



Tecumseh races past Chelsea

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Freight rail industry dirtier than coal power plants



Railroad locomotive pollution causes an estimated \$48 billion in health care costs and 3,100 premature deaths annually in the United States, according to the EPA's Co-Benefits Risk Assessment tool. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Aging locomotives, pushback on regulation contribute to pollution problem

Tim McLaughlin
REUTERS

BNSF Railway, one of the crown jewels of Warren Buffett's sprawling Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate, calls itself an environmental leader in the U.S. rail industry with the cleanest locomotive fleet in North America.

"When you see our orange locomotives' and freight cars' steel wheels moving on steel rails, think green," BNSF says in its latest sustainability overview.

But the company is the largest player in an industry that has a pollution problem: U.S. freight railroads are a major source of pollution, huffing out more nitrogen oxide, the primary component of smog, than all the nation's coal-fired power plants combined, according to a Reuters calculation using government data.

U.S. railroads together produced about 485,000 tons of nitrogen oxide in 2024, compared to 452,000 tons emitted by U.S. coal-fired power plants, according to a Reuters calculation of reported annual fuel consumption multiplied by the EPA's 2023 weighted-average emission rates.

BNSF, the nation's largest freight rail-

"Americans don't realize how much harmful pollution comes from old diesel locomotives. EPA should require the railroad companies to modernize their fleets."

Bill Magavern
Policy director for the Coalition for Clean Air

road, accounts for about a third of that total, producing 161,500 tons of smog-causing nitrogen oxide in 2024, according to the data.

"We don't dispute your number. BNSF is the biggest Class I railroad by volume," BNSF said in an email.

BNSF's position as largest in the rail industry, as well as its profitability, will be challenged if regulators approve the planned \$85 billion merger of Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern, which would create the first U.S. coast-to-coast freight rail operator, Morningstar railroad analyst Gregory Warren said.

Reuters shared its calculations with four industry experts and all agreed it was a fair methodology. About 80% of the industry's NOx tons are produced by Class I railroads, the industry term for the six major railroads with more than \$1 billion in annual revenue.

Details on the rail industry's recent NOx emissions performance, BNSF's share of those emissions, and the factors driving the ongoing high levels of pollution have not previously been reported.

Railroad locomotive pollution causes an estimated \$48 billion in health care costs and 3,100 premature deaths annually in the United States, according to the EPA's Co-Benefits Risk Assessment tool.

"Americans don't realize how much harmful pollution comes from old diesel locomotives," said Bill Magavern, policy director for the Coalition for Clean Air, a California group that advocates for public health. "EPA should require the railroad companies to modernize their fleets," he said.

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INSPECTIONS

Blissfield sandwich shop hit with third citation

Corey J. Murray
The Daily Telegram
USA TODAY NETWORK

In response to a records request, the Lenawee County Health Department has released reports from food safety inspections conducted in December at local restaurants, schools and other facilities.

Adhering to proper safety practices is critical to preventing foodborne illness and promoting public health.

The Daily Telegram is publishing regular reports on "priority" violations — ones that could directly lead to contamination of food or increase the risk of transmitting a foodborne illness, as well as corrective measures taken.

The Telegram will also report on "priority foundation" violations — ones that could lead to a priority violation — and occasional "core" violations, if there's a significant accumulation or repeat at a single eatery.

Two establishments met those criteria in December. They include:

Doll n' Burgers

411 E. Chicago Boulevard in Tecumseh

Priority: Two containers of sauce

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ANALYSIS IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

Detention centers expanding in the U.S.

Lauren Villagran, Ignacio Calderon and Jennifer Borresen
USA TODAY

President Donald Trump's second term has brought sweeping changes to immigration enforcement. One of the top takeaways: Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention has expanded dramatically, both in the number of people being held and the sites holding them.

Here are a few things to know about

immigration detention today:

Record number of detainees

Trump kick-started his promised "mass deportation" campaign in 2025 with a series of executive orders that paved the way for a stricter application of immigration law and for new policies to expand enforcement.

A year in, immigrant arrests have climbed dramatically. The pace of deportation flights — while rising — hasn't

quite kept up. The result is that more people are being held in detention for longer.

There were nearly 69,000 people held in ICE detention on Jan. 7, 2026, according to snapshot data provided by ICE. That figure eclipses the number of people being detained a year earlier, which reached fewer than 38,000 people in early January 2025, before Trump took office.

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