



NEWS

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Montco Officials Detail Training and Planning That Is in Place in The Event Of a Bakken Crude Railroad Derailment

Royersford, PA (April 17, 2015) – With well-publicized oil train derailments in the news, and more than one million gallons of crude passing through Pennsylvania each week, much of it through the county, the Montgomery County Commissioners today held a press briefing to detail the training and planning that has been done and is planned to prepare for a potential spill.

The commissioners were joined by staff from the county’s Department of Public Safety, local police and fire officials, and representatives of Norfolk Southern Railway, which transports much of the crude oil through Montgomery County on its way to refineries in Philadelphia and New Jersey. The press conference was held adjacent to Norfolk Southern tracks in Royersford, PA on the grounds of Lewis Environmental Group, one of the nation’s leading emergency response companies.

“For the last two years, our Public Safety team, along with police, fire, and EMS personnel, using the valuable input of nationally-known experts and with the full cooperation of Norfolk Southern and other transportation companies, has been working diligently to ensure that should there be a derailment of one of these trains, we are prepared to react quickly, efficiently, and safely to protect our residents, our environmental resources, and our property,” said Josh Shapiro, chair of the county commissioners.

Before Shapiro outlined the training and planning the county is doing, his fellow commissioners, Val Arkoosh and Bruce L. Castor, Jr., outlined the significance of the situation and how the transportation of oil has changed since the North Dakota shale fields began producing crude.

According to the American Association of Railroads, 493,126 carloads of crude moved by rail last year. In 2008, that number was 9,500. At about 700 barrels per tank car, that amounts to about 345 million barrels of oil.

“About half the crude oil that now moves by rail in the United States is bound for Mid-Atlantic states, mostly to refineries near Philadelphia,” said Arkoosh, citing data from the U.S. Department of Energy. “An estimated 60 to 80 oil trains carrying more than one million gallons of Bakken Crude pass through Pennsylvania each week on their way to refineries in Philadelphia and New Jersey,” she said.

Castor pointed out that the derailments that led to spills and explosions in the U.S. have occurred primarily in rural areas and there have been no fatalities, unlike the 2013 oil train from North Dakota that exploded in a small Quebec, Canada town killing 47.

“We aren’t here to place blame or point fingers,” Castor said. “We are here to work with our first responders and the railroads to make sure that should something happen, we are all on the same page and ready to respond.” Castor went on to note that government analysts have predicted that trains hauling crude oil will derail an average of 10 times a year over the next two decades.

“We are fortunate to have one of the leading companies in the world for responding to and cleaning up oil spills from train derailments here in Montgomery County,” Shapiro said, referring to Lewis Environmental.

Shapiro then went on to detail what the county has done and has planned to prepare for a potential derailment. Recently the county:

- Hired a vendor to help develop pre-plans for rail lines
- Surveyed CSX line in Cheltenham along border with northeast Philadelphia
- Surveyed Norfolk Southern line in Lower Pottsgrove, Pottstown, and West Pottsgrove
- Planned survey of the line through Limerick and Royersford
- On February 28th the county held a seminar with about 100 municipal officials from affected communities at its training campus entitled “Coordinating a Montgomery County Response to a Bakken Crude Oil Event”
- Held a discussion facilitated by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to explore capabilities to respond, based on lessons learned from previous events
- On Jan. 31st, Greg Noll, a nationally-recognized expert in the field, gave a 90-minute presentation on the “Changing Face of Energy” that was attended by 90 officials from across the county

Prior to those activities, the county accomplished the following:

- In September, 2013 it held its first tabletop exercise on crude with Norfolk/Southern
- In early 2014, it completed pre-planning of Pottstown and Abrams rail yards
- In April, 2014 a helicopter overflight video of rail-line from Pottstown-Philadelphia
- In June, 2014 it completed training for two fire companies that host the county's foam trailers
- In October, 2014 it acquired Engine 20, a foam pumper, with a \$350,000 federal grant
- In October, 2014 it conducted a tabletop exercise with CSX
- It acquired 22 sets of PPE and new gas meters for HazMat team

The county plans these activities in the future:

- May – EPA Oil Containment Training
- June – Bakken Crude Tabletop Exercise
- 2016 – Full-scale Exercise for Bakken Crude response

The county has also strategically placed a supply of AR-AFFF alcohol resistant foam throughout the county, and has negotiated mutual aid agreements for a foam task force. In addition, the county has in place mutual aid agreements with Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, and Delaware counties, all of which have additional foam assets.

Response plans vary depending on the circumstances and include evacuations, sheltering in place, perimeters, containment, protecting exposures, and mutual aid.