



Empire State
Consumer Project

For Immediate Release:
November 20, 2014

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MAPPING NEW RISKS TO CHILDREN

Increasing Numbers of Crude Oil Trains Moving Across New York State And Down the Hudson River Valley Pose New Risks to Children, Schools, Communities and the Environment

The recent spike in oil train traffic across the state and through the Hudson Valley presents unexamined and unaddressed risks to children's health and safety and the environment. These include new threats to 101 K-12 schools in the Hudson River Valley and Capital District, 351 K-12 schools statewide, and natural resources that are essential for water quality and the economy, according to new mapping by Healthy Schools Network and groups concerned about the environment. The tragic accidents in Lac Megantic, Quebec and Casselton, North Dakota that resulted in mass casualties and huge releases of air toxins illustrate how much more work New York State and federal agencies need to do to prepare for oil spills, derailments, and resulting catastrophes.

“We are deeply concerned about the growing number of crude oil rail cars passing through the Hudson Valley and across New York State every day. They are crossing from Buffalo, through Rochester and from the upper reaches of Lake Champlain and the Adirondacks to the Port of Albany, then down along the Hudson River. They threaten New York’s priceless natural resources and our children, and put hundreds of cities, towns, villages, and hamlets at risk,” said Healthy Schools Network Executive Director Claire Barnett. “A catastrophic event, should it happen near an occupied school, could devastate a community for a generation or more.”

The Albany-based Healthy Schools Network is releasing two maps today, in partnership with Hudson Riverkeeper, Scenic Hudson, Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Natural Resources Defense Council, Empire State Consumer Project and other environmental, public health, education and first responder groups concerned about state and federal preparedness in the event of an accident or catastrophe. The groups are calling on the state and federal government, and the rail shipping industry to take stronger steps to protect our children and natural resources. Steps the groups advocate include:

- Calling on rail transporters and their regulatory agencies to significantly reduce the speed of crude oil trains in the vicinity of all public or private schools and sensitive natural resources.
- Urging the rail industry, and state and federal officials, to provide additional support to first responders, emergency management coordinators and communities, including the information and resources they need to respond to rail accidents near schools.
- Recommending that the state and federal government provide emergency planning aid to k-12 schools and child care facilities proximate to rail lines to enable every school to have a current rehearsed and well understood plan for sheltering in place and /or safe evacuation routes.
- Asking federal regulators to take immediate action, using their emergency order authority, to remove defective railcars from all service carrying crude oil and other hazardous substances and to mandate other safety measures to reduce risks to our children including speed reductions, better braking systems and required emergency response plans that specifically address accidents in the vicinity of schools.
- Calling on New York state to work with the federal government to significantly increase inspections and repair of rail infrastructure, including tracks and deteriorating railroad bridges, before they cause a crude oil train disaster and to put on hold and require a full environmental review of the plans of Port of Albany terminal operators to begin transporting heavy crude down the Hudson Valley.

The Hudson River Valley map (DEC Regions 3 & 4) shows all 101 public and private schools and BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) facilities between Albany and the New Jersey border that are within one mile of train lines currently in active use to haul highly combustible shale oil. U.S. Department of Transportation guidelines call for a standard one-half mile “evacuation zone” for accidents involving trains hauling flammable liquids and gasses.* Between 15 to 30 of these crude oil trains travel through the Hudson Valley weekly carrying crude oil from North Dakota’s Bakken oil fields. There are also new

proposals under consideration to ship heavy tar sands crude from Alberta, Canada into the Port of Albany and down the Hudson Valley by rail and vessel.

The statewide map identifies 351 schools proximate to both the CSX and Canadian Pacific rail lines throughout the state of New York. In addition, a map of densely populated Monroe County (Rochester area) shows 63 schools there within one mile of rail lines carrying crude. Rochester, the fifth poorest city in the nation, has more schools within a mile of the oil trains than any other city in the state.

“Communities from Lac-Megantic, Quebec, where an oil train explosion caused 47 deaths, to Lynchburg, Virginia, where a leak from a derailed oil train lit the river on fire, have suffered the catastrophic impacts of oil train accidents,” said Riverkeeper’s Watershed Program Director Kate Hudson. “Each day these ‘bomb trains’ are allowed to continue transporting their explosive cargo in defective cars on deteriorating railroad tracks and bridges put Hudson River communities and their children at risk.”

Riverkeeper has prepared several maps depicting the potential impact area of a crude oil train accident based on the blast damage and evacuation areas that were witnessed following the accidents in Quebec and Casselton, North Dakota last year. These maps depict the extent of the impact area, from the 300-yard blast radius and 1100-yard evacuation zone imposed in Lac-Megantic to the 5 mile evacuation area mandated in Casselton because of the risk of windblown toxic air pollutants resulting from the derailment-caused fire and explosion. “Based on the human consequences of these two accidents,” Hudson said, “it is clear that communities on both sides of the Hudson River could be impacted by a crude oil rail disaster.

“For the past four decades, New York State, the federal government, local communities and conservation groups have invested heavily in the environmental recovery of the Hudson River, and we’re now just seeing the benefits,” said Andy Bicking, Director of Public Policy for Scenic Hudson. “The region is home to thousands of acres of significant natural habitat that contribute to water quality and the region’s \$4.2 billion tourism economy. Yet, the sudden increase in crude oil shipments through our region puts these investments in natural resources and the benefits they provide at risk. All levels of government must act now to ensure that they are prepared to respond to this imminent threat.”

Scenic Hudson shared previously released maps of natural resources within one mile of the CSX rail line that runs between Albany and New Jersey, including 47.7 miles of track that are within yards of the Hudson River, and within the impact area of a storm surge six feet above high tide. The analysis demonstrated that the total risk area is 209,982 acres, and includes more than 100,000 households, 12 sewage treatment plants, 6 drinking water intakes, over 100 public parks, and 8,460 acres of rare fresh water tidal wetlands that provide wildlife habitat and contribute meaningfully to water quality.

Manna Jo Greene, Environmental Director of Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, said: “Whether by rail, barge, tanker or pipeline, the transport of crude oil through our region poses severe danger to all in its path. Most of this crude is destined for export overseas, but whether it is burned here or abroad, hydrofracked Bakken crude and tar sands oil adds to

pollution at the source and during transport – and it's combustion will greatly exacerbate the climate crisis. It is far safer and wiser to be investing in renewable energy infrastructure and energy efficiency than to continue to take these unacceptable risks."

Kate Sinding, Senior Attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said: "These maps illustrate what those who've had to live in the path of these dangerous trains the past few years already know – the uncontrolled expansion of crude-oil-by-rail threatens our planet and our communities. It's the government's job to protect us, and there have been some positive steps, but it's not enough. They can start right here in the Hudson Valley by doing a complete review of the health and environmental impacts that come from quadrupling the amount of oil shipments through the region. And government officials also need to take a close look at the local and global impacts of shipping dirty tar sands through the Port and down the Hudson River."

Judy Braiman, of the Empire State Consumer Project, Rochester said: "Thirty-one percent of Rochester's residents live below the poverty level. Poverty means chronic stress, poor nutrition and lack of access to good medical care. Now there is an added, external, unaddressed risk – crude oil trains. We contacted several school districts in Monroe County, which includes the City of Rochester, to inquire about whether they had oil train derailment evacuation plans. Every school district we spoke to indicated it had a plan in place. Yet I was contacted by a colleague who spoke with 2 teachers in a Rochester school district who said they had no knowledge of any oil train evacuation derailment plan. We believe all parents and school staff, including teachers, should have knowledge of these plans."

Ulster County Executive Mike Hein said: "There is no question that the sheer volume of dangerous, explosive and toxic substances passing through our area on a daily basis warrants the utmost caution from all who are responsible in order to protect the great citizens of Ulster County as well as everyone in New York State."

Assemblymember Kevin Cahill, representing the 103 Assembly District, said: "The safety of the people I represent has always been the top priority. The increase in oil transports by rail, coupled with the proximity of the tracks to residential and school areas is a concern that must be addressed. Riverkeeper has been at the forefront of bringing awareness to this issue. I look forward to our continued collaboration to protect our communities from oil and chemical spill disasters."

Assemblymember Pat Fahy, representing the 109th District, said: "As the former president of the Albany School Board, and as an Assemblymember representing several schools and neighborhoods that could be impacted should an oil train disaster occur, I am deeply concerned. We must do all we can to protect our children, our neighbors and ourselves. I thank the Healthy Schools Network for helping to raise awareness about this very serious issue. I will continue to work with my colleagues to find the best ways to make sure the oil trains passing through our community become the safest possible."

Assemblymember Didi Barrett, representing the 106th district, said: "There are serious risks in the transporting of dangerous crude oil through the Hudson Valley by river and by rail. The Healthy Schools Network has offered a glimpse of what a spill of Bakken crude would mean for our schools, communities and businesses, our natural resources, our tourism

economy and our beautiful Hudson River. I commend Healthy Schools Network for working with other organizations such as Scenic Hudson and Riverkeeper to help identify the schools impacted along the west side of the river. I hope others will continue to get involved so we can help Dutchess and Columbia Counties understand and prepare for potential risks to our communities.”

US Representative Paul Tonko, representing the 20th Congressional District, said: “The increased transport of oil through the Capital Region has raised concerns in many communities, and with trains nearby to homes, schools, and businesses, safety must be a top priority. I will continue to work with local leaders and administration officials to ensure new rules are enacted swiftly to keep our neighborhoods safe. At the same time, it is critical that Congress undertakes a serious effort to think outside the barrel and put forward a comprehensive national energy policy that eliminates the need to transport volatile fuels through our communities, helps our businesses grow, and cuts energy costs for consumers.”

New York State United Teachers’ Vice President Paul Pecorale said: "Given the transport of significant amounts of volatile Canadian crude oil through our state, all schools in close proximity to rail lines should have derailment emergencies included in their emergency plans. NYSUT supports Healthy Schools Network's efforts to remind schools of this safeguard and will work to help ensure all schools are prepared."

NYS PTA President Bonnie Russell said: “As supported by the NYS PTA resolution on Soil Contamination on School Grounds, government entities, such as the NYS Dept. of Health, Dept. of Environmental Conservation, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) must insure that there are no health risks for children and youth resulting from the increase of oil trains across the state. There must also be plans in place in case of contamination because of an oil train derailment. If a derailment occurs and soil testing demonstrates contaminant levels exceeding safe or acceptable levels for human health or the environment, the affected areas are immediately closed for use by the school community and fully remediated."

Chairwoman of the Rockland County Legislature Environmental Committee Harriet Cornell said: “The explosive growth of Bakken crude oil being transported on U.S. freight railroads requires new levels of safety regulation to protect residents. In my home county of Rockland, a truck collided with a CSX tanker train—luckily empty but utilizing the unstable and dangerous DOT 111 tank cars which have been involved in deadly accidents in the U.S. and Canada. These trains, often with 90-100 tanker cars travel on tracks that run close to schools, the county’s principal reservoir and the roads on which school buses travel. I took part in a press conference with Congresswoman Nita Lowey at the site of the train-truck accident this past March. The inter-active map of the Hudson River Valley released by Healthy Schools Network highlights the dangers to public and private schools and BOCES facilities within one mile of train lines currently used to transport the crude oil. I endorse fully the call for speed limits, advance notification to first responders, immediate action by the federal authorities to remove the defective rail cars from service, and for NYS to work with the federal government to increase inspections and repair of rail infrastructure. Plans to increase even further the transport of heavy crude oil from the Port of Albany should be put

on hold until there is a full environmental review. Catastrophic oil train accidents will continue to happen unless we openly consider the risks and take action to prevent them.”

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*The US Department of Transportation Emergency Response Guidebook recommends a standard evacuation zone of 800 meters (0.5 miles) for accidents involving railcars filled with flammable liquids and gases and an isolation zone of 1600 meters (1.0 miles) around any railcar filled with those materials if they are on fire.

<http://phmsa.dot.gov/staticfiles/PHMSA/DownloadableFiles/Files/Hazmat/ERG2012.pdf>

NYS State Interactive Map of Schools: <http://goo.gl/OBxSps>

Hudson Valley (DEC Regions 3 &4) interactive map: <http://goo.gl/LCzlnA>

Hudson Valley List of Schools: <http://goo.gl/xBvBBy>

Monroe County (Rochester) map: <http://goo.gl/GEYcjP>

Monroe County List of Schools: <http://goo.gl/YA7RIC>

Hudson Valley (DEC Regions 3 & 4) Sample Cities:

Map of Albany: <http://goo.gl/n4s1WH>

Map of Kingston: <http://goo.gl/WWNKWL>

Map of Newburgh: <http://goo.gl/DvvRpp>

Excel spread sheet list of all 351 New York State public and private schools within one mile, and footnoted are 163 schools within ½ mile. <http://goo.gl/wpK38p>

Hudson Riverkeeper’s crude oil train derailment impact maps are available on-line at:

http://www.riverkeeper.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Catskill_map_Nov17.pdf

http://www.riverkeeper.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Newburgh_map_Nov17.pdf

http://www.riverkeeper.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Ulster_map_Nov17.pdf

Scenic Hudson’s natural resource maps are available on-line at:

<http://www.scenichudson.org/sites/default/files/crude-oil-transport-map-2014.pdf>

A recent Rochester Area Community Foundation report found the city to have the 5th highest poverty rate among the nation’s largest 75 metropolitan areas:

<http://www.racf.org/CommunityImpact/CommunityImpact/tabid/164/smId/605/ArticleID/101/reft>