



## **Federal Railroad Administration Rail Hazardous Materials Safety Fact Sheet**

### **Role of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)**

Safety is our number one priority and 2012 was the safest year in railroading history. Over the past decade, train accidents have declined by 43 percent and train accidents involving hazardous materials declined by 16 percent. This record level of success was achieved because we are committed to continuous safety improvement. Our rail system is complex and comprehensive and trains carrying hazardous materials do not operate in isolation. Our task is to identify and eliminate elements of unnecessary risk that exist in our rail network.

That's why the FRA and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) issue and enforce regulations to improve the safe transportation of hazmat by rail. Additionally, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) coordinates research with FRA and industry aimed at improving the security of tank cars transporting specified rail hazmat shipments.

In 2012, 2.47 million shipments of hazardous materials were transported by rail; less than a fraction of one percent resulted in any type of release. Under current DOT regulations:

- All railroad personnel who handle hazmat are subject to a background check before hiring and must complete training.
- Railroad's training programs and protocols are routinely reviewed and audited by the FRA for compliance.
- The protocols in place are generally progressive so as risks levels increase the level of security is tighten.
- Freight railroads are required to develop and implement risk assessments and security plans in order to safely transport hazardous materials, including a plan to prevent unauthorized access in rail yards, facilities and trains carrying hazardous materials.

### **Crude Oil Safety**

As part of our commitment to continuous safety improvement, FRA recently issued an [Emergency Order](#) and [Safety Advisory](#) to help prevent trains operating on mainline tracks or sidings from moving unintentionally. Under our Bakken Rail Accident Mitigation Project (RAMP), we are conducting additional safety inspections in the area as well as facilitating hazardous materials safety training seminars with shippers, consignees, contractors, and sub-contractors. We are working with stakeholders, participating agencies, local officials and rail carriers on highway-rail grade crossing safety and trespass prevention, which includes increased law enforcement patrols at grade crossings and expanded educational outreach to motor carriers.

### **FRA's Role in Hazmat Route Selection**

A primary safety and security concern related to transporting certain hazmat commodities by rail, especially Toxic-Inhalation-Hazard (TIH) and Poison-Inhalation-Hazard (PIH) materials is preventing a release –especially near population centers or in environmentally sensitive areas.

In order to minimize the risk of incidents involving such shipments, DOT regulations require railroads that transport TIH and PIH materials to perform comprehensive safety and security risk analyses in order to determine and select routes which pose the least overall risk.

These regulations require rail carriers to:

- Perform safety and security risk analyses every year
- Consider at least 27 risk factors in safety and security risk analyses
- Analyze and assess practicable alternate routes
- Seek information from state and local officials
- Address en route storage and delays in transit
- Enhance pre-trip inspections of rail hazmat cars

In addition, FRA funded the development of software that helps railroad perform the required safety and security risk analysis, and evaluate the use of alternative routes.

As a preventive measure, FRA:

- Reviews and inspects railroad risk analyses and route selection of TIH and PIH materials.
- Offers recommendations to modify or improve risk analyses.
- Requires justification for the use of a route that does not have the lowest risk score.
- Requires rail carriers to use alternate routes when necessary
- Consults with other Federal agencies including PHMSA, TSA, and the Surface Transportation Board before ordering the use of alternate routes.

Finally, communities may request from rail carriers the top 25 hazardous materials that go through their communities annually in order to assist emergency responders with prepping for any emergency situations that could arise.

**For additional information, please contact**  
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**August 2013**