

# Union Pacific train derails near Dallas, Texas carrying hazardous materials

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A Union Pacific train derailed Tuesday afternoon in Palo Pinto county, Texas, about 60 miles east of Dallas. Officials said the derailment was being treated as a “HazMat situation” after 35 rail cars carrying hazardous materials were involved in the derailment.

Kent Farquhar, assistant fire chief for Palo Pinto County Emergency Services District 1, identified the materials as hydrochloric acid, propane, and fuel, according to ABC affiliate WFAA. Officials say none of the cars leaked and no one was injured in the incident, narrowly avoiding a disaster for the environment and public safety.

Some brush fires were reported near the site, caused by sparks from the derailment, but local fire units responded to control the flames.

As a precaution, at least one car underwent a “liquid flare operation to safely dispose of propane from a damaged rail car” according to a statement from Palo Pinto County Emergency Services District 1. Liquid flare operations burn off liquid fuels that could be a danger during extraction. The Federal Railroad Administration recommends this method when it is unsafe to vent the fuel or transfer it to another container.

While the car was not reported to be leaking, any rupture to the container during removal could have created conditions for a large fire or explosion due to the nearby brush fires, making the fuel disposal necessary.

The flaring rate was reduced to prevent additional brush fires Wednesday night, extending the time it will take to clean up the site. Officials say it will take several days to complete the cleanup.

This is one of nearly 30 derailments in Texas so far this year, a state which is a leader in train derailments. In June, Texas saw a large train derailment on the same

day that a separate rail accident killed one rail worker. Last December, Texas also saw a major train derailment that killed two and injured three.

Since 1975 there have been nearly 12,000 derailments in Texas, more than any other state, with Illinois a close second. Both stand well above all other states, with third place California at just under 6,000. In recent years Texas takes an even stronger lead, with 1,554 since 2015 compared to Illinois at 1,007.

Texas has the most miles of rail in the country, at over 10,000 miles. While it does not have the highest rate of derailments per thousand miles, it still averages a high rate of 15 per thousand miles each year, comparable to other states with high rates of derailments.

The total number of train derailments and dangerous accidents has declined in recent decades, but injury rates have rebounded in the past few years.

According to data from the National Safety Council, employee injuries on railroads declined between 2007 and 2020 from 5,462 to 3,067. Since 2020, however, injuries have steadily increased to nearly 3,500 in 2024.

These rates of derailment and injury are largely due to company policies and inadequate railway maintenance. In 2024 BNSF announced it would be cutting \$105 million to its capital maintenance plan, deferring regular maintenance and upgrades to outdated systems.

Justin Lopez, general director of BNSF’s Montana Division, told employees that the cuts would result in “longer dependency on outdated systems,” “longer service disruptions,” and “deterioration of surface conditions [that] could result in increased slow orders.”

Data from the Department of Transportation attributes 30 percent of derailments to human error, likely an over estimation as companies seek to shift blame on to employees. The largest culprit are the rails

and roadbeds, largely a result of declining investments in railway infrastructure maintenance.

The effects of reduced and delayed maintenance and infrastructure improvements can have disastrous effects. Train derailments with hazardous materials can pose a serious risk to public health and safety.

Most famously, the East Palestine, Ohio incident was the result of neglected railway maintenance that produced one of the largest environmental disasters in recent US history as the company set fire to vinyl chloride to speed up the process of clearing the track for other freight trains and the generation of profits for the company.

According to research from the National Atmospheric Deposition Program and Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene, pollutants from the East Palestine disaster spread over 1.4 million square kilometers (540,000 square miles) through rain and snow.

Disasters like this one are a risk that is all too common on American railways with an average of three derailments occurring every day in the US. Such disasters, and the devastating consequences that can come from them, are the result of ceaseless drive for profits by the rail companies. Proper maintenance and safety are disregarded in favor of delaying spending on infrastructure and pushing for longer trains, heavier loads and better margins.

Safety is also under attack through the assault on jobs as rail companies push to eliminate thousands of positions and transition conductors into road utility positions as part of the effort to implement one-person crews on trains. Further attacks will come as Union Pacific begins the integration of Norfolk Southern, which it acquired in a \$85 billion deal.

The merger will create organizational redundancies that will result in thousands of layoffs and further the monopolization of the rail industry as safety standards wane to help pay for the cost of the acquisition.



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