

# In California, people of color are dangerously close to oil train disasters

By [Sara Bernard](#), Grist on 1 Jul 2015 <http://grist.org/news/in-california-people-of-color-are-dangerously-close-to-oil-train-disasters/>

There's been a lot of consternation [over oil trains](#) recently. In the U.S. and Canada, almost two dozen crude-carrying trains have [derailed in the past two years](#) — exploding into giant balls of fire in some cases, and in others, [killing people](#). And while the Obama administration released new oil train safety [rules](#) on May 1, they remained so lax and full of holes that some environmental groups [immediately sued](#).

In California, as more and more crude arrives [by rail](#), more people will find themselves within the “blast zone,” a one-mile evacuation area recommended by the U.S. Department of Transportation. As a [report](#) released Tuesday finds, California's “blast zone” lands squarely on the shoulders of people of color.

ForestEthics and Communities for a Better Environment

The report, co-produced by [Communities for a Better Environment](#) and [ForestEthics](#), shows that 80 percent of California residents within the blast zone live in “environmental justice communities.” The report defines environmental justice communities as those with high numbers of low-income, racial minority, or non-English speaking households ([check out the report](#) for the full specs).

In Los Angeles, 75 percent of residents living entirely within the blast zone are Hispanic or Latino (compared to 44 percent outside of the blast zone). Just 10 percent are white. In Oakland, 91 percent of residents in the blast zone are people of color. In Fremont and San Bernardino, a whopping 100 percent of blast zone neighborhoods qualify as environmental justice communities. Yikes.

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This is the first report of its kind to so explicitly link race to the oil train debate. It also makes lofty recommendations that any oil train activist can get behind, such as an immediate moratorium on all oil-by-rail imports in California and “immediate action to root out systemic and institutional environmental discrimination and racism.” Hear, hear.