



Testimony on Safety (oil trains) before Philadelphia City Council
Committee on the Environment
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Thank you for supporting the important oil train resolution passed unanimously by City Council last week. There are several next steps that are key to achieve safety and public health protections from the dangerous and dirty oil trains that snake through the City every day in addition to the immediate ban of all tank cars in use today to transport Bakken crude.

Federal intervention is needed to require that domestic crude oil be reclassified to reflect its high dissolved gas content, volatility, and corrosive properties. Many experts question the use of non-pressure, general purpose tank cars for this cargo at all and federal regulations that treat the oil at the extraction point before transport by rail or by pipeline are being considered (North Dakota has recently adopted some treatment regulations but they do not go far enough to make the material safe for transport).

Here in Philadelphia, more can be done as well. For instance, Philadelphia Energy Solutions is the largest single customer of Bakken crude in the nation, operates the largest crude by rail yard in the United States and has the largest refinery complex on the Eastern Seaboard. The City shouldn't issue any more permits and they should advise PADEP not to issue permits that would allow expansion at the PES or Monroe refineries or the rail yards before an overhaul of the currently aging infrastructure is accomplished to make the bridges, elevated roadways, and rail tracks that carry the 2 to 3 oil trains that course through the City's neighborhoods every day meet the highest safety specifications. An "inspection blitz" (like the one ordered last year by New York Governor Cuomo) of all rail components and an analysis to assess the adequacy of maintenance, repair, and operational workers should be performed at the direction of the City and/or state.

Philadelphia asked the railway operators to improve their operations in its oil train resolution but more should be called for. CSX and Norfolk Southern should step up like the head of the Federal Railway Administration recently told rail operators they should, voluntarily making operational changes and footing the bill for repairs and emergency response training.

Changes that could be made today by the operators and the refineries that would protect the City and the neighborhoods and work places that now are exposed to unacceptable risk and day to day pollution from the oil trains include: Speed should be limited to below 8 miles per hour, which is the rate that DOT111s puncture when derailed (punctures cause explosions and virtually uncontrollable fires); double brakes and brake signaling systems should be immediately installed in all cars; the hundred or more cars in "unit trains" should be limited to a maximum of 20 cars to reduce the magnitude of a catastrophic derailment. Finally, communities should be able to decide if they want to accept this train traffic – right now, people don't even know about the trains, what they are carrying, the safety risks and the emergency response should there be a disaster. We look forward to the community forums the City's resolutions tasks Philadelphia's OEM with but because of all the recent fiery train derailments, the time has come for the City to seek keeping these trains out altogether, before we have "the accident waiting to happen".

Federal and state officials are calling for similar safety changes. U.S. Senator Bob Casey was in Philadelphia on Monday pushing his bill to train first responders. Pennsylvania's Department of Transportation Acting Secretary told the Legislature the state needs to identify grant opportunities to help pay for specialty equipment like flame retardant – many rural communities don't even have the foam that is needed to contain the exceptionally hot fires that erupt when a train car explodes.

Delaware Riverkeeper Network asks this Committee to consider an even bolder but highly reasonable course of action. Considering the dangers of domestic crude oil and the documented very limited production longevity of the North Dakota fracked shale oil wells, a more secure and safe strategy would to leave this oil in the ground where it can be stored for the future. Today the more viable, economical sustainable and environmentally protective path is to leave fossil fuels behind and instead develop a green economy for Philadelphia based on renewable, energy-efficient energy sources that will support healthy communities and a thriving biodiverse environment here where the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers come together, bringing us so many environmental and economic benefits if we protect them from degradation and pollution.