

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

March 16, 2015

Sarah Feinberg
Acting Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Acting Administrator Feinberg:

I have heard strong concerns from many constituents about the safety of Bakken crude oil being shipped through Minnesota, as the trains carrying this crude oil have shown a propensity to explode in the case of a derailment. I was encouraged by your recent comments that "[T]his situation calls for an all-of-the-above approach – one that addresses the product itself, the tank car it is being carried in, and the way the train is being operated." I urge you to take whatever actions necessary to address the safety of the product itself, as your comments called for, and require that this crude oil be made less volatile before it is shipped through my state and across the country.

The crude oil coming from the Bakken region is more volatile than traditional heavy crude oil, and has a lower flash point. In particular, Bakken oil contains more dissolved flammable gases than other, heavier crude oil. These dissolved gases cause the oil to be more likely to explode in the case of a train derailment that results in the puncture of a tank car. I have previously written to the Department of Transportation in support of the highest tank car standards possible to prevent these punctures in the case of a derailment. But, as you noted, we need to address every aspect of this issue to ensure the safety of Minnesota's communities.

That's why I also support the proposed routing requirements for high-hazard flammable trains (HHFT). Whenever at all feasible, these HHFTs should not be allowed to travel through population centers. We also need to do more to address rail integrity issues to prevent derailments in the first place, and to give communities the resources that they need to respond to an accident with this dangerous fuel. In line with your comments, in addition to these important measures, I urge you to take action to require that Bakken crude oil be made as safe as possible before it is shipped through my state.

Thank you for your efforts to ensure the safety of these trains. If you have any questions about this request, please follow up with Matt Hayward on my staff at 202-224-5641.

Sincerely,



Al Franken
U.S. Senator