

Railroads move large volumes of hazardous materials through Louisville

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The train that derailed early Monday in southwest Louisville, spilling the cancer-causing chemical 1,3-butadiene is just one of many that snake through Louisville each day, carrying vast quantities of hazardous materials by homes, shopping centers, parks and schools.

City officials on Monday did not have precise numbers, but said that because of Louisville's manufacturing base, including the Rubbertown complex of chemical plants, and its role as a rail hub, the quantities are huge. "It's astronomical," said Doug Hamilton, director of the Louisville Metro Emergency Management Agency.

In the aftermath of the 9-11 terrorist attacks, some cities sought to regulate the flow of hazardous materials by rail and reroute the most dangerous chemicals around population centers. Louisville officials looked into that possibility, but because the federal government regulates railroads, cities have been unable to enforce new routes.

"If there was any way I could legislate that these (shipments) couldn't come through neighborhoods, I'd do that," said Metro Councilwoman Mary C. Woolridge, whose Third District is adjacent to the Rubbertown chemical plants along the Ohio River. "But there is nothing we can do at all, except to maybe try to work with the railroads."

She said her constituents are worried not only about derailments, but the safety of chemicals that are temporarily parked along rail routes and in rail yards.

Paducah & Louisville Railway President Tom Garrett said that it's "not really practical to avoid significant cities because you have industries in those cities that use chemicals on a daily basis. They supply a lot of products that go into consumer goods and [automobiles](#), and they employ a lot of people."