



Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

A Division of the Rail Conference—International Brotherhood of Teamsters

SAFETY TASK FORCE

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Mr. Richard A. Hipskind
National Transportation Safety Board
Investigator-in-Charge
223 East 650 North
Valparaiso, IN 46383

Dear Sir:

As the Investigator-in-Charge of the December 30, 2013 BNSF's train derailment in Casselton, ND (NTSB file # DCA-14-MR-004), you request input from the involved parties as to whether this investigation warrants a public hearing. In response, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen ("BLET") respectfully requests a public hearing. Our position on this response is to stimulate interest to the general public regarding, but not limited to, the topics covered.

First, the petroleum crude oil that BNSF train U-FYNHAY4-05 carried originated in North Dakota (Bakken region of North Dakota). This product tends to be very low-density or "light", meaning it contains more volatile compounds that may account for its explosive properties.

Secondly, the vessels used for transporting this product by rail (DOT-111 general purpose tank cars) have historically failed when involved in a derailment/collision, releasing their product into the atmosphere (most recently Lac-Megantic, Quebec and Aliceville, Alabama). Failures by these types of tank cars generate great concern to BLET, and to the general public. Moreover, BLET contends that the rail cars designated to transport crude oil should have more puncture resistant standards. At the least, these rail cars should have an increased head and shell thickness of at least one-half inch, and top fitting protections in place.

Petroleum crude oil is a volatile and extremely flammable liquid. According to the American Association of American Railroads ("AAR") Annual Report of Hazardous Materials Transported by Rail for 2012, the number of petroleum crude oil originations has increased by 327 percent between 2011 and 2012, and continues on an upward trend. BLET realizes there is an alarming increase in transporting crude oil by rail, as our members operate these trains daily across the United States, through the backyards of local communities, and large cities.

Transportation by rail concerns our membership greatly as we are physically placed in an ever-present danger due to the FRA's insufficient regulatory language regarding placement of "spacer" cars in unit trains such as the train sets listed above. Requiring only one non-hazardous rail car separation from a locomotive, instead of five as required manifest trains, places the train crews in unnecessary danger. Post-incident, the train crews are normally the first responders, and by allowing only a forty to ninety foot separation from a possible dangerous scenario, may greatly deter their response time and unnecessarily risk their lives. The general public needs to be aware of this issue, and demand that these hazardous materials are given the same consideration of separation as in a manifest train (at least two-hundred and fifty feet from a locomotive).

Our Organization hopes the NTSB is in concert with our concerns, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Daniel B. Kenner
BLET-STF Party Spokesman