

State of emergency declared in Kentucky after chemical train derails

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On Wednesday, a CSX train derailed in Rockcastle County in Kentucky. According to CSX, the 15-car derailment took place in the area between Mullins Station and Livingston, causing a chemical spill. Two cars carrying sulfur were part of the breach and one person was injured.

Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear declared a state of emergency, with a half-mile evacuation zone implemented. More than a dozen homes have been impacted by the train derailment, with the police calling on residents to evacuate. CSX claims it will provide residents with hotel vouchers and food.

This was one of several high-profile accidents on US railroads in recent days. An Amtrak train carrying passengers from Pontiac, Michigan, to Chicago also derailed November 16 in southwestern Michigan near New Buffalo. The train, part of Amtrak's Wolverine service, crashed into a vehicle on the tracks. There were over 200 passengers and six crew members on board. At least 10 passengers were injured.

On November 17, a Norfolk Southern train and a CSX train collided, which caused a fire and a diesel fuel spill. A fuel tank on the CSX train was ruptured with over 4,000 gallons in it, and 1,200 gallons were burned off. CSX claimed that it had contained all runoff, while also claiming that "safety is our highest priority."

On November 20, 29-year-old FedEx truck driver Delontae Fairman was killed by a freight train collision in Chicago at the Norfolk Southern rail yard in the city's South Side.

The cause of the accident has so far not been disclosed. According to the Chicago Fire Department, the semi-truck was stuck on the tracks when it was hit by the train.

A statement put out by Norfolk Southern on Monday

said, "Norfolk Southern is aware of an incident involving a truck driver at our 47th street intermodal facility in Chicago this morning. Our thoughts are with their family and colleagues during this difficult time. We are working with first responders at the scene, and will work with them to fully investigate the incident."

In fact, train derailments are a regular occurrence in the United States, with at least a 1,000 taking place each year, or at around three per day. The indifference of the rail companies to the safety of the rail workers and the environmental disasters they leave in their wake is fully sanctioned by the Democrats and Republicans.

Earlier this year, Norfolk Southern was responsible for the dangerous conditions that led to the accident in East Palestine, Ohio, which resulted in the burning of a toxic chemical plume that poisoned the working class community and surrounding areas.

Investigations into the East Palestine, Ohio, derailment revealed that the wheel bearings of the train overheated. Two temperature alarms had gone off, but the company did not stop the train. Moreover, instead of mandating that the trains have more advanced electronic braking systems, the rail companies have spent millions to lobby Congress against such efforts.

The East Palestine disaster occurred only a few weeks after the Biden administration banned a potential strike by 120,000 railroaders, in which safety would have been a key demand. In the aftermath of the spill, both state and federal officials worked overtime to shield Norfolk Southern from responsibility.

Management has driven the railroads into the ground through cost-cutting and by keeping rail workers in unsafe conditions. While the rail companies have made billions in profits in recent years, including share buybacks and dividends for their wealthiest shareholders, little resources are spent to improve

safety or working conditions.

Also in Chicago last week, a Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Yellow Line commuter train also crashed, causing 38 injuries. The crash occurred in the far North Side working class neighborhood of Rogers Park.

According to National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigators, the cause of the crash was a design problem within the CTA system that prevented the train from stopping sooner. NTSB chairwoman Jennifer Homendy told ABC Chicago that the train was going 26 miles per hour when it crashed into snow fighter equipment.

According to Homendy, the train's automated braking system did not start soon enough. Instead of starting at 2,745 feet, the train braked at 1,780 feet. The conductor did everything possible to manually stop the train, but the train's wheels were slipping on leaves on the tracks, making it very difficult to stop.

Conditions for CTA workers have rapidly deteriorated since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which took the lives of a number of transit workers. In addition to low wages and terrible working conditions, the CTA is facing a serious shortage of workers due to resignations and early retirements. A WTTV study found that at least 14 percent of CTA workers are working more than 50 hours a week and many are working 80 hours more with overtime spiking.

Between 2016 and 2018, CTA workers worked without a contract. While rank-and-file members authorized a strike, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 308 and Chicago's Democratic-controlled city government suppressed the strike action. The last transit strike in Chicago was in 1979, when a three-day strike of rail operators and bus drivers shut the city down to demand higher wages and cost-of-living adjustments.



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