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Contacts:

Tracy Carluccio, Delaware Riverkeeper Network, 215-369-1188 x 104

tracy@delawareriverkeeper.org

Mary Donahue, Clean Water Action, 215-545-0250 x 206 mdonahue@cleanwater.org

Matt Walker, Clean Air Council, 215-567-4004 x121 mwalker@cleanair.org

Adam Garber, PennEnvironment, (215) 732-5897 agarber@pennenvironment.org

Ann Dixon, Protecting Our Waters, anndixon4523@gmail.com

Catastrophic Oil Train Derailment in West Virginia is an Accident Waiting to Happen in Philadelphia

Organizations call on City Council and regulators to step up to protect Philadelphia residents NOW

Philadelphia, PA – A CSX train carrying Bakken crude oil from North Dakota careened off the tracks along the Kanawha River at Adena Village and Boomer, West Virginia upstream of Charleston, during a snow storm yesterday. A powerful fireball explosion led to evacuation of residents within a half mile, according to news reports.

The train was carrying more than 100 tank cars of highly volatile crude oil when 12 to 14 cars derailed, several caught fire, and at least one car fell into the river. The river was set afire and one house was burned, residents fleeing for their lives in frigid temperatures. It is reported that one resident has been hospitalized, several hundred people are in community shelters and a state of emergency has been declared by Governor Earl Ray Tomblin. The fires are still burning today and water intakes on the river have been closed due to oil in the river.

On January 31, in south Philadelphia, 11 tank cars carrying crude oil derailed in the CSX rail yard along the Delaware River next to Rt. 95. There has been a veritable black out of any information about how and why the derailment occurred and any safety or environmental impacts. There has been no follow up reporting about what occurred at the rail yard, how the tank cars were righted, what type of tank cars were involved and the level of risk for neighboring areas and the river if the trains had spilled, punctured or caught fire. This is disturbing because the public is shut out of the most basic information about events that could have very big effects on them.

On January 20th last year, the City dodged a bullet when seven cars from a CSX train derailed; one of the tank cars carrying crude oil dangled over the river from the Schuylkill Arsenal Bridge for days. There have been no safety improvements by CSX

since this accidents; in fact, the volume of dangerous crude being carried through Philadelphia and the region has increased, increasing risk and opportunities for pollution.

These near disasters have left many Philadelphia residents asking not IF a catastrophe like the West Virginia calamity will happen here but WHEN it will happen. Two to three mile-long trains carrying domestic crude roll through Philadelphia neighborhoods every day to the Philadelphia Energy Solutions (PES) refinery, which is expanding its operations. Today PES is the largest single customer of Bakken crude in the nation. There are hundreds of thousands of people within the blast zone of the train tracks in Philadelphia. <http://explosive-crude-by-rail.org/>

"West Virginia's derailment is a horrifying reminder of what could happen in Philadelphia. The possibility of an explosive oil train derailment threatens our health and safety every day. We need action from City Council and the Office of Emergency Management and we need to know what is being done to prevent a catastrophe," said Mary Donahue, Program Organizer, Clean Water Action.

"CSX is the operator responsible for both derailments here in Philadelphia and for this horrific disaster in West Virginia and many more across the nation. Crude by rail accidents are increasing as fast as the oil is being fracked and loaded into these substandard tank cars on old rickety train tracks and railroad bridges. Where is City Council and emergency management when we need them to protect the City from these unacceptable risks? We are sitting ducks here in Philly, waiting for a catastrophe just like West Virginia's and no one in authority seems to care," said Tracy Carluccio, Deputy Director, Delaware Riverkeeper Network.

"I live in University City near train tracks that run along the [Schuylkill](#) and near the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. If a train explodes here, the river, homes (including my own) and hospital could be destroyed. Oil trains must be banned," says resident Ann Dixon, member of Protecting Our Waters.

"It was extremely fortunate that no one was seriously hurt by the derailment and explosion in West Virginia," said Matt Walker, Community Outreach Director with Clean Air Council." If an explosion were to happen in Philadelphia, with our high population density and higher number of older oil trains, it could have catastrophic impacts to residents, businesses, universities, and hospitals. While the federal government plans to slowly phase out older tank cars, this doesn't address the inherent volatility of Bakken crude oil, which can cause explosions even in newer tank cars like those in the West Virginia accident," added Walker.

"Oil trains are an outrageous risk to our communities. These trains are barreling through Pennsylvania putting the lives of hundreds of thousands at risk and it's time our

elected officials ended this threat before a disaster like West Virginia happens here,” said, Adam Garber, PennEnvironment.

A coalition of organizations has requested City Council to adopt a resolution banning DOT 111s and taking other actions to protect the City from oil train pollution and danger. A letter submitted to City Council and the draft resolution can be found here: <http://bit.ly/1A3pzDp>

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