

Lawmakers Take Hard Look At Oil Shipping Safety

RANDALL CHASE, Associated Press

DOVER, Del. (AP) — State lawmakers are working to ensure that increased rail shipments of oil to Delaware come with adequate safety and response measures.

Members of the House Energy quizzed industry officials Wednesday on safety and inspections standards for tanker cars bringing oil shipments to the Delaware City Refinery and for the tracks that carry them.

Lawmakers also heard from state and local emergency response officials on their ability to respond to a tanker derailment or fire.

Crude oil shipments by rail have increased dramatically in the United States in recent years. PBF Energy brings crude oil by train from various sources, including tar sands oil from Canada and oil fields in North Dakota, to a new rail loop it built near the Delaware City refinery.

The National Transportation Safety Board noted recently that crude oil shipments by rail have increased by more than 400 percent since 2005.

But the use of rail tank cars to ship crude oil has come under increasing scrutiny following deadly derailments in North Dakota and Quebec. Federal regulators have particularly focused on the design of older tanker cars involved in those accidents.

Herman Seedorf, head of refining for PBF and former manager of the Delaware City refinery, said the company plans to use new tanker cars built to higher safety standards that have been voluntarily adopted by the rail industry and which exceed what the current law requires.

Seedorf said that, starting April 1, the refinery will not accept any shipments of lighter crude oil using the older-design tankers. The same standard will apply to shipments of heavy crude by the end of June, he said.

"We, as a company, have been way ahead of the curve," Seedorf said.

Jamie Turner, head of Delaware Emergency Management Agency, said he was confident in the ability of local and state officials in Delaware to respond in the unlikely event of a train derailment.

Representatives of CSX Railroad and Norfolk Southern, which carries tankers to the Delaware City refinery, said safety is a priority for them, and that rails and cars are subject to regular inspections.

Bryan Rhode, regional vice president of state government affairs for CSX and former

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secretary of public safety in Virginia, said development of domestic shale oil production represents a tremendous economic opportunity.

"Rail has a critical role in this opportunity, but with this role comes great responsibility," he said.

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