

## Coal Train Transportation Problems

- BNSF Railway conducted a study that concluded that a train car carrying coal releases about [500 lb of coal dust for every 100 miles traveled](#). They [now require](#) that shippers use a specific loading technique combined with “dust suppressants,” which it says reduces dust release by 85%. Many of the [approved suppressants](#) are toxic. Even if the methods are as effective as they say, that would still amount to put current 75 lb of coal dust released per car per 100 miles. It has also [been claimed](#) that most BNSF shippers don’t comply with the BNSF rules, and that the surfactants degrade over time. So by the time trains reach the West Coast, they are not likely to be working much at all.
- Coal dust which lands on railroad tracks builds up and [destabilizes the tracks](#), increasing the risk of derailments. Other trains - and potentially other activities - are likely to disturb and resuspend deposited coal dust in the air<sup>1</sup>.
- US freight trains average about [1,300 derailments per year](#), or about 1 derailment every 500,000 miles traveled. That means that if just 2 trains per day traveled to and from Humboldt Bay on the 300 miles of North Coast track, we could expect a derailment about every other year.
- Derailments and collisions result in an average of about [8 fatalities every year](#) - not counting highway crossings. 2,875 people have been killed in [train collisions at highway crossings](#) in the US since 2010 - well over 150 per year. The NCRA line includes a lot of at-grade highway crossings.
- Powder River Basin coal is [especially known for spontaneous combustion](#). Experts say that any place shipping, storing or handling PRB coal will see a fire sooner or later.
- While there are no statistics on coal train derailments, a quick online search reveals that it is a frequent occurrence, for example [this coal train derailment near Richmond VA](#) in July 2021 in which coal entered the James River.

### **Bottom Line**

*Coal trains release massive amounts of toxic coal dust, even when preventive measures are taken. If trains are restored to the North Coast rail line, it is a certainty that we will see regular spills, derailments, fires, and collisions.*

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<sup>1</sup> ESA. 2016. Report on the Health and/or Safety Impacts Associated with the Transport, Storage, and/or Handling of Coal and/or Coke In Oakland, Including at the Proposed Oakland Bulk and Oversized Terminal in the West Gateway Area of the Former Oakland Army Base