



Bomb Trains: the Above-Ground Explosive Crude-Oil Pipeline on Rails

WNY Drilling Defense
&
Environmental Justice Task Force
WNY Peace Center, Inc.

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Below-ground oil-carrying pipelines generate lots of controversy. Witness the 10 year fight over the proposed expansion of the XL pipeline. Thankfully, President Obama nixed it last year.

While posing exactly the same risks to the environment, infrastructure, life & limb as below-ground oil-carrying pipelines, their above-ground oil-carrying pipeline cousins oddly generate zero controversy for five reasons.

- The above ground pipelines hide in plain sight: we grew up with trains and their various assortments of oddly shaped freight and tanker cars. Seeing more tanker cars than usual doesn't elicit concern: "hey, they look like the ones I saw when I was 10 years old!".
- There are zero public hearings or notices about the intention to carry pipeline-equivalent-volumes of crude oil by rail. While the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) regulates different aspects of below ground pipelines, both federal agencies have zero say about above ground pipelines carrying pipeline equivalent volumes of crude oil. Conclusion: the public is not informed about the risks involved.
- Prior to 2012, the railroads never carried pipeline-equivalent volumes of crude oil by rail. Historically, there was no need for the feds to regulate such crude oil transport.
- Much of the oil pipeline infrastructure was built after the 1960's in a setting of rising environmental concern. Hence the regulatory agencies regulating them arose around same time. By contrast, build-out of the railroad infrastructure began in the 1830's. Railway right-of-ways are roughly 180 years old, and new track can replace old track along established right-of-ways without agency review. Railroad companies can carry dangerous products without federal/state agency/public review.
- Crude oil does not explode. This is very well known....until July 6, 2013:

Lac-Megantic, Quebec

- A Bakken crude oil carrying train derailed while traveling at high speed in downtown Lac-Megantic Quebec
- The oil exploded killing 47 people, destroying 30 buildings and destroying the infrastructure supporting 115 businesses

Since Lac-Megantic, Bakken oil from hydrofracked North Dakota is now known to be highly explosive due to the butane, propane and methane present in the oil.

Bakken crude oil carrying trains are now called “bomb trains” and they travel through Buffalo NY and Upstate NY on their journey to Albany and points south (NJ and PA).

These oil trains pose a serious risk to our lives, infrastructure and underground supplies of drinking water. The region between Batavia NY and Schenectady NY, underneath CSX-owned tracks, is essentially one big aquifer. Should one or two Bakken crude oil carrying tanker cars derail and leak, it would render that aquifer useless for large distances from the train wreck.

The Great Flats Aquifer in Schenectady NY supplies drinking water for 150,000 people and the bomb trains travel for at least 10 miles directly over that aquifer. The DEC says the soils over that aquifer are very permeable to water (allowing re-charge of the aquifer). The soils are likely permeable to oil too. A leak from just one tanker car would render the Great Flats Aquifer useless for a long period of time.

The bomb trains travel next to the Mohawk River for 60 miles between Utica and Schenectady NY. A leak from one tanker car would kill a large fraction of the aquatic life in the river for a distance of 8 miles (as it did in the river next to Lac-Megantic Quebec).

Hydrocarbon pollution of groundwater from just one tanker car is permanent condition on the time scale for many decades. In December 1970 near LeRoy NY, two tanker cars derailed and spilled 30,000 gallons of trichloroethylene (TCE) a very common industrial, cancer-causing solvent. The plume of TCE now occupies an area larger than the Buffalo International Airport, 46 years later. The concentration of TCE in that plume is still greater than EPA limits for TCE in drinking water.

On the evening of December 6 2015, WNY Drilling Defense members counted 533 tanker cars carrying Bakken Crude oil traveling eastbound through Hamburg NY.

What You Can Do

0. Get on the bus from Buffalo and attend the “Break Free from Fossil Fuel” event in Albany, May 14th. This will be huge! (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/keep-it-in-the-ground-rally-tickets-24831087451>)

1. Attend the Josh Fox event at Starpoint High School, Tuesday, May 3 at 6:30 PM, where he will show us his new film (<https://www.facebook.com/events/1596385547355293/>)

2. Please sign our petition to Gov Cuomo asking him to stop the bomb trains in NY State. He has the power to do so under DEC law.

3. Join WNY Drilling Defense by emailing Frank Gage (snowbird1967@roadrunner.com) or Charley Bowman (RenewableEnergy@wnypeace.org)

4. Attend our monthly meetings: first Thursday of each month, 6 PM, Crane Library, 633 Elmwood Ave, Buffalo NY.