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Waterkeepers Chesapeake Decries Another Crude Oil Train Explosion

Disaster on the Kanawha River in West Virginia is another example of a rail system not able to handle highly volatile Bakken crude oil transport.

February 18, 2015 – Washington, DC -- On Monday afternoon, a train hauling Bakken crude oil derailed along the Kanawha River in Fayette County, West Virginia. Twenty of the cars caught fire and a home was destroyed. There are reports that cars continued to burn yesterday and an unknown volume of oil has leaked into the Kanawha River. [West Virginia Headwaters Waterkeeper Angie Rosser](#) is responding to the disaster, with support from Waterkeeper Alliance.

“Our thoughts are with the residents of Fayette County and the first responders as they deal with this explosion and toxic oil spill. While one home was damaged, many people evacuated and drinking water supplies impacted, thankfully no one was seriously injured,” said Betsy Nicholas, Executive Director of Waterkeepers Chesapeake. “Incidents like this one are yet another warning that our entire region is at risk. Our rail systems, suffering from years of delayed maintenance, were not made for this highly volatile cargo.”

According to CSX, the train consisted of two locomotives and 107 rail cars and was traveling from North Dakota to Yorktown, VA, the same rail line that runs through Lynchburg, Virginia. All of the oil cars were the CPC 1232 models, the presumably upgraded tanker cars that are “safer” than the outdated, inadequate DOT-111 cars. These newer CPC 1232 also derailed and exploded on the [James River at Lynchburg in April 2014](#).

“This dangerous event could have happened on the James River again,” said [Pat Calvert, Upper James Riverkeeper](#). “This is the same rail line that runs along hundreds of miles of the James River and through many population centers in Virginia. This is an alarming reminder that our river and communities continue to be at risk every day without stronger safety requirements for Bakken crude oil transport. Increased inspections of the lines carrying this highly volatile material are vital to the safety of Virginians and the James River – a key drinking water supply for millions.”

Anacostia Riverkeeper
Assateague Coastkeeper
Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper
Chester Riverkeeper
Choptank Riverkeeper
Gunpowder Riverkeeper

Lower James Riverkeeper
Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper
Miles-Wye Riverkeeper
Potomac Riverkeeper
Sassafras Riverkeeper
Severn Riverkeeper

Shenandoah Riverkeeper
South Riverkeeper
Upper James Riverkeeper
Upper Potomac Riverkeeper
Virginia Eastern Shorekeeper
West Rhode Riverkeeper



The number of tanker cars traveling through towns and cities and along rivers has increased exponentially due to the Bakken oil fracking boom in North Dakota. The number of tanker cars on U.S. rails jumped from 9,500 carloads in 2008 to 415,000 in 2013, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). The Congressional Research Service reported that 258,541 carloads of crude traveled over the nation's railroads in the first half of 2014. Bakken crude oil is more volatile and flammable than other crude oils, as demonstrated by explosion of the CPC 1232 model tank cars.

We are very concerned that access to information about routes and cargo continue to be kept from the public and that the DOT's final rules which were promised in January are delayed until May. Rail safety experts say that in many circumstances, all local responders would be able to do in the event of a large tank car fire is simply let it burn. But that approach would involve tremendous damage in the many densely populated areas in our region through which crude oil is now moving by rail.

The threats of derailments in cities like Baltimore are real. Two years ago [a train was hit at a crossing in Baltimore County and exploded](#). Several years prior a train carrying hazardous chemicals derailed underground within the City, exploded, and [burned for days at extremely high temperatures](#). Days later spilled chemicals from the [derailment caused an explosion within the City's stormwater system](#), launching manhole covers into the air. During the same April 2014 rain storm associated with the Lynchburg crude oil derailment and fire, [a retaining wall collapsed and fell onto CSX train tracks](#) in Baltimore, just feet from where the trains run underneath a public park and an elementary school.

“The rail companies are fighting the states to keep the information from the public. Meanwhile, these crude oil train derailments continue unabated,” said Nicholas. “All indications are that the U.S. DOT will allow transport of Bakken crude with these flawed railcars for the foreseeable future. Our Waterkeepers will continue to fight for stronger protections and the public's right to know.”

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Waterkeepers Chesapeake is a coalition of eighteen independent programs working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable. The coalition amplifies the voices of each Waterkeeper and mobilizes our organizations to fight pollution and champion clean water. The members of Waterkeepers Chesapeake work locally, using grassroots action and advocacy to protect their communities and their waters, as well as regionally to expand each Waterkeeper's capacity for on the water, citizen-based enforcement of environmental laws in the Chesapeake region. Waterkeepers Chesapeake is a member of Waterkeeper Alliance. www.waterkeeperschesapeake.org

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Additional resources: Maps of rail systems and crude oil routes and incidents:

<http://bit.ly/1vUx6EN> (Monday's derailment)

<http://riveratrisk.org> (James River)

www.Blast-Zone.org

<http://projects.propublica.org/graphics/oil-trains>

<http://www.fractracker.org/2014/08/rail-accidents/>