

Make Washington Trains Safer -
Pass Multi-Person Train Crew Legislation – HB 1841 - in 2020

What they're saying:



“Since 1966, no regulations have existed to require minimum train crew sizes. During that time, train traffic across the state has increased significantly, much of it driven by the arrival of oil trains, which are highly combustible and can stretch more than 7,000 feet long. Without sensible regulations to pair appropriate crew sizes with volatile train freight, the ability to prevent accidents and to respond to them as quickly as possible is diminished.

This is a problem that demands immediate attention. We ask that you prioritize public safety by passing multiple-person train crew size legislation this session, for the sake of communities **across our state and the firefighters who serve them.**”

– Washington State Council of Firefighters and Washington Fire Chiefs Association



“Establishing minimum crew sizes for trains carrying oil and other hazardous materials is a commonsense step – it would help with accident prevention and accident response, spotting and avoiding problems **before they occur and acting quickly to mitigate damage when they do.**” – Environmental Priorities Coalition, including the Sierra Club, Washington Environmental Council, Washington Conservation Voters, Cascade Bike Club, and Fuse



“**Railroad companies** have been implementing policies to limit train staffing to single person crews and have even been exploring automated train operation without immediate human oversight. HB 1841 establishes minimum train crew sizes to protect communities put at risk by these **staffing cuts.**” – Washington State Labor Council

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More than [1 million barrels](#) of oil are shipped across Washington, by rail, every week. Each year, more oil trains are crossing our state, **and they're getting longer**.

- Some of these trains run more than a mile of rail cars, containing highly flammable and combustible materials.
- Growing rail traffic is putting an additional strain on rail infrastructure, yet few policy changes have been made to improve public safety for impacted communities.
- Even trains stretching longer than a mile are sometimes operated by a one-person crew.
- 3 significant, reportable train derailments occur every day in the United States.

According to the Seattle-based [Sightline Institute](#), 10 crude oil trains caught fire between 2013-2015. Oil transport by rail has only increased since then.



Photo credit: Seattle Times

In April 2019, a train with more than 100 cars, some carrying hazardous materials, including liquefied petroleum, derailed in Adams County, spilling chemicals and resulting in a fire that lasted 24 hours.

Understaffed trains can also slow down ambulance and fire fighter response times. Without additional crewmembers to help de-couple broken down trains that can block roads and bridges, valuable minutes are lost **while EMT's and** firefighters wait.

- Faster ambulance response times directly [correlate](#) to better survival rates for patients.
- Slower fire department response can lead to greater damage for buildings, and worse health outcomes, or even fatalities, in people trapped and waiting for assistance.

Common-sense action should be taken in 2020 to improve public safety. In 2019, legislation to put in place minimum crew sizes for trains carrying hazardous materials attracted 58 co-sponsors in the House and 21 in the Senate. Bills passed the full House, and out of committee in the Senate. Colorado, [Illinois](#), and Nevada passed similar legislation last year.

The cost to railroad companies **for this change is minimal, but we shouldn't put a price on the safety of our communities**. We must pass multi-person train crew legislation this year.

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