Chicago Greens

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Carloads Increase by 4,500%

Eco-Groups Concerned Over High Risks of

Crude Oil Tank Car Trains

The Chicago Greens, and affiliated environmental organizations, are concerned over high risk locations in the Chicago area for accidents involving railroad trains with crude oil tank cars. The rail lines built more than a century ago were not configured for the volumes and types of freight being carried currently. Chicago handles one-fourth of the nation's freight rail traffic, each day handling 37,500 railcars, over 7,400 miles of track. The groups are particularly concerned each of the tank cars can spend up to 10 hours or longer traversing the Chicago region, and switched at any one of the 21 yards. The Chicago area rail network is considered to soon reach saturation.

As many as 40 crude oil trains, each carrying a million or more gallons of the flammable liquid involved in several recent fiery derailments, roll through the Chicago area weekly.

In addition, the trains have to pass through one of the 35 busy junctions, where railroads cross one another, or go through highway crossings identified as the most prone to accidents in Illinois.

While the Federal Railroad Administration is implementing new tank car design regulations, and operating rules, it is felt that Chicago area poses unique problems which these actions will not solve. A meeting is being planned to develop additional, regional safety proposals.

Charles Paidock, of the Chicago Greens, said: “We contacting elected officials at the federal, state and local levels, and appropriate agencies, in the hope that suitable safety measures and operating rules are adopted. I do not think either the rail or petroleum industries are responsive to public safety concerns, and want years to retrofit their cars to more stringent standards. Plus the railroads are wanting to have only one engineer operate each train.”

Dr. Lora Chamberlain of Frack Free Illinois said, "With many dangerous Bakken Oil unit trains coming into and through Chicago and the suburbs every day, I do not think the average resident knows the danger that lurks on these rails - explosive ‘bomb trains’ may be passing by your home or child's school. The Federal Railroad Administration is not doing enough - they should be mandating that the oil producers de-gasify their oil so that it is less flammable. And we should be re-routing these oil trains well around the Chicagoland area. Explosive oil and people/traffic/commuter trains do not and should not mix!"

Catherine Walbridge added: “I am especially concerned because I read that the number of carloads of crude oil has spiked nearly 4,500 percent between 2008 and last year - from 9,500 carloads to 435,560, with many of these headed through Illinois.”