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**Sent:** Monday, April 06, 2015 12:49 PM  
**To:** Planning and Sustainability Commission  
**Subject:** testimony on Pembina propane facility

To the Portland Sustainability Commission:

I live within the blast zone of train tracks carrying crude and other petroleum products. The last thing we need is even more hazardous cargo going through our towns. A recent study by the U.S. Department of Transportation forecasts [207 train derailments over the next 20 years involving oil and ethanol trains--so-called "bomb trains"](#)-- causing billions of dollars in damages and untold loss of life.

Now we have a new type of "bomb train" to worry about: Propane bomb trains. These mile-long trains loaded solely with propane are far more dangerous than oil trains. Consider what happened in 1984, when PEMEX's liquid propane gas tank farm in San Juanico, Mexico, developed a leak; when it caught fire, it resulted in one of the worst industrial accidents in world history. Over 500 people were killed, 5-7,000 were severely burned, the town devastated. Yet this deadly Mexico blast was less than half the blast—3.1 kilotons of TNT equivalence-- that we would witness in a worst case scenario should a mile-long propane tanker train catch fire: That blast would measure 6.3 kilotons TNT equivalence.

A current proposal in the works has Pembina Pipeline Corporation of Canada bringing mile-long propane trains from Alberta over 1000 miles of tracks to Portland, OR, for export to Asian markets--every other day and, eventually, every day for the next 25-plus years.

Pembina wants to store 23 million gallons of liquid propane at the Port of Portland, just across from Vancouver where oil companies want to build the nation's largest oil export terminal. Should these storage tanks collapse, catch fire in an accident, earthquake or terrorist attack, worst case, they would release an explosion equivalent to the nuclear bomb that incinerated Nagasaki. Times two. (The 23 million gallons of liquid propane, vaporized and mixed with air has, when ignited, the potential for a 48.5 kiloton explosion. The bomb the U.S. dropped on Nagasaki to end World War II had the blast equivalence of 21 kilotons of TNT. )

Proposals to transport propane by rail are beginning to multiply. Why? A critical export route for propane from Canada—[the Cochin pipeline running from Fort Saskatchewan to the U.S.](#)—is handling other petroleum products, meaning Canadian propane exporters are now increasingly vying for rail outlets.

On April 7, you will consider whether or not to approve Pembina's proposal. If you do, and the City Council concurs, the Coast Guard would need to clear the Columbia River of all shipping traffic in order to usher the "Very Large Gas Carriers" (read: "very large terrorist targets") filled with liquid propane to the Pacific Ocean twice a month and, eventually, every week.

At a recent train safety conference in Olympia, Washington, locomotive engineers expressed grave concern for the communities their trains traveled through. Whereas once, there were both locomotive engineers and conductors, some 4 per train, now, in an effort to maximize profits, corporate train operators have cut their crews down to two lone engineers. Gone are the conductors who could respond in an emergency by pulling apart a train if the front portion was starting to go off the rails, and this at a time when railroads routinely run 100-car trains where

they used to run 50. Engineers are too often sleep-deprived, and forced to work around the clock. Train whistleblowers are often blamed for the safety hazards they report, and routinely fired.

It all adds up to a very volatile mix: Liquid propane, poorly maintained rails, sleepy train engineers discouraged from reporting safety problems. And, oh, don't forget about suicidal pilots and that 9.0 earthquake long overdue in the Cascadia subduction zone.

Please reject this proposal by Pembina. It is the proverbial camel's nose under the tent: We do not want to see Portland --or any other town along the route--wiped off the face of the map due to this unsafe cargo.

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