

## EDITORIAL: Crude-oil explosions prove need for better rail cars



The wreckage of an oil train derailed in Mount Carbon, West Virginia, was still smoldering 48 hours after the tanker cars left the tracks.

CURTIS TATE — Tribune News Service

On Feb. 13, we published an editorial dealing with trains carrying volatile crude oil through the San Joaquin Valley and Northern California. We called on the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to finally approve a long-delayed new tank-car design.

The improvements include ceramic insulation, front and back shields and increased metal thickness, making them more puncture-resistant.

The designs — which the tank-car industry says are the best available — have been delayed at the USDOT. Those who must buy the new tank cars — oil companies or third-party firms that lease them to oil companies — don't want to be forced to buy heavier, more expensive cars.

If the USDOT is looking for a compromise, we suggest they visit Mount Carbon, West Virginia. That's where an oil train derailed Feb. 16. Twenty-seven of the CSX train's 109 cars went off the tracks in a snowstorm. At least 14 tank cars exploded or burned.

Residents miles away thought they had been awakened by a bomb. Though the area is sparsely populated, two small towns had to be evacuated.

Another train, pulling 100 tankers, derailed in the Canadian wilderness just before midnight Feb. 14. The accident

involved 29 tank cars, seven of which burned.

All of the cars that caught fire in these derailments were CPC-1232 cars, which were “state-of-the-art” in 2011. Go on the Internet and check out photos of the burning tankers in Mount Carbon to see if these rail cars are sufficient to carry crude oil.

Refineries in the Bay Area and Bakersfield are receiving the same crude oil that fueled the Canadian and West Virginia explosions. The trains roll through Valley communities, in the middle of towns or close to neighborhoods.

In our previous editorial (“We need free exchange of ideas on oil train safety”), we called on Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Turlock, to use his considerable influence as chair of the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials to spur the administration to approve new designs — now.

Instead, he chastised a member of the rail-car industry for speaking to The Modesto Bee Editorial Board.

Denham recently authored a bill to allow passengers to take dogs onto passenger trains. We don’t think for a second that he was prioritizing dogs over safety. That said, having passenger cars share the rails with safer tank cars will keep everyone — dogs and people — safer.

We like to think a pointed nudge from the chairman of the subcommittee could do some good.

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