



New Federal Rules Aim to Stop Fiery Oil Train Crashes BY LISA RIORDAN SEVILLE

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In an effort to stop a string of fiery train crashes, the federal government today passed new rules overhauling the way North America moves [crude oil](#) by rail.

The regulations require retrofitting or phasing out the current fleet of tank cars, which became the focus of national attention after a series of explosive accidents across the continent, including a tragic derailment in Quebec that killed 47 people.

Once virtually non-existent, crude-by-rail has spiked 4,000 percent since 2008 thanks to the boom in North American oil production. Regulations have not kept apace. A 2013 NBC News investigation found most of that crude oil was transported in tank cars that regulators had for years known had a tendency to leak, rupture, or explode.

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The standards announced today require tank cars with thicker shells, thermal protection, and better end and valve protections to prevent rupture. Trains that are exclusively carrying crude, known as "unit" trains, must install new braking systems by 2021 or slow to 30 miles an hour. Some trains with older cars will also be forced to slow to 40 miles an hour in urban areas.

The new set of standards "significantly improves current regulations and requirements," said U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx at a press conference in Washington, D.C. Friday. "It will make transporting flammable materials by rail safer than it is today." The standards were developed in coordination with Canadian regulators, who announced mandated tank car retrofits last year.

The overhaul will happen in stages. The DOT-111 tank car, which has been the focus of criticism, will have to be updated or come off the rails within three years. The industry

has about five years to address newer tank cars without protective "jackets." It will also have to do better testing of the crude going into those cars. In the past it has been misclassified, allowing highly flammable oil to move in accident-prone cars.

While many of the announced rules build on changes the oil and rail industries have implemented voluntarily, both balked at the rule on brakes. Both rail and oil industry groups said the electronic braking system known as ECP does not have a well-tested record, and that the alternative of slowing to 30 miles an hour could have major consequences. "Slow-moving trains will back up the entire rail system," said Edward R. Hamberger, president and CEO of the American Association of Railroads.

The American Petroleum Association also pushed back, saying questions remained as to whether "each change will make a meaningful improvement to safety," according to a press release. The group warned that the retrofit schedule may strain existing shop capacity to overhaul the trains.

While both tank-car shop backups and traffic on the rails have proved major issues in the boom of crude by rail, the industry has seen a dip as American oil production has slowed in recent months, potentially reducing backlogs and traffic.

The rail overhaul will not be easy or cheap, said Canadian Minister of Transport Lisa Raitt. But standing beside Foxx at the podium, she defended the new rules.

"I believe that we truly have to act to honor those who died and honor those who were injured," she said.