

From: [Theodora Tsongas](#)
To: [HVET Exhibits](#)
Subject: Comment on HB 2209
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Comments to House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

Subject: HB 2209

February 7, 2019

Good Afternoon Chair Evans, Vice-Chairs Lewis and Meek, Committee Members,

I am Dr. Theodora Tsongas, an environmental health scientist with over 40 years' experience evaluating the health and safety impacts of environmental contamination. I am a member of the Environmental Health Working Group of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, the American Public Health Association, and a community member of the Multnomah County Local Emergency Planning Committee.

I am here today to express my concerns about HB 2209 and to stress the need to amend it to include the same necessary concepts as HB 2858, to make it more effective in preventing disasters. It is my opinion that HB 2209 has not been thoughtfully conceived to protect the public. Any bill that addresses citizen concerns must take effective steps to protect our communities and waters, forests and farmlands from permanent loss through the next derailment or oil spill. We have learned from derailments, oil spills, devastating explosions and fires in other communities such as Lac- Megantic, Quebec; we had our wake-up call in Mosier. But, it was more than a wake-up call, causing

significant and long term damage to the mental and physical health of the community and its infrastructure and economy. The public health impacts included evacuation, school closure, hazardous air quality, loss of drinking water system, loss of sewer system, contamination of ground water and the Columbia River. The long-term impacts include mental trauma to children and residents, impacts of inhalation exposure to the smoke and particulates released by the explosion and fire, damage to feelings of a safe and secure home, economic near ruin of the city, loss of property values and income from tourism.

I live in Multnomah County, where 20% of the population lives, works and goes to school within the blast zone of oil trains. Multnomah County is only one of the many counties in the state that could be affected. What we value of life and property is at risk now all along the rail lines.

In order to be effective, HB 2209 must include Oregon DEQ review and approval of contingency plans; training for oil train-related spills; fees on railroads to improve oil spill response and to fund emergency preparedness; adequate insurance for railroads to cover worst-case oil train derailments and oil spills; and 24-hour notice to the state when oil trains are *en route*.

Railroads operating high hazard train routes must be responsible for the risks incurred by their activities. The costs to public health and well-being and the economic costs of derailments are too high; prevention is the best way to avoid those costs. An improved bill will provide incentives to the railroads to take more effective steps to eliminate derailments.

Thank you for considering my concerns.

Theodora Tsongas, PhD, MS