

July 19, 2021

To: Mayor Ted Wheeler, Commissioner Dan Ryan, Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty,
Commissioner Carmen Rubio, Commissioner Mingus Mapps

CC: Governor Kate Brown

On behalf of the members of Linnton Neighborhood Association, and 45 additional organizations who have endorsed this statement, this letter is to record our opposition to Zenith Energy's transport and storage of their unusually dangerous type of oil.

The crude oil that Zenith transports is either strip-mined and melted from the bitumen of the Alberta Tar Sands or fracked from the Bakken shale formations under North Dakota. In a year of historic, catastrophic climate events affecting our region, the urgency of taking bold action to keep fossil fuels in the ground is critical.

Zenith Energy's transport of oil-by-rail poses immense risks to the community and the environment, from emissions, accidents, potential spills, fires, and explosions. The risks from Zenith are growing. The quantity of this especially toxic crude oil that Zenith brought through Portland was eleven times higher in 2019 than in 2018, and significantly increased again in 2020—resulting in an annual increase of over 200 million gallons in just two years. In addition to other known risks, diesel exhaust from these unit oil trains — typically 110 tank cars — contains more than forty hazardous pollutants that cause extreme air particulate and noxious pollution as they are openly vented, posing additional health threats to the communities along the tracks.

Air pollution is a serious and growing problem throughout Portland and elsewhere in the region. The greatest effects of environmental pollution always fall most heavily upon people of color, low-income communities, and marginalized peoples who lack the resources and mobility to escape from pollution. Many also lack access to high quality, affordable health care, and their needs have traditionally been ignored or dismissed in environmental and land use planning.

Loading Tar Sands and Bakken crude oil onto marine tankers poses unique risks to the Willamette and Columbia Rivers from spills or leaks. This endangers the health of the river, salmon, and other marine life. The decisions made in Portland have direct impacts on the upstream and downstream harm caused by these operations. Additionally, Zenith's terminal is in NW Portland's aging Critical Energy Infrastructure (CEI) Hub, an industrial agglomeration built predominantly on sandy and filler soils guaranteed to liquefy when the Cascadia Subduction Zone fractures again or another earthquake strikes. A huge percentage of the fuel and chemical plants in CEI Hub will rupture; many will burn and release toxic fumes across the region.

Zenith also has a history of flouting and ignoring health and safety regulations. The company expanded its crude oil processing and transfer terminal in NW Portland without first getting the necessary permits to function legally. They also have been operating on an expired Title V Air Emissions permit. The City of Portland's Climate Action Plan acknowledges the need to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate the effects of climate change. Approving Zenith oil-by-rail in our community violates our Climate Action Plan at a time when the importance of a clean transition to renewable fuels is more urgent every day. The extraction, shipping, and transfer of Tar Sands and Bakken crude oil are some of the worst contributors to greenhouse gas emissions.

We urge the Portland City Council and the Multnomah County Commission to pursue protective policies that hold fossil fuel companies financially accountable for their pollution and other damage to Portland and surrounding waterways. We call on municipalities, agencies, and officials to deny all support and permits for Zenith Energy. Specifically, we urge the Portland City Council to deny the Land Use Compatibility Statement (LUCS) that Zenith Energy requires to continue these daily threats to the health and safety of the people of Portland and the surrounding region.

On behalf of Linnton Neighborhood Association board,
Richard Barker, Chair

We undersigned, on behalf of our organizations, agree with and endorse this request of the Linnton Neighborhood Association and urge you to resolve this issue by denying the Zenith LUCS.

The signatures of 45 organizations, including 25 neighborhood associations, 13 faith organizations and 7 citizen groups have been temporarily removed pending permission from those groups to post their information here.