

THE RAILWAY SAFETY ACT Amendment

Congress can deliver on President Trump's call for legislation to prevent devastating train derailments, like the disaster in East Palestine, from ever happening again.

Background: On February 3, 2023, a Norfolk Southern train carrying hazardous materials derailed in East Palestine, Ohio. Eleven tank cars left the tracks and ignited. Families were evacuated from their homes as plumes of toxic smoke filled the air and chemicals contaminated the surrounding soil and groundwater.

The disaster highlighted known deficiencies in the freight rail industry's safety practices, particularly in its transport of hazardous materials. The Railway Safety Act was developed to address those deficiencies and prevent toxic freight train derailments.

What It Does: The Railway Safety Act Amendment contains several commonsense measures to prevent future derailments involving hazardous materials, including:

Enhances Safety Procedures for Trains Carrying Hazardous Materials. The bill enhances requirements and procedures for trains carrying large amounts of dangerous substances, such as flammable gases or explosives, including the development of emergency response plans and advance notification to States.

Prevents Wheel Bearing Failures. The bill requires the largest freight railroads to meet performance-based standards for identifying overheating wheel-bearings and to install detectors and identify defects at least 10 miles from well-populated areas.

Ensures Sound Inspections. The bill prohibits time-limits on inspections and upgrades inspection quality by closing loopholes.

Requires Adequate Crews. Consistent with current administration policy, the bill requires the largest freight railroads to operate with at least two-person crews to ensure that sufficient, well-trained staff are available for safe operation and response in the aftermath of any derailment.

Supports First Responders. The bill establishes grants to train and equip local first responders to deal with train derailments and a program to quickly reimburse local departments after a derailment.

Invests in Innovations. The bill provides funding to support the research and development of new safety-enhancing rail technologies and equipment.