

# OIL TRAINS

## *Risking Community and Environmental Health*

### What are “Oil Trains”?

Oil Trains are the unit trains assembled to transport crude oil by rail. These unit trains can span a mile in length with 70 to 120 tank cars that together, can carry more than one million gallons of crude oil. Transporting crude oil by rail began to grow as Bakken crude production expanded from fracking in North Dakota and Montana between 2009 and 2013. By April 2013, 75 percent of crude oil produced in North Dakota was being moved by rail and only 17 percent by pipeline. (1)

### Why are oil trains a threat to your community?

There are several reasons why oil trains are hazardous to communities and the environment. Oil trains carry Bakken crude oil, a lightweight, sweet (low sulfur) crude which, compared to other crude oils, is highly volatile and flammable. In the event of a tank failure or rupture, the oil can ignite, explode, and form a fireball. Crude oil fires can produce health-threatening air pollution from the release of soot, aerosols, and gases. (2) Oil spilled into waterbodies are difficult to remediate, and releases carcinogens, including benzene, into the water, harming wildlife and polluting the waterbody, which is especially dangerous if it's used as a drinking water source. (3) Oil trains travel across the nation to refineries, like Philadelphia Energy Solutions, and cross waterbodies, highways, bridges, and through cities and towns to deliver the oil. This directly places communities in harm's way in the event of an oil train disaster, with more than 3.9 million Pennsylvanians living within a half mile of an oil trains route (possible evacuation zone). (4)

### Who regulates oil trains?

The Federal Department of Transportation, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) have authority to regulate oil trains and administer rules to enhance safety.

### Which rail routes do oil trains travel on?

Oil trains travel along the 95,000-mile network of US Class I railroads. In Pennsylvania, approximately 700 miles of track (5) are used by Norfolk Southern and CSX delivers crude oil to Philadelphia Energy Solutions for refining. Maps of rail lines used can be found on Northern Suffolk and CSX's websites. A detailed map of crude transported by rail routes and possible evacuation zones can also be found on FracTracker's website at <https://www.fracktracker.org/2015/03/danger-around-bend/>.

## How often are oil trains moving through Pennsylvania?

Oil train traffic rose quickly from 2012-2015, delivering about 70 to 80 trains carrying more than one million gallons each week. (6) Today, growth in pipeline activities combined with a shift in favor of imported oil, has led to a sharp decline in crude by rail shipments, which is good news. In the first quarter of 2017, 59,643 carloads of crude oil were transported by rail in the U.S., down 29 percent from delivered shipments during the first quarter of 2016. (7) In Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Energy Solutions has halted crude by rail shipments since June 2017, after a few months of receiving one unit train per day (70,000 barrels of crude oil). (8) This may indicate a shift away from crude by rail shipments in favor of pipeline deliveries, since the Dakota Access Pipeline began interstate crude oil delivery on May 14. (9) But while oil train use is in decline, it remains a serious threat to the environment in our region today.

## Why are oil trains an issue right now? What can I do to help?

Although oil train traffic is on the decline, the Trump Administration is moving the United States toward more aggressive fossil fuel extraction activities. All modes of transporting crude oil could be on the table in the near future. The Trump Administration and Congress are working hard to rollback regulations and strip agencies of their rulemaking power. One bill in particular, the deceptively-titled Regulatory Accountability Act (RAA), will cripple public health and environmental protections if passed into law.

The Regulatory Accountability Act will effectively tie the hands of agencies during the process of creating rules to protect public health and safety, and respond to emergencies. Until May 2015, the Department of Transportation (DOT) Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) authorized the use of outdated and easily-punctured DOT-111 tank cars, which, when combined with a network of worn-out railway, resulted in the rise of oil train derailments, spills, and explosions. DOT issued a rule that enhanced risk-based standards for many oil-carrying tanks and protocols for trains transporting flammable materials. (10) If the RAA is passed into law, rules like this one would be blocked or weakened from the obstacles created by the bill. Some of these include a cost-benefit analysis of counterproposals from industry, as well as trial-like hearings where agencies bear the burden of proof. (11)

Help protect your community by contacting your senators to tell them to say NO to the Regulatory Accountability Act and to urge them to commit to helping Pennsylvania transition away from dirty fossil fuels and hazardous transport methods like oil trains.

For more information contact Zakia Elliott, SE Regional Outreach Coordinator by email at [Elliott@pennfuture.org](mailto:Elliott@pennfuture.org) or by phone at (215) 545-9692.

---

(1) <http://www.genscape.com/blog/tank-car-lease-rates-plummet-weak-crude-rail-demand-low-crude-prices#sthash.bDKHEizc.dpuf>

(2) <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dep/cleanup/laws/bakken-crude-oil-spills-response-options-and-environmental-impacts.pdf>

(3) <http://www.delawariverkeeper.org/sites/default/files/resources/Comments/DRN%20comment%20DOT%20Oil%20Train%20Rulemaking%209.24.pdf>

(4) [https://drive.google.com/file/d/oB\\_IWgC5PxSUcUllYOTJnN3p3YUU/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/oB_IWgC5PxSUcUllYOTJnN3p3YUU/view)

(5) [http://www.puc.state.pa.us/consumer\\_info/transportation/rail\\_safety.aspx](http://www.puc.state.pa.us/consumer_info/transportation/rail_safety.aspx)

(6) <https://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/2015/05/01/feds-issue-new-oil-train-safety-rules/>

(7) <https://www.aar.org/BackgroundPapers/US%20Rail%20Crude%20Oil%20Traffic.pdf>

(8) <http://www.cnbc.com/2017/04/19/reuters-america-e-coast-refiner-shuns-bakken-delivery-as-dakota-access-pipeline-starts.html>

(9) <http://www.cnbc.com/2017/04/19/reuters-america-e-coast-refiner-shuns-bakken-delivery-as-dakota-access-pipeline-starts.html>

(10) <https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/final-rule-on-safe-rail-transport-of-flammable-liquids>

(11) <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/rules-at-risk-from-raa-5-16-2017.pdf>