

RWU to Co-Sponsor Educational Conferences on the West Coast

Railroad Workers United (RWU) will co-sponsor two conferences, one in the Bay Area and one in the Pacific Northwest in late winter-early spring. Entitled *"The Future of Railroads: Safety, Workers, Community & the Environment"*, Railroad Workers United is partnering with the Backbone Campaign and other labor, citizens and environmental groups to organize these innovative and cutting edge conferences.

In recent months, public attention has focused on the railroad in a way that it has not been for decades. In the wake of Lac Megantic and other derailments, combined with resulting fires and explosions, the public is alarmed about oil trains and the movement of trains in general through their communities. Environmental activists are up-in-arms about the amounts of fossil fuels moving by rail. Farmers and other shippers are concerned about the congestion that has occurred in recent months, due in part to the oil boom. All of this attention gives railroad workers a golden opportunity to educate the general public about the railroad, its inherent efficiencies, its value to society, and its potential. It also gives the workforce an invaluable opportunity to inform non-railroad workers about the situation that we face on the job every day.

The public generally has no idea what goes on daily on America's railroads. At this conference, we plan to talk about crew fatigue, single employee train crews, excessively long and heavy trains, draconian availability policies, short staffing, limited time off work and other issues. These issues are of concern not just to railroaders, but are of concern to environmentalists, the community at large and society in general. Non-railroaders in attendance at the conference will come away with a deeper understanding of our workplace and a greater appreciation of the issues facing us. They will without a doubt, become valuable allies in our future fights with the

rail carriers. And railroaders will gain a better insight into the environmental movement, environmental politics, and how to better forge alliances and work with public citizens' groups.

Tentative workshops and discussion topics at both conferences include but are not limited to:

- Single employee train crews and the safety hazards they pose for workers, communities and the environment.
- Excessively long and heavy trains and their inherent problems and dangers.
- Crew fatigue and the need for adequate time off, proper train line-ups, advance call times, call windows and all the rest to ensure well-rested, alert and safe train crews.
- Building worker-to-worker alliances along the supply chain of all transport workers.
- "Railroading for the General Public 101".
- "Environmental Politics for Railroad Workers 101"
- Ensuring safe track, bridges and rolling stock.
- The "Solutionary Rail" campaign and a vision for what a sustainable railroad of the future could look like.
- Fighting for safety across various industrial sectors and together with affected communities.
- A history of labor-community-environmental alliances and how to build one that revolves around the railroad industry.

The conferences are planned for March 14th in the Bay Area (Richmond, CA) and a week later—March 21st—in the Pacific Northwest (Olympia, WA). Specific locations will be announced later in January. For more information, check the RWU website <http://railroadworkersunited.org/> or "Like Us" on Facebook. To get involved in organizing either conference and/or to attend, contact Gifford Hartman at 415-410-9299; giffordhartman@gmail.com in the Bay Area or Jen Wallis at wallisjeanette@gmail.com in the Pacific Northwest.