



PHOTO TRASK BEDORTHA

tioning someone by the railroad tracks or by asking the rail companies. Hoover and Griffin says not only do the placards indicate what the car carries, if the card is missing or flipped over then the tank is empty.

Hoover says if oil or other substances are stored in town, it's reported. But if the train cars are on a siding, meaning they are ready to roll but remain stationary for a while, as some tank cars are in west Eugene's Trainsong Park, that's not reported. Railroads report annually what they have transported, he says, but ODOT has refused to release that information. If a spill occurs and a hazmat team is deployed, Hoover says they contain the leaked material and stop the leak from continuing, "and that's their sole role." Once the spill is contained, owners and operators of facilities or property contaminated by hazardous substances are responsible, under Oregon law, for cleanup.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration does not list Oregon as having any current petroleum refineries. Washington has five and California has 16 operating refineries. According to Brett VandenHeuvel of Columbia Riverkeeper, crude oil is coming from the Bakken oil fields of North Dakota. He says Canadian tar sands oil is a possibility as well — while U.S. crude must be refined before export through American ports, Canadian oil can be exported as crude. Port of Coos Bay spokesperson Elise Hamner says the port doesn't export oil, though it's still controversially pursuing a liquefied natural gas export terminal, which would be accompanied by a natural gas pipeline.

VandenHeuvel worries about those fossil-fuel trains spilling into the Columbia River, affecting water and other resources. "These oil trains are carrying massive volumes of oil," he says. "And a spill could be devastating to the Columbia River. Imagine a train carrying 10 of those [tank cars] derailling in a salmon nursery." Oil spills along other waterways that supply drinking water or chemical leaks into groundwater would also be devastating.

When asked about oil-by-rail and other chemicals, Union Pacific, which has the north-south tracks along the I-5 corridor, said, "Railroads do not release information about specific routes or details about particular commodities/shipments because of safety and security concerns."

Union Pacific spokesperson Aaron Hunt says that the bag Griffin filmed on one train car passing through downtown Eugene is vinyl and "is an additional security measure hydrochloric acid shippers are taking to make sure no one tampers with their cars while in transportation." Other cars observed carrying hydrochloric acid did not have such bags.

SAFETY

Paul Orum, an independent consultant who recently testified before Congress after the West, Texas, fertilizer explosion on behalf of the Coalition to Prevent Chemical Disasters, says that "local emergency responders often do not really have complete information from railroads about what is shipped through and do not have full public knowledge about these hazards."

He gives the example of chlorine gas, which is a toxic inhalation hazard: "Most communities have very little idea of what passes through on the rails and the potential harm of a fully loaded 90-ton rail car of chlorine, which can have downwind worst-case impacts for 14 to 25 miles." He adds, "The vulnerability zones are often much larger and far beyond anything that local emergency responders could effectively handle."

Griffin documented a number of tank cars of chlorine on Lane County railways in the past three weeks. In January 2005, a train in Graniteville, S.C., derailed and a tank car of chlorine was breached, releasing chlorine gas. The train engineer and eight other people died of chlorine gas inhalation, about 500 people went to the hospital with respiratory difficulties and more than 5,000 were evacuated.

Orum says railroads are "common carriers," required to carry the hazardous materials, but not allowed to adequately factor into the shipping price the cost of liability insurance. He says that while water and wastewater treatment plants have historically been the largest shippers of chlorine, it's commercial industry that uses chlorine and other dangerous chemicals shipped by rail. He and DeFazio both say that our regulatory system needs to demand that companies use fewer toxic and volatile chemicals.

Videoing the trains in Eugene, Griffin documented chlorine, which is an inhalation hazard; molten phenol which is flammable and toxic; methyl diphenyl diisocyanate, which the EPA says is a skin and inhalation sensitizer and can cause asthma, lung damage and, in severe cases, fatal reactions; explosive non-odorized propane and corrosive hydrochloric acid, in addition to the crude oil.

Industry demands the chemicals. The shippers, or more precisely the investors, own the tank cars, and the railways have to transport them. In addition to using less hazardous chemicals, DeFazio says the tank cars themselves could be made safer. ODOT cited the 9/11 security issues when it refused to answer EW's questions about what tank cars are be-

ing used on Oregon's railroads, but according to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), 69 percent of the tank cars in use are the soda-can shaped DOT 111 cars that exploded in the Lac-Mégantic disaster. NTSB says the steel cars are thin and puncture in accidents. The ends of the cars can tear, and valves and top fittings can break in rollovers.

DeFazio says the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration was "looking at its bellybutton lint" when it comes to DOT 111 cars. Though the issues with the cars have been known since a 1991 study, it wasn't until recently that the problem was addressed — cars built after October 2011 that ship ethanol and crude oil now have thicker shells and shields on the ends of the tanks to prevent punctures. The problem is that older cars do not have to be retrofitted. According to the NTSB the cars have a long service life, and commingling the older cars with newer ones negates the safety benefits. DeFazio says the federal government could mandate the cars be upgraded in the 2014 rail reauthorization bill, but he expects industry and Republicans to fight that.

Griffin's video shows rusty tank cars filled with chemicals, leaks that have dripped from railcars rolling by and how easy it is for someone to leap onto a train. The footage shows these cars passing businesses, houses, people, mountain lakes and forests.

Lisa Arkin of Beyond Toxics says the dangerous and leaking tank cars are both an environmental and a social injustice: "Our local railroads not only transport but park tankers in neighborhoods," she says, "which serves to illustrate the monstrously common problem of disproportional impacts — the tankers are old and they do leak." She says neighborhoods including Whiteaker, River Road, Trainsong and Bethel, which are historically lower-income, face the most hazards.

Griffin says if there is one thing he has learned from train hopping, it's to take an inventory of what you really need versus what you simply want. Having too much stuff will get you killed hopping a train, he says. His sleeping bag almost got him dragged under a railcar's wheels; noisy utensils got him caught by the "bull dog" (train security). He learned to dress in layers and eat fruit from Dumpsters instead.

Griffin says a train carrying hydrochloric acid through town is a byproduct of consumer commodities. He says the question to ask ourselves, if we want any type of healthy future, is: Do we really need those commodities?

Go to eugeneweekly.com for the tank car video by PictureEugene