Chicago Greens

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 Eco-Group Says Railroads Doing Little to

 Eliminate Danger of Tank Car Trains

Environmental activists concerned about trains of explosive and flammable crude oil passing through Chicago, were critical of safety measures to avoid accidents announced by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe  (BNSF) railroad, saying it does little to eliminate the hazard. Other railroads like CSX and Union Pacific have not announced any changes regarding their operations or safety measures.

The BNSF stated that it would reduce the speed of these trains to 35 (from an earlier 40 miles per hour) in cities with a population of over 100,000. Along with this, the company is increasing the number of inspections of the railroad tracks near waterways. The train wheels will also be inspected more frequently to avoid accidents.

In the past five weeks, there have been 5 oil train derailments resulting in large fireballs. Oil production has increased due to fracking technology. With pipelines at capacity the boom has led a 4,000 percent increase in the volume of crude oil that travels by rail. An estimated 25 million Americans live within the “blast zone” the activists say are created by these trains. The federal Department of Transportation (DOT) has predicted 10 derailments a year

While one of the most effective things to do is introduce a speed limit for trains which use two (2) types of tank cars to carry crude oil, there are different opinions on what this should be. The older cars, which still make up the majority of the crude by rail fleet, have been shown to explode at seven miles an hour. The newer, supposedly safer cars, which have been involved in each one of these accidents recently, have been shown to explode at 15 miles an hour.

Charles Paidock of the Chicago Greens, stated that: “We have identified about 27 risk factors that need to be looked at in developing standards for transporting crude oil, and safety measures such as installing new brake systems, alternative routes, and avoiding environmentally sensitive areas altogether. I do not perceive what BNSF is adopting as a serious recognition of or response to the problem of exploding tank car trains.”

Chicago handles one-fourth of the nation's freight rail traffic, with as many as 40 crude oil trains, each carrying a million or more gallons of the flammable liquid, rolling through the area weekly.

The DOT, which has said that the growing movement of oil trains posed an “imminent hazard” to the public, has nevertheless been slow to toughen up tank-car standards.