

Oil Spill Plans from Railroads

The Issue

Washington State is becoming a western gateway for oil movement by rail. Federal standards for railroad oil spill plans are simply not adequate for Washington.

Federal rail plans aren't made available to responders or the public, leading to a lack of confidence in response capability. Federal thresholds for 'comprehensive' rail plans are set too high. As a result, most rail operators are only required to write a "basic" plan that does not have adequate details about responding to spills.

There is no process for an independent review of the federal plans - one that uses measurable standards for approval. The federal program does not include a requirement for drills with an independent review of the results. This means plans may not get regular updates that make them stronger over time.

Solution

The solution is to require rail operators carrying oil as cargo to develop state approved oil spill plans and participate in Washington drills.

This would apply to both unit trains and single oil cars that carry oil as cargo. Oil spill plans from rail operators will ensure response contracts exist and equipment is staged in critical locations throughout the state. It will ensure that spills are managed in the incident command system.

Proposal

Ecology proposes to amend the definition of 'facility' in state law so that rail is considered a facility along the entire rail corridor and not just when stopping and transferring oil at crude by rail facilities.

Rules would be written on the content of oil spill plans and the participation in drills. Funding is necessary for the development of this program in Washington.

WHY IT MATTERS

Contingency plans are developed to explore risk scenarios and prepare for eventualities in a crisis.

Planning for oil spill emergencies means that many response details large and small are well thought out ahead of time and approved by the State.

Transporting oil by trains represents a new and a relatively high risk to public safety and environmental protection.

Rail operators should invest in planning and in oil spill drills that test the strengths of plans, resulting in continual improvement. It also means that these plans are available for the public to see.

Oil transportation information:

ecy.wa.gov/programs/spills/OilMovement/index.htm.

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Ecology's Spills Website

ecy.wa.gov/programs/spills/spills.html

Special accommodations:

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How it benefits Washington

Ecology calculated that a major marine oil spill could cost Washington's economy \$10.8 billion and adversely affect up to 165,000 jobs due to disruptions to maritime shipping and public port activities, recreation and tourism, and injuries to state fish, shellfish, and wildlife resources.

Railroads would contribute to maintaining preparedness levels built up by other oil handlers in this state for decades. Railroads would fully participate in the Incident Command System when responding to oil spills. Plans that are reviewed and approved by the state, made available to the public, and tested in drills will reduce the damages from oil spills.

