

DURBIN STATEMENT ON TRAIN DERAILMENT IN WESTERN ILLINOIS

[WASHINGTON, D.C.] - U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today made the following statement on the oil train derailment near Galena, Illinois.

“First and foremost - though the situation on the ground is far from over - I am extremely grateful that it appears no one has been hurt. I have spoken with federal, state and local agencies responding to the disaster and will continue to closely monitor developments.

“Nationally, the rising number of fiery train derailments across the country is unacceptable. The Administration should act now to finalize their rule to strengthen tank car standards.

“In the coming days, we need to look at not just the safety of the rail cars, but the safety of what is being put into those cars. There is mounting evidence that stricter standards are needed in the handling of Bakken crude which appears to be particularly volatile. We can’t wait. The safety of our communities depends on it.”

In August 2014, after pressure from Durbin and area mayors, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) took its most significant action to date by releasing a draft rule to handle the issue of tank car safety comprehensively. Shortly afterward, Durbin convened a meeting with mayors from the Chicago metropolitan area, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Administrator and the Surface Transportation Board (STB) Chairman to hear their concerns about rail safety and an increase in rail delays.

In Illinois, tank car weakness was exposed in two high profile derailments in Illinois when DOT-111s exploded after derailing. In 2009, one person was killed when a Canadian National (CN) train carrying ethanol derailed in Cherry Valley, Illinois. In 2011, 800 residents of Tiskilwa were evacuated from their homes after an ethanol train derailed and caused a massive explosion. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) found the weakness of these cars added to the severity of both explosions.

Recent derailments have caused similar explosive fires, including last month in West Virginia. The most severe occurred in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec in July 2013 when a train carrying crude oil derailed and exploded, wiping out dozens of buildings and killing 47 people. The Transportation Safety Board of Canada released a report on the incident a year later, citing inadequate government oversight as one of the causing factors.

Durbin helped secure several funding lines and policy changes in the fiscal year 2015 Senate Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill that will help address oil train safety. The bill includes funding for an increase of track inspections, more training for first responders, and calls on DOT to finalize their proposed rules quickly.

Durbin has also worked closely with area mayors on the issue of freight rail traffic and blocked rail crossings. He called for increased mitigation as part of CN's controversial purchase of the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railway (EJ&E). The deal was finalized in late 2008 and was placed under special STB oversight that expires early next year. In response to complaints from the communities along the EJ&E, Durbin has pushed the STB to ensure greater safety along the line. This push resulted in the STB's first ever fine against CN for under-reporting the number and duration of blocked rail-highway crossings. Several suburban communities in Illinois have contacted the STB with their concerns about increased rail traffic along the EJ&E. The Village of Barrington and City of Aurora in particular have been vigilant in promoting increased rail safety, especially for trains carrying crude oil and ethanol.