need for many of the high-paying jobs that the refining operations currently provide. That's why the Trans-shipment ban in the new code amendment should be a no-brainer for everyone who lives in Whatcom County.

But to enforce this ban the County must establish oversight provisions for "Change of Use" such as the expansion of storage tanks and piers that should trigger new conditional use permits and Environmental Impact Reviews. The County can also establish Conditional Use Permits for upgrading old units with new technology to insure that these changes don't just increase production capacity but reduce pollution while reducing water and energy usage too.

The County Board has been talking about this for three years now. It's time to act, and do the right thing for the all the current and future residents of our wonderful place to live. Thank you for your time.

Jack McBride
11 Bogey Lane
Bellingham, WA 98229
360-922-7570
jack@mcbridephotographics.com

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