



Moratorium Sought On Local Bakken Oil Rail Transport



Photo: Police helicopter view of Lac-Mégantic, the day of the derailment

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by Editorial Staff

In the wake of two explosive derailments in the past two weeks involving crude oil from the Bakken region of North Dakota and western Canada, the Center for Biological Diversity is calling for a moratorium on rail transport of the oil in the Northeast.

Trains travel to Albany and the Hudson River Valley from the north as well as west-east rail lines that border the Adirondack region, bearing the same incendiary crude that has been involved in a total of five major rail accidents since summer 2013.

The problem of derailments first garnered widespread public attention in summer 2013, when a runaway train transporting 72 tankers of Bakken crude careened into the Quebec town of Lac-Mégantic, killing 47 people and incinerating the downtown.

On Dec. 30 a train transporting Bakken crude oil derailed and exploded near Casselton, N.D., prompting an evacuation of residents within five miles of the accident. Earlier this week a 122-car train carrying Bakken crude derailed and caught fire near Plaster Rock in New Brunswick, prompting evacuation of the town.

“Every day trains with tens of thousands of barrels of highly flammable Bakken crude are rumbling through small towns in upstate New York, endangering people, rivers, wetlands and wildlife,” Mollie Matteson, a senior scientist at the Center’s Northeast office in Richmond, Vermont, said in a statement issued to the press. “In just two years Albany has become a major nexus for Bakken oil shipment in the Northeast. We can’t afford to wait for another train wreck before a thorough review provides assurances that these shipments are safe.”

The accident at Lac-Mégantic was among the worst train accidents in North American history. A 72-tanker train carrying Bakken crude careened into town in the middle of the night, killing 47 people, incinerating the downtown, and spilling roughly 1.6 million gallons of crude oil, some of which reached the lake that serves as the focal point for this once-popular tourist town.

“A massive increase in rail shipment of oil through the Northeast has occurred with no public scrutiny to ensure our safety or protect the environment,” said Matteson. “A moratorium is needed until a careful review can ensure safety measures are in place to avoid another tragic accident.”

The Center for Biological Diversity sent a letter January 9th to members of the New York and Vermont congressional delegations, and to the leadership of rail safety subcommittees in Congress, urging federal intervention.