



# **Durbin, Duckworth: Plainfield tank car derailment a wake-up call for DOT**

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) today called on U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Elaine Chao to do more to prevent railroad tank car accidents like the one in Plainfield, Illinois on June 30, 2017, in which multiple rail cars on a Canadian National (CN) train carrying crude oil derailed, causing an estimated 45,000 gallons of oil to leak out of the tank cars.

“We are extremely grateful for the hard work of Plainfield’s first responders, who were able to contain the spill and prevent any injuries or deaths as a result of the incident,” the Senators wrote in a letter to Secretary Chao. “However, a derailment of this magnitude could have easily become a full-scale disaster. The federal government must make tank car safety a top priority, and DOT must do more to prevent these types of accidents from happening in the future.”

Without a quick response from first responders in Plainfield, Illinois, the recent accident could have caused an explosion or oil could have seeped into the DuPage River, which lies about 1,200 feet from the site of the accident. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the spill hasn’t impacted air quality and there is currently no threat to the public. The cause of the derailment has not yet been determined.

Durbin and Duckworth have long advocated for a comprehensive approach to safety when shipping crude oil by rail, including strengthening the tank cars, preventing derailments through greater inspections, adequately preparing communities following an incident, and addressing the volatility of crude oil.

In recent years, the federal government has taken a number of actions to mitigate the severity of tank car derailments, including phasing out older tank cars and requiring new brake systems, speed restrictions, and a requirement for railroads to inform local emergency managers about shipments of crude oil. Last year’s Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act required newer tank cars to be equipped with a thermal

blanket, forced DOT to issue a rule developing a comprehensive oil response plan, and closed a loophole that allowed shippers to continue using older, unsafe tank cars.

Crude oil production has increased in recent years and Illinois is uniquely impacted by the transportation of this hazardous material by rail, as the state is home to both the intersection of six Class I railroads and the second-largest rail network in the country. Data shows that about 40 crude oil trains run through the Chicago area every week. The recent incident in Plainfield, Illinois, is the fourth major tank car derailment in Illinois since 2009. Previous high-profile derailments in Cherry Valley, Tiskilwa, and Galena, Illinois, highlight the need for the federal government to be an engaged partner in protecting communities and the millions of Americans who live along rail lines from being victims of accidents with deadly consequences.

**Full text of the senators' letter is available below:**

**Dear Secretary Chao:**

We write to urge the Department of Transportation (DOT) to prioritize resources to prevent or reduce the scale of potentially catastrophic spills of hazardous materials transported by railroad tank cars. On June 30, a Canadian National (CN) freight train carrying crude oil derailed in Plainfield, Illinois. We are extremely grateful for the hard work of Plainfield's first responders, who were able to contain the spill and prevent any injuries or deaths as a result of the incident. However, a derailment of this magnitude could have easily become a full-scale disaster. The federal government must make tank car safety a top priority, and DOT must do more to prevent these types of accidents from happening in the future.

The United States has seen a sharp increase in crude oil production in recent years, and the State of Illinois is uniquely impacted by the transport of this hazardous material by rail. Illinois marks the intersection of six Class I railroads and is home to the second-largest rail network in the country. The recent incident in Plainfield is the fourth major tank car derailment in Illinois since 2009. Previous high-profile derailments in Cherry Valley, Tiskilwa, and Galena, Illinois, highlight the need for the federal government to be an engaged partner in protecting communities and the millions of Americans who live along rail lines. In many cases, these rail incidents have been caused by weakness of train cars and insufficient government oversight.

The federal government has in recent years taken a number of actions to mitigate the severity of tank car derailments. In May 2015, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) finalized a rule aimed at preventing these types of catastrophic spills. This rule included phasing out older tank cars and requiring new brake systems, speed restrictions, and railroads to inform local emergency managers

about shipments of crude oil. The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act built off of this rule. Actions taken in the FAST Act to enhance railroad tank car safety included requiring newer tank cars to be equipped with a thermal blanket, requiring DOT to issue a rule developing a comprehensive oil response plan, and closing a loophole that allowed shippers to continue using older, unsafe tank cars.

These are steps in the right direction, but the federal government can and should do more. With this in mind, we request a response to the following questions:

1. What is the Trump Administration doing to address the threat posed by tanker car derailments and hazardous material spills?
2. How is DOT implementing the requirements outlined in the FAST Act and enforcing PHMSA's rule to improve safety of transporting hazardous materials by railroad tank cars?
3. What future actions will the Administration take to prevent accidents like the one in Plainfield?