

# RWU Resolution on Hazardous Substances Near Schools

**WHEREAS**, volumes of crude oil shipments have risen rapidly in recent years relative to previous decades; and

**WHEREAS**, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) remains committed to the transport of flammable liquids by all modes of transportation, including our nation's 140,000-mile freight railroad network, which is often located near residential areas, schools, and other public locations, endangering citizens by placing them unknowingly within blast and evacuations zones; and

**WHEREAS**, the rail transportation of large volumes of crude oil along other petroleum products and hazardous substances presents unique safety risks; and

**WHEREAS**, incidents such as the Lac-Mégantic derailment in Quebec, Canada, when a unit train carrying crude oil from the Bakken region of North Dakota killed 47 unsuspecting people and decimated most of the village, and many others have resulted in significant and devastating loss of life and the destruction of property and our environment; and

**WHEREAS**, the safe and successful management of any hazardous substance incident is based on effective pre-incident planning, preparedness, training, exercises, and implementation of an incident management system; and

**WHEREAS**, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), in consultation with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), issued a final rule to improve oil spill response readiness and mitigate effects of rail accidents and incidents involving petroleum oil and high-hazard flammable trains (HHFTs); and

**WHEREAS**, the intent of comprehensive oil spill response plan (COSRP) requirements is to ensure that local emergency responders and emergency response planning officials have access to sufficient information regarding the movement of HHFTs in their jurisdictions to adequately plan and prepare for emergency events; and

**WHEREAS**, government concern regarding the dissemination of "sensitive security information" should neither surpass a parent's right to information necessary when making decisions related to securing the safety of a child nor an employee's right to safe working conditions; and

**WHEREAS**, in order for school personnel to manage a hazardous substance incident safely and successfully, they too must take part in effective pre-incident planning, preparedness, training, exercises, and implementation of an incident management system. Consider:

- An explosion resulting from the transport of Bakken crude oil can decimate everything within a 1-mile (radius) blast zone and comes with up to a 3-mile (radius) evacuation zone.
- Trains carrying crude oil from the Bakken oil fields of North Dakota to east coast refineries contain hydrogen sulfide, a colorless, flammable, and extremely hazardous gas. Hydrogen sulfide ignites at lower temperatures and is explosive when mixed with air.
- Exposure to more than 50 parts of hydrogen sulfide per million milligrams of liquid triggers shock, convulsions, and coma; pushed beyond 700 ppm, death is likely within two breaths. Enbridge discovered Bakken crude containing 1,200 parts per million (ppm) of the gas. Exposure to hydrogen sulfide, no matter how seemingly insignificant, can lead to internal organ failure, infertility, immune system suppression, blood disorders, cancer, birth defects, and genetic mutations.
- In order to expand the U.S. energy industry to achieve "energy dominance," regulatory changes were signed allowing Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to move by rail. Putting LNG into rail cars and

moving it through highly populated communities presents a significant risk to the safety of the public and the environment, with the possibility of catastrophic consequences. The rail shipment of spent nuclear fuel, anhydrous ammonia, and chlorine gas also pose serious concerns for public safety.

- Even without derailing, spilling, or exploding, doctors have warned that proximity to oil trains gives rise to profound health risks with increasing rates in cancer, asthma, and cardiovascular disease through exposure to particulate matter released as emissions from trains.

**RESOLVED**, that Railroad Workers United (RWU) calls on appropriate governmental agencies for full transparency in the dissemination of information identifying safety threats related to the transport of hazardous substances, including petroleum oil and HHFTs, to parents of students attending, and faculty employed by, schools at risk of negative impact; and be it further

**RESOLVED**, that RWU calls on appropriate government agencies for full transparency in the dissemination of information identifying safety threats related to the transport of hazardous substances, including petroleum oil and HHFTs, to residents, businesses, and others at risk of negative impact; and be it further

**RESOLVED**, that RWU calls on appropriate government agencies to provide funding needed for State Emergency Response Commissions (SERCs) and Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs) to develop and implement comprehensive response plans specific to incidents involving the transport of hazardous substances, including petroleum oil and HHFTs; and be it further

**RESOLVED**, that RWU calls on legislators to sponsor and support legislation that includes school personnel in comprehensive emergency response plans, so they are able to effectively manage incidents involving hazardous substances, including petroleum oil and HHFTs, at schools where children are present who could be negatively impacted; and be it finally

**RESOLVED**, that RWU supports legislative efforts such as [IL HB 1542](#) that include school personnel in comprehensive response plans specific to the transport of hazardous substances, so they are able to effectively manage incidents at schools where children are present who could be negatively impacted.

**Adopted by the RWU Steering Committee 11/2/2022**