

Two massive train derailments in the US in the span of 12 hours

Alex Findijs
27 March 2023

Two major train derailments have occurred in less than 12 hours this week, less than two months after the catastrophic train derailment and chemical spill in East Palestine, Ohio.

At around 11:15 pm central time Sunday, a Canadian Pacific train derailed a mile outside of Wyndmere, North Dakota, with 31 of 70 cars leaving the track in a large pileup. Of the derailed cars, four spilled liquid asphalt and two spilled ethylene glycol. An additional car carrying propylene was punctured, releasing vapor, according to Canadian Pacific spokesman Andy Cummings.

Liquid asphalt is refined crude oil used in the production of roads. Ethylene glycol is an industrial solvent used in the making of anti-freeze and hydraulic brake fluids. Both chemicals are flammable but company and public officials say that there was no fire at the site and that there is no waterway for the material to contaminate. The railroads said it believes a broken rail was the likely cause of the derailment.

Nevertheless, hazardous waste crews are on site and it is expected to take seven to ten days for the spill to be cleaned. Ethylene glycol breaks down in air and water after around 10 days and the liquid asphalt is expected to congeal in the cold weather, aiding in the cleanup of the site.

Just hours later, at 8:30 am Pacific time, a Union Pacific train carrying iron ore derailed in San Bernardino, California. Company officials said that 55 cars, including two locomotives, derailed after the train conducted an “uncontrolled train movement,” according to a statement from UP. At one point, the train was traveling at speeds of more than 80 miles per hour. The statement added that the crew was not in the cab at the time of the derailment—having jumped from the runaway train—and that no one was injured.

The iron ore that spilled from the train is allegedly not hazardous, but there was a fuel leak from one of the locomotives which is being investigated by hazmat officials, according to county fire department officials.

The cause of the derailment has not been determined as of this writing.

The derailments in Wyndmere and San Bernardino are the latest in an endless list of such events in the United States, where on average three trains derail every single day.

The recent catastrophe in East Palestine, in which a Norfolk Southern train derail spilling thousands of gallons of toxic vinyl chloride, has sparked public outrage and attention over the horrid state of commercial rail transport in the US.

That derailment saw company and public officials initiate a “controlled release” and burning of the vinyl chloride, releasing toxic dioxins. Congressional hearing were held on the derailment, with Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw testifying before the US Senate. Shaw claimed the company had plans to “make it right” and that “we will be in the community for as long as it takes.”

But despite the platitudes from Shaw and grandstanding from Congress, nothing has been done to combat the scourge of train derailments in the United States. Only hours before Shaw’s first appearance before a Senate committee earlier this month, another Norfolk Southern train derailed in a 30-car accident in Alabama. This was followed by a 28-car derailment in Springfield, Ohio.

Another Canadian Pacific train derailed in a Chicago suburb over the weekend, with two cars derailing on a train carrying primarily wheat.

The rampant crisis of train derailments is the product of decades of attacks on workers and safety by the

major railroad companies, who have consistently sought to cut costs by downsizing personnel and refusing to properly maintain rail lines. Despite the high frequency of rail accidents, rail companies continue to rake in billions in profit, indirectly benefiting from the derailments as their cost is outweighed by the increase in profitability.

These issues of inadequate staffing and safety were the main demands of rail workers as they pushed for strike action last year. With the help of the union bureaucracy, which delayed for months to buy them time, the Biden administration and Congress prevented a strike by banning it and enforcing a White House-brokered deal workers had already rejected. But the underlying issues remain and express themselves in the continuing occurrence of large and potentially disastrous train derailments.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact