

2/8/18

To whom it may concern, regarding House Bill 4004:
By Arlene Burns, Mayor of Mosier, OR

I am the mayor of Mosier, which is now widely known as the town where the crude oil train derailed and caught fire. Mosier is the heart of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, the transition zone between rainforest and desert. We are known for "nuclear" winds, which has made "The Gorge" a world-class windsurfing and kiting destination. We have survived previous calamities, fires and floods in our recent history, but we all recognize how lucky we are to have survived the June 3rd derailment and fire. Lucky because it was a rare, windless day; Lucky because it was in early summer verses later when the earth is as dry as a tinder-box; Lucky that our wastewater treatment plant miraculously captured the brunt of the spill, instead of the Columbia River ecosystem.

It was a big wake up call. Not only of what is traveling by rail through our front yard, but also how unprepared we really are to handle events of this magnitude. Most of the city limits (including the elementary and middle school) plus both directions of the freeway were in the mile-wide "impact zone", causing the freeway to be closed in both directions. This led to gridlock traffic, backed up for miles, which also made it very challenging for emergency responders.

There were many consequences from this event that left our children's nerves frayed and resulted in a major turnover in key community leadership positions. Since the derailment, we have had to replace our fire chief, school principal, city attorney, city manager, water-master and finance director. We know we dodged a bullet. It could have wiped us off the map.

We have come to realize that Oregon has the weakest laws on the west coast. We don't need to invent something from scratch, but we do need to get up to speed to make sure that our laws protect our citizens in ways that those in Washington and California already do. It's time to catch up!

Another thing that we have come to understand is that there are so many different types of oil, with different chemical compounds and volatilities, but there is only one classification for "oil" made before the problematic Bakken Crude was ever in our vocabulary.

We are not adequately protected from these highly volatile compounds by our current regulations. We now must also keep in mind the uncertainty of Federal Regulations which have been painstakingly created (regarding pneumatic brakes and upgrades to tanker cars) which are now being rolled back by the current administration. Even Robert Sumwalt, the Trump-appointed head of NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) recently expressed his concerns over the rollbacks.

We are at a poignant moment, and the policies you create are the framework for our priorities. It is time to ensure that our policies are paving the path to protect our communities and our ecosystem in reasonable ways. Especially in light of hotter and drier seasons, which, as happened in California last year, gave fires unimaginable fury.

Bottom line, it should not be that dangerous materials are transported through our State without adequate protection.

Mosier's accident can hopefully serve as a wake-up call to us all.

Please do all you can to implement safety measures that will enable us to be adequately prepared.

Arlene Burns
Mayor of Mosier