



<sup>1</sup>New Jersey

**Work Environment Council**

Safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment

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## **Labor, environmental and community organizations join Senator Weinberg calling for oil train bill**

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Teaneck, New Jersey – Legislators and an alliance of concerned groups rallied to call for passage of legislation that would require transparency so the public would know about high hazard cargoes traveling through their communities. Rail carriers would be required to develop safety plans which would be submitted to the Department of Environmental Protection. First responders in communities along the routes would also be provided training.

In Paulsboro, New Jersey, a Conrail train derailed during the early morning hours in November 2012, one car ruptured releasing more than 20,000 gallons of vinyl chloride. In much of Paulsboro, residents had headaches, difficulty breathing, dizziness and nausea. Children walked to school through a cloud of vinyl chloride and 600 residents were evacuated. The estimated cost of the emergency response and remediation exceeded \$30 million dollars.<sup>1</sup>

Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg, Senator Bob Gordon and Senator Kip Bateman are sponsoring a bill that would require owners or operators of high hazard trains to make information available to the public regarding routes and volumes of cargoes. Importantly, the bill also requires the companies to provide evidence or financial responsibility to cover the substantial costs in the case of disaster. The bill is scheduled for a full Senate vote tomorrow, June 23.

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<sup>1</sup>National Transportation Safety Board Railroad Accident Report, Conrail Freight Train Derailment with Vinyl Chloride Release, Paulsboro, NJ, November 30, 2012. Page viii.

The New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC) and its partners on this issue applaud this legislative effort for transparency and emergency preparedness. They gathered with bill sponsors Senator Loretta Weinberg, Senator Bob Gordon and Assemblyman Timothy Eustace at the Benjamin Franklin Middle School in Teaneck, which is near a railroad track that transports hazardous substances to illustrate the dangers the community and school children face. Advocates joined the bill sponsors to demand that communities have a right to know about hazardous materials being transported by rail, particularly when school children are being taught within the blast zone.

“The costs of a potential disaster are astronomically high and the rail car companies are not currently required to prove they have insurance coverage for worst case disasters, costs which we know will be higher in New Jersey. This bill would be a step in the right direction for information transparency and safety preparedness, but the legislature needs to ensure that the public has access to information and that our first responders receive the training they need,” said **Dan Fatton, executive director of the New Jersey Work Environment Council.**

“Freight trains are transporting millions of gallons of dangerous oil through communities each week, putting the safety of our residents at risk,” said **Senator Weinberg (D-Bergen).** “We've seen derailments and other disasters occur across the country, yet rail companies still refuse to disclose information about their operations and safety plans. Given the safety risk these trains pose to our residents, we have to take action to protect those who live, work and go to school in close proximity to the rail lines. These requirements will improve accountability of the companies and require proactive planning to better ensure that if an emergency occurs, the rail company and our emergency officials are prepared to respond.”

"Our communities are on the front line of dealing with trains carrying hazardous and explosive materials and they have a right to know how often these trains are coming through their neighborhoods and how much they are carrying," said **Debbie Mans, Executive Director, NY/NJ Baykeeper.** "It is critical that an emergency response plan is submitted for review and that the companies prove they have the financial ability to pay for any cleanups or damage from any spill or explosion."

"The safety of citizens and first responders must be paramount when any type of hazardous or dangerous material is transported," said **Dominick Marino, president of Professional Firefighters Association of New Jersey and WEC**

board member, "Knowing the correct information is the only way first responders can properly plan for an emergency."

"For too long, we have been in the dark on exactly what it's in the black freight trains that rumble through our communities," said **Doug O'Malley, director of Environment New Jersey** and WEC board member. "This bill will finally shed light on what's in these trains -- and ensure there's emergency and clean-up plans in place if and when one of these trains derails."

"As a worker, members of my union and I often face dangers on the job. We remain concerned about not having access to information about substances that might harm us," said **John Pajak, president, International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) Local 877** and WEC board member.

"The Ironbound community lives every day with these potentially dangerous trains moving and parking around our neighborhood right next to homes and schools. The threat of one of these tankers exploding or leaking is inevitable. Our community demands the Right to Know what hazardous threats are possibly surrounding them, and action must be taken immediately to ensure that our community and all those impacted by these oil trains are protected from harm." said **Molly Greenberg, environmental justice policy manager, Ironbound Community Corporation**.

"With 50 trains coming through our communities a week, we are playing Russian Roulette with our safety. It's not *if* a disaster occurs; it is a matter of when. This is an important bill that will allow public access to the Emergency Response Plans," said **Jeff Tittel, Director of the New Jersey Sierra Club** and WEC board member.

Under this legislation, companies are required to provide information about routes and volumes of cargoes, updated on a monthly basis; an analysis of the consequences of maximum discharges; a copy of the most current discharge response, cleanup, and contingency plan submitted to the Department of Environmental Protection and railroad routing analysis and any accompanying documentation that impacted the owner/operators' routing decision. Training must also be offered to emergency service personnel along the travel route.

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## **About WEC**

The New Jersey Work Environment Council is an alliance of 70 labor, community, and environmental organizations advocating for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment. For more information, please visit [www.njwec.org](http://www.njwec.org).