

Every month since February 1987 the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation has produced one-hour TV programs on issues related to peace, social justice, economics, the environment, and nonviolence.

The Olympia FOR's program airs several times every week for the entire month on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for Thurston County's cable TV subscribers. You can see TCTV's schedule at www.tctv.net.

You can also watch the program described below (and more than 100 of our previous interview programs and special programs) at the Olympia FOR's website, www.olympiafor.org. Simply click the "TV Programs" link to reach www.olympiafor.org/tv_programs.htm, scroll down, and click the program you want to watch.

Many of our website's TV program listings also include a document (in Word and/or .pdf format) describing the program.

MAY 2015

"Stop the Dangerous Oil Trains. Protect Our Communities and Climate"

by Glen Anderson, producer and host of this TV series

The Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's May 2015 TV program examines the escalating epidemic of oil trains that have been exploding across the U.S. and Canada. Besides explaining why this is happening, we also explain what people can do about it.

Explosive oil trains roll through our local communities in Washington State – Spokane, the Columbia River Gorge, Vancouver, Longview, Chehalis, Centralia, Grays Harbor, Everett, Skagit County, and Bellingham. In fact, all five of us in this TV interview – and all of the volunteers serving on our TV crew – live in communities that are endangered by these explosive oil trains.

At a few points during this TV program we show video footage that Robert Whitlock recorded of an oil train SE of Olympia, and another one crossing the Nisqually River near the border between Thurston County and Pierce County.

All four of our TV guests have been working on the problems – and also the solutions – for several years. They are well informed and very active in several different organizations, especially:

- **Matt Krogh** works with ForestEthics
- **Abby Brockway** works with Earth Ministry and the Faith Action Network
- **Carlo Voli** co-founded and works with 350 Seattle and Rising Tide Seattle
- **Rod Tharp** is an active member of the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's "Confronting the Climate Crisis" group and is a lead organizer in the "People's Climate Action Fleet."

Why so many oil trains all of a sudden?

Worldwide, most of the oil that was easy to extract has already been pumped out of the earth and burned into our air, causing air pollution and life-threatening damage to our climate. The oil that remains is in locations (deep underground, in oceans, in the Arctic) that can be drilled only with serious technical difficulty (e.g., by hydrofracturing ["fracking"] with dangerous chemicals that destroy aquifers and drinking water), at great expense, and/or with severe environmental damage (e.g., the Canadian tar sands, near the US's aquifers, in oceans and the Arctic).

Oil companies are extracting significantly more oil than Americans need (especially now that we have been conserving oil), so the oil companies want to sell the excess oil on international markets at higher prices than they could get in the U.S. Although Americans have reduced consumption of liquid fuels, we are still importing foreign oil. The many millions of people who live in the blast zones are not benefiting from the fuel, but are at risk for industry profits.

Producers are making choices. The pipelines coming out of Bakken fields have excess capacity now. The producers are sending excess oil on trains instead of pipelines so they can send it to export facilities in our nation's NE and NW, where they ship it to other nations. Many Washingtonians are working hard to prevent them from using Washington from becoming a major conduit to Asian markets. We are potential victims.

Robert Whitlock gave us permission to use this videotape he took in July 2014 of a long oil train crossing over the Nisqually River. The whole video shows the train is very long – consuming 8 minutes going past Robert Whitlock's video camera <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XO19KvNPJ3o>

Why are these oil trains so dangerous?

Abby Brockway summarized the facts around the deadly explosion of an oil train in Lac Megantic, Quebec, Canada, on July 5, 2013. The train's engine had a problem, so the train was parked, and the brakes were set. A fire occurred, the brakes malfunctioned, and the entire train rolled downhill into town, where it derailed and exploded. It killed 47 persons and destroyed much of downtown.

Matt Krogh provided a map showing the vast network of rails throughout the United States – and the blast zones where people are vulnerable to exploding oil trains. In Washington State, these dangerous oil trains roll through Spokane, along the Columbia River gorge, and up north from the Vancouver WA area through downtown Chehalis and Centralia, Thurston County, along Puget Sound through Tacoma, downtown Seattle, downtown Everett, and up to refineries in Anacortes (Skagit County) and in Whatcom County.

We discussed the worst rail tank cars – (the “DOT 111” design), which use a very old design and were used for liquids such as corn syrup, not highly flammable oil. The Canadian government has banned the use of the DOT 111 rail tank cars in Canada, but they are still widely used throughout the U.S. But even the newer design (“CPC 1232”), which is supposed to be safer, is still grossly inadequate. Some of the recent explosions have occurred with the newer, supposedly safer “1232” design. Even these are grossly inadequate, especially because the oil from the North Dakota's Bakken area contains extremely explosive gases. Fortunately US Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) has introduced a bill that would significantly strengthen requirements for rail tank cars and regulations for using them.

Railroads have seriously hurt safety in several ways. Explosive oil trains often include 100 or more tank cars and can be a mile long. To reduce costs, they eliminated cabooses, so now a problem could occur near the end of a mile-long train and without a caboose, nobody would see it. Railroad companies make train crews work long, inconsistent shifts, so they are tired. Also, the companies want to reduce crews to only one engineer with nobody else up front to keep on the lookout, keep the engineer awake, or to help in case of a medical or other problem.

Unlike the stereotypical assumption that environmentalists and workers oppose each other, this is one of many cases where we are on the same side. Railroad workers' jobs and safety are at risk, and we are in solidarity with them.

The climate cannot tolerate more carbon dioxide without severe damage:

Fossil fuel companies discovered 5 times more carbon sources than our world can safely use. Why search for more? The math is simple: In order to stay below 2°C of warming, we can emit no more than 565 more gigatons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere without risking catastrophe for life on earth. But fossil fuel companies now have five times as much fossil fuel reserves underground. They absolutely must keep the excess in the ground in order to avoid risking catastrophe for life on earth.

It's also a very local problem for our region:

Nevertheless, they keep drilling and selling more to be burned – and they keep exploring and drilling for more. Right now, the Port of Seattle is complicit in Shell's drilling for more oil in the Arctic. The Port of Seattle – without consulting the public – made a secret deal with Shell to host Shell's Arctic drilling equipment. Local climate activists are publicizing this abuse and planning a variety of nonviolent actions.

In Washington State, the 2015 legislative session is not doing nearly enough. The State Senate is blocking action to protect the climate and promote safe energy. Gov. Jay Inslee cares about the climate and could do much more by exercising his own authority, without going through the Legislature.

For a number of years, Canada's First Nations and the U.S.'s Native Americans have been bold leaders in protecting natural environments from abuse by coal and oil companies. Tribal leaders in several places have been doing a lot. In early April 2015 the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community (in Skagit County WA) sued the giant railroad company BNSF (previously known as Burlington Northern Santa Fe) for violating their written agreement about the trains that BNSF rolls through Swinomish land and ignoring multiple attempts by the Swinomish to resolve the matter. The case is in court now.

People all across the political spectrum want their local communities to be safe. Explosive oil trains are a threat to all of us, our communities, and our ecosystems. Low-income communities and areas where people of color live tend to be where big business corporations locate their most environmentally destructive facilities, so the movement is multi-racial and multi-class.

In the greater Olympia WA area, the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's "Confronting the Climate Crisis" group has been vigorously active in many ways since our local climate group began in August 2012. See the "Climate Crisis" part of www.olympiafor.org.

Ordinary people in many communities have been organizing to oppose the abuses of the coal and oil companies. People have attended public hearings to oppose plans for export facilities, protested along the routes, communicated with federal, state and local governments and various governmental agencies and special jurisdictions (port districts, etc.). People with various kinds of knowledge and skills have found useful ways to help.

The climate crisis and the recklessly dangerous extracting and transporting of fossil fuels have brought together very diverse people to protect their local communities and ecosystems and the world's climate. One of the most interesting was the "Cowboys and Indians Alliance" from late summer 2014. Two iconic American constituencies – Native Americans and cowboys/ranchers – organized an alliance to protect their shared interest in protecting lands, waters, ecosystems, and communities from extracting oil and shipping it through the Keystone XL pipeline. So they joined together and traveled (very visibly!) to Washington DC to oppose the Keystone XL pipeline.

We actually have made progress stopping some coal and oil export proposals in the Pacific NW. People in other areas (*e.g.*, the Gulf Coast) need help in protecting their communities and ecosystems too.

Promote sensible solutions:

Instead of such recklessness, we need an economy that is both safe and sustainable.

The end of this article lists a number of non-profit organizations that are organizing against coal and oil, and promoting sensible solutions instead. See the list.

One solution that few people know about yet is to modernize our rail system and use it for good purposes instead of hauling climate-killing coal and oil. One aspect of this "Solutionary Rail" proposal is to have modern electric trains carrying people and operating on solar panels along the route. See more information about this creative "Solutionary Rail" proposal at www.solutionaryrail.org.

Sunday June 21, 2015: A creative, enjoyable nonviolent action:

The Chambers Bay Golf Course is a new world-class golf course immediately north of Steilacoom, SW of Tacoma. The train tracks run between the golf course and Puget Sound (part of the “Salish Sea”). Several times every day, oil trains 100 tank cars long are already using the tracks to transport oil to refineries in Tacoma, Anacortes, and Cherry Point (Whatcom County).

In mid-June 2015 the U.S. Open Golf Tournament will be held at Chambers Bay, close to the railroad tracks and explosive oil trains roll along the shore of Puget Sound. Tens of thousands of spectators will attend the U.S. Open Golf Tournament, and nearly 100 million people worldwide will watch it on TV.

Because the golf course has a great view of Puget Sound – and there is much slack time during the golf tournament when spectators and TV cameras can look to the saltwater view to the west, the **People’s Climate Action Fleet** will be highly visible with many kinds of boats on the water with large banners floating high above to make a visual presence opposing the oil trains. A variety of clever ways will be used to lift large banners, helium blimps, and other devices with signs that will be visible to spectators at the golf course and TV viewers.

Organizers of the **People’s Climate Action Fleet** are planning to safely and nonviolently steer many, kayaks, tribal canoes, sailboats, powerboats, etc., with signs, kites and balloons carrying our message, into the middle of that view. They envision a colorful demonstration, much like Rising Tide’s waterborne demonstration two years ago on the Columbia River near Portland, Oregon. The organizers are inviting people to bring their boats. Banners will have appropriate messages, such as “Stop the Oil Trains,” “Protect the Salish Sea and the Pacific Coast,” “Keep Fossil Fuels in the Ground,” “Save a Livable Climate for our Grandchildren,” and Rising Tide’s great slogan: “Coal, Oil, Gas: None Shall Pass.”

(The “Salish Sea” is a term for Puget Sound and the waters up beyond north and west through Strait of Juan de Fuca. All of the surrounding land areas drain into this body of water.)

Sunday June 21 is the Summer Solstice, so there will be plenty of daylight. It’s also Fathers Day, so this is a great opportunity for the entire family to enjoy an enjoyable day on the water!

Organizers are experienced with safe boating on this part of Puget Sound. Safety and nonviolence are important in the planning. Organizers are coordinating with the Coast Guard, which is enforcing a restricted area closer to the land. We’re enjoying great participation with the highly experienced and effective Backbone Campaign (www.backbonecampaign.org).

The Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation’s “Confronting the Climate Crisis” group initiated this, and we are working with a growing number of organizations and individuals. A demonstration this size requires cooperation and planning throughout the Northwest. We are contacting many active environmental groups and other organizations to encourage their participation. If you can help with this outreach, please e-mail us at peoplesclimateactionfleet@earthlink.net to say whether your group will join the People’s Climate Action Fleet and co-sponsor the demonstration. Visit www.peoplesclimatefleet.org for much more information or to donate financial support or other kinds of help. The website is being updated often.

Other actions:

One of our guests, Abby Brockway, earned much publicity by perching at the top of a large tripod over railroad tracks at a railroad switching yard in NE Everett. She had done many, many legal activities to express concern about the climate, oil, and explosive oil trains. Finally this courageous step needed doing. She was arrested and faces trial.

Recently the Port of Seattle – without adequate public notice or participation – arranged with Shell that it would use Terminal 5 to host Shell’s gigantic equipment that will later be moved into the Arctic, where it will drill for oil in sensitive offshore ecosystems. Many persons who are concerned about the climate will be taking action at the Port of Seattle in the near future.

All politics is local:

Underlying the work we are doing, a strong motivational factor is our deep desire to protect our world's climate from further disruption. This is a huge worldwide problem, so **some** people try to avoid paying attention, while **other** people who **do** care feel overwhelmed. I often think of the wise insight from Tip O'Neill, who used to be the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. He said, "**All politics is local.**" So we can understand a big problem and then work at the local level to address it and to correct local aspects of the problem. Then – overall – our cumulative results of people around the world can solve global problems.

All four of our guests have deep concerns. When faced with the extremely serious climate crisis, they have arisen to act boldly and with determination to turn things around. They can't do it all, but they are doing much. Each of us who watches the TV interview or reads this description of the TV program can do something – and most of us can do more than we have been doing.

Many people shy away from learning about the climate crisis because it feels so big and horrible and overwhelming. But our four TV guests have shown that we actually enjoy working with other pleasant people on this difficult topic. Working with ethical organizations and knowledgeable, warm-hearted people feels really good. I encourage our viewers to help.

The crisis is serious, and the problems are huge. But we can empower ourselves to act – both as individuals and through the excellent organizations that have already begun. A great many organizations have launched a variety of campaigns to address strategically important aspects of these issues. These organizations are excellent sources of information, so I want to urge our viewers to contact them.

The Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's website – www.olympiafor.org – posted a list long ago on our website's "**Climate Crisis**" section. **Here are a number of great non-profit organizations are working on the more specific aspects of the climate crisis that pertain especially to oil trains:**

- 350 Seattle – www.350seattle.org
- Citizens for a Clean Harbor – www.cleanharbor.org (Grays Harbor WA on the Pacific Coast)
- Climate Solutions – www.climatesolutions.org
- ForestEthics – www.forestethics.org
- Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's "Confronting the Climate Crisis" group (360) 352-6327
E-mail climate@olympiafor.org See much info, including a list of climate-related organizations, at www.olympiafor.org/Climate_Crisis.html
- People's Climate Action Fleet – www.peoplesclimatefleet.org
E-mail peoplesclimateactionfleet@earthlink.net
- Rising Tide Seattle – www.rtsea.org
- Solutionary Rail – www.solutionaryrail.org

Other good groups with a hand in this include:

- Backbone Campaign – www.backbonecampaign.org
- Earth Ministry – www.earthministry.org
- Faith Action Network – www.fanwa.org
- Washington Environmental Council – www.wecprotects.org