

Explosive crude oil trains and a massive oil terminal are threatening both Columbia County and the Columbia River.

How did crude oil come to Columbia County without a public hearing?

In 2012, Massachusetts-based oil company Global Partners began shipping crude oil from Port Westward near Clatskanie, Oregon. Citing 'operational flexibility' in the ethanol facility's air pollution permit from DEQ, no public hearings or notifications occurred when the then Columbia Pacific Bio-Refinery transitioned quietly and quickly from ethanol into a crude oil terminal.



Seemingly overnight, mile-long unit trains carrying explosive crude oil from the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota, began traveling through the Columbia River Gorge, Portland, and Columbia County to the shipping terminal at Port Westward. From Port Westward, the crude oil is loaded onto ocean-going barges and shipped through the sensitive Columbia River Estuary—the cradle of salmon habitat in the Columbia River Basin.

Crude oil and ethanol are not the same commodities and pose very different risks to the region. Major changes in port uses, especially those involving volatile commodities, should trigger environmental reviews and public debate. It is unacceptable that the Port of St. Helens and DEQ kept citizens and emergency responders in the dark by allowing Global Partners to ship crude oil without any public notice or comment period.

Violating State Laws and Dangerous Near-Explosive Accidents

Without public involvement, the 'operational flexibility' in the ethanol facility's air pollution permit was passed onto oil company Global Partners to ship up to 50 million gallons of crude oil annually. Global Partners couldn't make it one

year without drastically violating Oregon law. In 2013, Global Partners violated the law and shipped six times more crude oil at Port Westward than permitted. DEQ regulators called Global Partners' exceedance the "highest level violation." The oil company is now contesting the \$117, 292 fine resulting from this seemingly highly profitable violation.

Oil Trains 101

Crude oil is shipped in unit trains of 100 tanker cars or more and are over a mile-long. The highly explosive crude oil contents of these railcars can be identified by a red diamond placard reading 1267. Unit trains of crude oil cause major delays in traffic and separate schools, hospitals and homes from critical emergency response services. The majority of crude oil in America is shipped in outdated tank cars called DOT-111. Newer tankers are being manufactured, including a rail car called the CPC-1232. The rail industry claims that the CPC-1232 tank car is far safer than the DOT-111, however the rail car that exploded and fell into the James River in Lynchburg, VA in a May 2014 derailment was confirmed by the USDOT to be the newer CPC-1232 model.

On January 21, 2014 Global Partners put Port Westward workers and the Columbia River at risk when a massive 300-ton piece of machinery struck a full oil tanker rail car. One oil tanker carries up to 30,000 gallons of oil. The accident happened less than 200 feet from the Columbia River and underscores the reality of oil spills in the Columbia River.

Green to Black: Millions in Green Energy Funding Lost to Big Oil

In 2012, the former Columbia Pacific Bio-Refinery ethanol facility at Port Westward began accepting crude oil-by-rail. The construction of the former ethanol facility was subsidized with \$36 million dollars in green energy loans and tax credits. Yet, when the facility was flipped to oil none of the green energy loans or tax credits were recovered, forcing Oregon's taxpayers to subsidize the next occupant of the ethanol facility: oil company Global Partners. Global Partners has never produced ethanol.

Oil Export on the Horizon?

U.S. oil industry has been loudly demanding that the Obama administration lift the decades-old ban on crude oil exports. Global Partners' Port Westward terminal is the closest west coast oil terminal to the Bakken oil formation and lacks a refinery, possibly making it an ideal port to ship crude oil extracted in the U.S. oil to Asian refineries.

What's next for Big Oil in Columbia County?

On August 19, 2014 DEQ approved Global Partner's request to expand their crude oil operations at Port Westward to ship up to 1.8 billion gallons annually. They also received permission to expand their oil terminal storage at Port Westward. Currently, Global Partners is relying on the storage facilities built for ethanol production. The expansion at Port Westward would allow up to 50 full oil trains per month of crude oil. That's 100 mile-long unit trains round trip crossing every intersection in Columbia County each month. The current rail cap to the Port Westward rail spur is 24 and a November 2013 resolution approved by the Port of St. Helens Port Commission increased the rail cap 38 trains per month contingent upon upgrades to the P&W railroad. The impacts of a rail cap increase in Columbia County to the rest of the rail line, including the Columbia Gorge and Portland were not considered.

What can be done to keep Columbia County and the Columbia River safe from Big Oil?

The Port of St. Helens Commission needs to hear from you! Write a letter to the editor expressing your opinion about oil-by rail and attend a port meeting to call on the Port Commission to revoke Global Partners' lease at Port Westward. The Port Commission meets at 8:30AM on the second Wednesday of every month at 100 E Street in Columbia City.

For more information about oil-by-rail and ways to get involved contact Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky at jasmine@columbiariverkeeper.org or 503-929-5950
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