

## **Testimony to the House Committee on Energy and Environment On House Bill 4105**

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council strongly supports HB 4105 to protect Oregon's public lands, air, water, and wildlife from oil and gas production and transport.

Oil and natural gas (often called "fracked gas" when obtained through injection of liquids at high pressure), are fossil fuels that present numerous risks to Oregonians. When burned, they emit greenhouse gases that drive the current climate crisis. When combusted, they also emit numerous air toxics and pollutants, including but not limited to benzene (a carcinogen) and carbon monoxide (poisonous and deadly especially when it builds up indoors<sup>1</sup>). And just the fracking wastewater produced in the making of fracked gas can imperil vital groundwater reserves by releasing cancerous and radioactive toxins.

The risks associated with oil and gas are not limited to their use. The extraction, refining, and transport of gas and oil are extremely hazardous to Oregon's land, air, and water as well.

### **Safety Concerns**

According to Green America, between 2015 and 2017 there were 12 deaths and 10 injuries reported from natural gas pipelines in the US.<sup>2</sup> These pipeline explosions can cause millions of dollars in property damage and be expensive and dangerous for first responders. If crossing more remote, public lands, response time could also be delayed.

### **Water Impacts**

Locating pipelines for transport of gas can create significant impacts on Oregon waterways. Often times, this requires either trenching through rivers, streams, and tributaries or burrowing under water bodies. Trenching through rivers and streams will most certainly impact fish habitat and increase turbidity. The potential for water pollution from fracking to lay pipes under streams also carries a high risk. There have been many examples of fracking fluid escaping around the country and sullyng water.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.greenamerica.org/natural-gas-pipeline-and-infrastructure-explosions-nationwide>

## **Wildlife Impacts**

In addition, oil—whether crude or refined—when spilled into waterways or lands, creates enormous challenges for clean up. Oil spills that stay on the surface can be moved by wind and currents. When it comes into contact with birds and seabirds, mammals, salmon fisheries, or other aquatic life, it can seriously harm or kill these creatures.

## **Health and Environmental Impact of Spills**

Tar sands, or oil sands, are an expensive and dirty source of oil. It is a mixture of mostly sand, clay, water, and hydrocarbons (called Bitumen) whereby the bitumen must be extracted from the sand before it can be produced to gasoline.

Tar sands crude oil shipments have also steadily and quietly been increasing in Oregon without notice to our agencies.<sup>3</sup> There have been at least two documented cases whereby the Department of Environmental Quality was not given advance notice of oil-by-rail shipments coming through the state of Oregon.<sup>4</sup> Such oil-by-rail shipments pose not only a risk of toxic inhalation for workers and neighbors to the operations, but they also pose a risk of major spills, lack of adequate response and preparation, and risk to the first responders responding to the spills.

For example, on June 3, 2016, a Union Pacific unit train carrying almost 3 million gallons of crude oil derailed by the town of Mosier, spilled 42,000 gallons of oil, and caught fire, prompting an evacuation order for the town. Officials were unprepared, and it took 14 hours to extinguish the flames.<sup>5</sup> This put first responders at risk. Additionally, toxic smoke and ash contaminated the town of Mosier, the oil contaminated the town's groundwater supply,<sup>6</sup> and also spilled into the Columbia River Gorge during salmon migration.<sup>7</sup> All it took for this disaster to happen—was a bolt on the railroad tracks to break, for a train traveling 26-30 miles per hour.<sup>8</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Oil and gas development and transport are inherently risky, and the environmental and health impacts must be avoided and minimized. HB 4105 would steer our state away from using state-owned public lands for new major fossil fuel projects like train terminals, LNG terminals, and gas pipelines, and it would require facilities unloading or receiving oil or gas to provide advance notice to the Department of Transportation, as well as imposing penalties for safety violations. It is a common-sense and just solution to help prevent such catastrophes like the one in Mosier from occurring in the future.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.opb.org/news/article/tar-sands-crude-oil-trains-oregon-legislature/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*; <https://www.opb.org/news/article/northwest-state-officials-receive-little-informati/>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://gorgefriends.org/protect-the-gorge/mosier-oil-train-derailment.html>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.opb.org/news/series/oil-trains/mosier-groundwater-contaminated-oil-train-derailment/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.oregonlive.com/environment/2019/06/years-after-oil-trains-arrived-oregon-house-passes-spill-planning-bill.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/railroad-reveals-cause-of-fiery-oregon-oil-train-derailment/>.