

Schumer: Freight train tank cars a major danger

Published: Aug. 9, 2013 at 1:30 AM
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KINGSTON, N.Y., Aug. 9 (UPI) -- A tank-car type that carries crude oil is unsafe for this use and must be phased out, upgraded or limited to non-flammable liquids, a U.S. senator said.

DOT-111 tank cars, the most common freight railroad tank cars in the United States, "have an explosive potential in the worst possible way," Sen. [Chuck Schumer](#), D-N.Y., told reporters at a CSX Corp. rail yard with DOT-111s as a backdrop.

Yet these old, weak and structurally "flawed" tank cars continue to be widely used for carrying crude oil, ethanol, propane and other volatile, flammable liquids, he said.

Schumer called on the U.S. Department of Transportation to require freight railroads operating in the United States to either stop using the DOT-111 cars, update them to new-car safety standards or mandate they carry only non-flammable liquids such as corn oil or canola oil.

He said he raised these concerns in a meeting with Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx last week.

In his news conference, Schumer cited the unattended 72-car freight train carrying crude oil in Quebec July 6 that caught fire, rolled 8 miles down a hill and crashed into the tiny Canadian town of Lac-Megantic, triggering an enormous explosion that killed 47 people and destroyed the town center.

He said that accident, while extraordinary, was not unique.

He cited a freight train carrying more than 2 million gallons of ethanol that derailed and sparked a massive fire in Cherry Valley, Ill., in 2009, killing a Rockford, Ill., woman waiting at a nearby railroad crossing. Thirteen of the train's 15 derailed tank cars were ripped open when the train ran off its tracks.

He pointed to a 2006 ethanol train derailment and fire in New Brighton, Pa. Twenty of 23 of that train's derailed cars ruptured and released ethanol.

"What ties all three of these things together? DOT-111 cars," Schumer said.

"The experts have looked at it and said that it's not safe, that it's prone to tearing and splitting, should there be a derailment," he said.

The National Transportation Safety Board "found that the heads and shells of DOT-111 cars can almost always be expected to breach at derailments," he said. "But NTSB's warnings have fallen on deaf ears."

Some 1,400 tank cars a day carry crude oil across the United States, up from just 31 cars a day in 2009, Schumer said. Each DOT-111 car can carry nearly 1,100 barrels of oil.

Last year, 663 rail cars carrying hazardous materials in the United States derailed or were damaged, a 38 percent drop from 2003's 1,072 figure, the DOT's Federal Railroad Administration said.

The FRA enforces railroad safety regulations and seeks ways of improving railroad safety.

Schumer said derailments don't happen frequently, but when they do, they can be devastating.

A DOT spokeswoman told United Press International the department takes Schumer's concerns "very seriously."

"Safety is our No. 1 priority, and 2012 was the safest year in railroading history," the spokeswoman said in an email Thursday.

The DOT's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, which seeks to minimize risks of dangerous-goods transportation, "has been considering amendments, including those that address the DOT Specification 111 tank cars, as well as operating practices that would enhance rail safety and clarify regulations," the email to UPI said.

DOT considerations are now under review of the White House Office of Management and Budget, she said.

The seven major freight carriers operating in the United States had no immediate comment.

Those carriers are Canadian National Railway Co., parent of the Illinois Central Railroad and Wisconsin Central Ltd.; BNSF Railway Co.; Canadian Pacific Railway Ltd., parent of Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern Railroad Corp.; CSX Corp.; Kansas City Southern Railway Co.; Norfolk Southern Corp.; and Union Pacific Corp.