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Derailment Raises Concern Over Train Shipments of Crude Oil

Public interest advocate calls transport of oil through Columbia Gorge “reckless.”



An aerial view of the smoke and fire from an oil train derailment in Mosier, Oregon
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF COLUMBIA RIVERKEEPERS



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By **Eve Conant**

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A Union Pacific train carrying crude oil through the Columbia River Gorge near the town of Mosier, Oregon, derailed midday Friday and caught fire, resulting in highway closures and the evacuation of an area school.

Federal and local officials are investigating the damage. The immediate concern was that a potential oil spill could reach area waterways, in particular the Columbia River, which is home to steelhead and chinook and sockeye salmon.

“For now it looks like the water was not impacted from oil on the trains,” says a spokesman for the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Greg Svelund.



Trooper Will Finn
 @wspd5pio

Hood River - picture from the scene. Hood River Bridge is placed as detour. NO TOLL during this incident.

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“There is no oil on the Columbia River right now,” he said Friday evening.

Rock Creek, near the site of the derailment, typically holds protected fish and aquatics, says Svelund, but “it’s dry right now. That’s good.”

Shipments of crude oil through the Pacific Northwest have [increased in recent years](#), say local news reports, not without controversy. “We think oil on trains is dangerous and reckless, and this is a striking example of that,” says Brett VandenHeuvel, executive director of the public interest group Columbia Riverkeeper, which works to protect and restore the river.

VandenHeuvel spoke from the area, where he had been throughout the afternoon, “seeing large plumes of black and white smoke hundreds of feet into the air, and about eight to 10 [train] cars tangled up. It’s been going for several hours now.” He added that the derailment occurred near the site of a sewage treatment plant.

There was no immediate information about impacts to the land and animals in the area. EPA spokeswoman Judy Smith says, “This is definitely an all-hands-on-deck multi-agency response to make sure we get on top of this as soon as possible.”

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