

PROPOSED RESOLUTION: Hazardous Substances Near Schools

WHEREAS, volumes of crude oil shipments by rail have risen rapidly in the 2010s relative to previous decades; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) remains committed to the transport of flammable substances by all modes of transportation, including the nation's 140,000 mile freight railroad network that is often located near public areas such as neighborhoods and schools and endangers citizens by placing them unknowingly within blast and evacuations zones; and

WHEREAS, the rail transportation of large volumes of petroleum products and other hazardous substances presents unique safety risks; and

WHEREAS, incidents such as the derailment in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, Canada when a unit train carrying crude oil from the Bakken region of North Dakota killed 47 unsuspecting people and decimated most of the village, and many others, have resulted in significant and devastating loss of life and destruction of property and the environment; and

WHEREAS, the safe and successful management of any hazardous substance incident is based on effective pre-incident planning, preparedness, training, exercises, and implementation of an incident management system; and

WHEREAS, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), in consultation with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), issued a final rule to improve oil spill response readiness and mitigate effects of rail accidents and incidents involving petroleum oil and high-hazard flammable trains (HHFTs); and

WHEREAS, the intent of comprehensive oil spill response plans (COSRPs) requirements is to ensure that local emergency responders and emergency response planning officials have access to sufficient personnel, resources, and information regarding the movement of HHFTs in their jurisdictions in order to adequately plan and prepare for emergency events; and

WHEREAS, government concern regarding the dissemination of "sensitive security information" should not surpass employees' right to safe working conditions and parents' right to information necessary when making decisions related to securing the safety of their child; and

WHEREAS, in order for school personnel to manage a hazardous substance incident safely and successfully, they too must take part in effective pre-incident planning, preparedness, training, exercises, and implementation of an incident management system. Consider: • An explosion resulting from the transport of Bakken crude oil can decimate everything within a 1-mile (radius) blast zone and comes with up to a 3-mile (radius) evacuation zone. • Trains carrying crude oil from the Bakken oil fields of North Dakota to east coast refineries contain hydrogen sulfide, a colorless, flammable, and extremely hazardous gas. Hydrogen sulfide ignites at lower temperatures and is explosive when mixed with air. • Exposure to more than 50 parts of hydrogen sulfide per million milligrams of liquid triggers shock, convulsions, and coma; pushed beyond 700 ppm, and death is likely within two breaths. Enbridge discovered Bakken crude containing 1,200 parts per million (ppm) of the gas. Exposure to hydrogen sulfide, no matter how seemingly insignificant, can lead to internal organ failure, infertility, immune system suppression, blood disorders, cancer, birth defects, and genetic mutations. • Even without derailing, spilling or exploding, doctors have warned that proximity to oil trains poses a serious health risk with increasing rates in cancer, asthma, and cardiovascular disease through exposure to particulate matter released as emissions from trains.

RESOLVED, that Railroad Workers United (RWU) will partner with state and federal governments, calling for full transparency in the dissemination of information pertaining to safety threats related to the rail transport of hazardous substances, including petroleum oil, to the parents of students attending, and faculty employed by, schools at risk of being negatively impacted; and

be it further RESOLVED, that the RWU will provide other impacted unions, including but not limited to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), with information about the potential negative impacts of transporting hazardous substances such as petroleum oil by rail; and

be it further RESOLVED, that the RWU will partner with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and State Emergency Response Commissions (SERCs) to ensure the implementation of comprehensive oil spill response plans specific to incidents involving the rail transport of hazardous substances, including petroleum oil and HHFTs; and

be it further RESOLVED, that RWU will call on FEMA and SERCS to implement an Incident Command System as a mandatory process to channel communication during the release or explosion of a hazardous substance resulting from a rail incident, and that this system shall govern the command, control, and coordination of a comprehensive emergency response plan's implementation during the release or explosion of a hazardous substance, specific to the needs of each school within a Local Emergency Planning Committee's region; and

be it further RESOLVED, that the RWU will call on federal, state, and local legislators to sponsor and support legislation that includes school personnel in comprehensive emergency response plans specific to the transport of hazardous substances, so they are able to effectively manage incidents involving the rail transport of these substances at schools where children are present who could be negatively impacted; and

be it further RESOLVED, that RWU will call on federal, state, and local legislators to sponsor and support legislation mandating the implementation of emergency response drills specific to incidents involving the rail transport of hazardous substances, including petroleum oil and HHFTs, at schools where children are present who could be negatively impacted; and

be it further RESOLVED, that RWU will support and lobby for federal and state legislation efforts aimed at keeping school children safe, such as IL HB 1542

<https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/fulltext.asp?DocName=10200HB1542ham001&GA=102&SessionId=110&DocTypeId=HB&LegID=130219&DocNum=1542&GAID=16&SpecSess=&Session=>