

# Rail risky way to move oil, too

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**A freight train rumbles through the frost in refinery row in Edmonton. CN has a lengthy record of derailments that make moving oil by rail just as much of a concern as moving oil by pipeline to the West Coast, a reader says.**

Photograph by: John Lucas, *The Journal*, File, Edmonton Journal

Re: "Railways argue against pipeline; CN, CP say they can move oil to coast without the risk, controversy," *The Journal*, Nov. 30.

I find it frightening that CN and CP argue they can move oil to our West Coast without the risks associated with pipelines.

As someone who has researched railways in detail, I want to make readers aware of the recent record of railways, particularly CN, regarding derailments, spills and other environmental impacts.

This record is not pretty.

Who can forget the disaster in August 2005, when 43 Canadian National Railway cars derailed at Wabamun Lake west of Edmonton, spilling 1.3 million litres of heavy bunker C fuel oil that quickly spread across the lake?

Four days later, CN revealed that 700,000 litres of Imperial Pole Treating Oil had also spilled into the lake. This hazardous chemical contained naphthalene and other polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons that are highly toxic and linked to cancer. In May 2009, CN pleaded guilty to three charges related to the oil spill.

What about CN's three derailments in the Scotford Rail Yard next to Fort Saskatchewan? The most recent one on Nov. 21 involved 14 tanker and freight cars falling off the tracks. Only three months earlier (Aug. 18) 43 CN tank cars fell off the tracks in the same yard. And, in April 2005, hydrogen peroxide leaked out of an overturned car when eight CN tank cars derailed in the Scotford Yard.

There is a string of additional CN derailments that would be far too exhaustive to include here.

In August 2007, a fire started after a train derailed and collided with another train in the CN yard near Prince George, B.C. Gasoline leaked into the Fraser River.

Nine CN Rail cars flipped off the tracks north of Squamish, B.C., in 2005, spilling 40,000 litres of toxic caustic soda into the Cheakamus River. The chemical compound stripped the river of oxygen, killing about 500,000 trout, salmon and other fish. B.C. Environment staff said the spill decimated the river's fish population.

In December 1999, the CN Ultratrain, a petroleum products unit train linking the Saint-Romuald oil refinery with a petroleum depot in Montreal, exploded when it derailed and collided with a freight train, killing two people. The train derailed at a broken rail caused by a defective weld, causing the Transportation Safety Board of Canada to call into question CN's quality assurance program for rail welds.

Deraillments are of particular concern to Canadians living next to railways, considering that 12 per cent of all rail traffic carries dangerous goods, according to the Railway Association of Canada.

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada again criticized CN in a report released Oct. 27. According to the agency, nine of 10 recent derailments across Canada involve CN trains, and can be blamed on improper and unsafe marshalling practices since 2000.

In a report released Aug. 25, the Transportation Safety Board of Canada said disasters like the Wabamun train wreck five years ago could happen again because "tens of thousands" of defective railway cars might be riding Canada's railroads.

Residents in southwest Strathcona County, only one kilometre east of Edmonton, are very worried about CN's safety record.

CN, Imperial Oil and Cando Contracting have partnered to build an industrial rail yard right next to their homes, two protected wildlife conservation areas and numerous ponds and creeks. This rail yard, now completed, is for the storage of 225 petroleum tank cars

owned by Imperial Oil. Residents whose homes are less than 200 metres from the rail yard are worried that a derailment would result in a major spill of toxic petroleum products into nearby dugouts and natural watercourses, including Mill Creek, which flows into the North Saskatchewan River.

Construction of the rail yard did not include any spill containment measures or designs.

Should we be worried about the railway industry proposing that they can move oil to the West Coast with fewer risks than pipelines? Most certainly. Based on the Transportation Safety Board of Canada's stern and repeated warnings about derailments, spills and other rail accidents, we should not for one minute think railways are any safer than pipelines when it comes to moving petroleum products.

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