

Latest Derailment Creates New Citizen Opposition to Oil Train Shipments

The derailment and explosion of a unit oil train outside of Mosier, OR has fueled opposition from environmental, tribal and citizens groups to further shipments of oil by rail. On June 3rd, 14 cars of a 96-car train derailed and caught fire in the scenic Columbia River Gorge, resulting in evacuations along with possible water and other environmental contamination.

The wreck is the latest in a series of highly visible derailments and/or explosions of oil trains in the U.S. over the last three years or so. Because of its proximity to a residential area as well as one of great scenic beauty and environmental sensitivity, it has heightened alarm over the movement of oil by rail. Citizens are in fear that it is only a question of time before a similar mishap results in loss of life and/or devastation of the local ecology.

As result, two weeks later, more than 100 people formed a human blockade on the tracks in Vancouver, WA. As part of what their press release called and attempt to “highlight risks associated with fossil fuel extraction, transportation and consumption.” In addition, other actions by other citizens’ coalitions targeting oil trains are ongoing around the country.

The cause of the wreck was determined to be “track failure”, the same reason behind a number of other recent derailments, including the fiery crash of a CSX train in Lynchburg, VA in April of 2014.

Rail is the safest, most fuel efficient and environmentally sensitive way to move freight and passengers. However, this is of little consolation to trackside communities that face the nightmarish prospect of another Lac Megantic type of derailment and explosion. Their concern is very real. With the railroads in full-blown cost-cutting mode now as a result of the downturn in traffic (see above article), people’s fears are accentuated. We must not allow the rail carriers’ push for single employee train crews, their maintenance cost-cutting, their move to even longer and heavier trains on longer crew districts, nor their trimming of pools and extra boards and the resultant “turning and burning” of train crews to endanger the lives and safety of both railroad workers and communities. Railroad Workers United continues to attempt to work with citizens and environmental groups, despite our differences, to enhance rail safety for workers and communities alike (see article on Page 3).