

# OIL TRAIN CRASHES, BURNS & LEAKS INTO THE COLUMBIA RIVER



FIRE AND SMOKE FROM A BURNING OIL TRAIN RISE HIGH ABOVE THE COLUMBIA RIVER

PHOTO: MICHAEL O'LEARY

**B**ack in 2013, *EW* did a public records request to find out how much oil was rolling through Eugene on railroad tanker cars. The request was swiftly denied by Oregon's Attorney General's office citing a post 9/11 security exemption. After all, if terrorists were to find out how much explosive Bakken crude was rolling through town, what would they do with that knowledge?

As the citizens of Mosier found out on Friday, July 3, oil trains don't need terrorists to blow them up. Sixteen oil tanker cars derailed near the small town of Mosier, along the Columbia River near Hood River, and four of them caught fire. A huge plume of smoke was visible from across the river. Mosier School was evacuated, as were 60 to 70 homes. Residents had to boil water and were told not to flush toilets or run water down drains for several days. A sheen of oil subsequently appeared in the river.

According to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, "Officials estimate that 42,000 gallons of crude escaped from four rail cars. Recovery of oil includes 10,000 gallons from the wastewater system, and the remaining 32,000 gallons were either burned off and vaporized, captured by booms in the Columbia River, or absorbed by soil, with an undetermined amount remaining in wastewater lines."

Michael O'Leary of Northwest Steelheaders is one of the conservationists who has long predicted that the upswing in coal and oil trains along the Columbia could spell disaster for the salmon and the river's water. "I was shocked they did not have absorbent boom in place on the Columbia for more than six hours after the derailment," O'Leary tells *EW*.

O'Leary arrived at the scene of the derailment within hours after the accident. He says, "It's a safe assumption that rolling huge volumes of volatile Bakken oil on accident-prone railways is going to cause a catastrophe on the Columbia." He asks, "How many more communities will be evacuated? How many more boil water/no flush orders will be issued? How long until lives are directly lost?"

Union Pacific, which runs the derailed train, confirmed that it carried Bakken crude. The oil train that crashed and exploded in Lac-Mégantic Canada, killing 47 people, also carried Bakken crude from the oil fields of North Dakota.

"Seeing that rolling fireball taller than the treetops on Friday was truly shocking," O'Leary says of the Mosier incident.

Oregon's Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, Governor Kate Brown and Representatives Earl Blumenauer and Suzanne Bonamici have called for a temporary halt to oil train traffic in Columbia River Gorge, saying they will "also be pushing for the Department of Transportation to take a hard look at alternative routes for oil and hazardous material trains that would put fewer Oregonians at risk of a dangerous crash in their backyards."

Most oil is carried in DOT 111 tank cars. The train that derailed in Mosier had cars that had been upgraded to a higher CPC 1232 standard, but the think tank Sightline Institute says those cars are no safer.

Congressman Peter DeFazio issued a statement of his own, saying, "For years, I have worked to increase rail tank car safety standards and to help emergency responders prepare for rail accidents involving crude-by-rail." He says that last year "Congress passed legislation that requires railroads to provide advanced notification and information on high-hazard flammable trains to states." The legislation also included provisions he championed — requiring "thermal-protection for rail tank cars and require railroads to retrofit, replace and phase out 40,000 additional rail tank cars to prevent catastrophic spills in accidents."

Union Pacific spokeswoman Raquel Espinoza says preliminary findings indicate "a fastener that connects the rail tie with the rail could've contributed to the cause, but we are still looking at different pieces of evidence."

O'Leary says, "According to Union Pacific they inspected this line very frequently — more than was legally required. Which just goes to show that despite the railroad's assurances, accidents do happen. And the problem with oil train accidents is that they start at catastrophic and get worse from there."

It is still unclear how much oil and Bakken crude rolls through Eugene on tracks running next to Fifth Street Market and through the Whiteaker. Railroads have to notify states of shipments over one million gallons of oil, but not shipments less than that. ■

## POLLUTION UPDATE

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) fined **Pacific Recycling, Inc.** \$12,374 last week for Clean Water Act violations at its Eugene metal recycling facility (located at 3300 Cross Street). Pacific Recycling has a history of environmental violations (and associated fines) at this facility (see [goo.gl/kkGAOD](http://goo.gl/kkGAOD)), and this most recent fine is for failure to monitor its stormwater discharges during the first half of 2015.

Doug Quirke/Oregon Clean Water Action Project

## LANE COUNTY AREA SPRAY SCHEDULE

Oregon Department of Transportation is spraying roadsides. Call 503-986-3010 to talk with a vegetation management coordinator or call 1-888-996-8080 for recent herbicide application information. Hwys. 36, 101 and 126 were recently sprayed.

Weyerhaeuser Company, 746-2511, plans to hire Amlin Vegetation Management LLC, 503-837-0599, to spray Weyerhaeuser and Weyer/Plum roadsides northwest of Triangle Lake and on the eastern slopes of the coast range with aminopyralid, metsulfuron methyl, glyphosate, imazapyr, triclopyr Conquer and/or MSO Concentrate targeting broadleaf, herbaceous and/or noxious weed vegetation. See ODF notification 2016-781-06878, call Robin Biesecker at 541-935-2283 with questions.

Compiled by Gary Hale, *Forestland Dwellers*: 342-8332, [forestlanddwellers.org](http://forestlanddwellers.org)



- **Good Food Easy/Sweetwater Farm will be opening a farm stand** at the Creswell Bakery at 182 S. 2nd Street in Creswell beginning 10 am to 2 pm Saturday, June 11, then ongoing each Saturday throughout the summer. Erica Trappe of Good Food Easy says, "We are a major supplier of produce to the bakery, so now customers will be able to purchase the same fresh local ingredients they enjoy on the bakery menu."

- The downtown Eugene Public Library at 10th and Olive is hosting **Build Your Business to Sell for Big Bucks** at 6 pm Thursday, June 9. In a free talk, expert Frank Plaisted will teach you "how how to incorporate an exit strategy into business planning from the start, so you can cash in at the end." And at 6 pm June 16, the library is putting on workshop on **Email Marketing: Standout Subject Lines**. Workshop leader Carol Infranca is "an award-winning print and broadcast journalist, business and government marketing and public relations specialist, and an authorized local expert for Constant Contact." More info at 541-682-5450 or [eugene-or.gov/library](http://eugene-or.gov/library).

## CORRECTIONS/ CLARIFICATIONS

In our massive Summer Guide we listed the July 17 Habitat for Humanity Blues Build, music by Curtis Salgado and more event as free. This benefit July 17 is actually \$25 in advance, \$30 day of event. Find out more at [bluesbuild.org](http://bluesbuild.org) or Junction City/Harrisburg/Monroe Habitat for Humanity at 998-9548.