

CUMBRES & TOLTEC SCENIC RAILROAD CONVERTING ONE LOCOMOTIVE FROM COAL TO OIL BURNING

Minor Change Will Protect the Environment in Adverse Conditions, While Not Altering the Steam Engine Railroad Experience

What exactly is involved in converting the engine?

Locomotives need fuel, which generates heat to convert water to steam, which powers the engine. The Cumbres & Toltec and its predecessor, the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad have always run steam locomotives since 1880s. From the beginning, these locomotives have used coal as fuel. One of the engines, No. 489, will now be converted to burning oil instead of coal. The average passenger will not notice the difference, since it will still be a steam engine with billowing clouds of smoke and the wonderful sound of a steam whistle. The only difference is the fuel will be oil instead of coal.

Why is this being done?

With climate change, we are seeing dryer conditions every year and occasional days that are more windy than in the past. Oil burns cleaner than coal without embers and with less risk of starting a fire. All season long, the Cumbres & Toltec exercises an abundance of caution and operates vigorous fire safety measures. Each departing train is followed by a fire patrol motor car that carries a water tank and fire pump and tails the train the entire length of its journey. In addition, during times of extreme dryness or windy conditions, we can now run the 489. Shutting the railroad down because of extreme dry conditions is an economic hardship to all of Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico, since the railroad is one of the chief economic drivers in this region. Converting 489 to oil burning allows us to protect the spectacular mountain and high plain environment in which we operate, and allows us to safely run during more extreme conditions.

Are you converting all the locomotives?

No, just the 489. As a national historic monument, we are committed to preserving the railroad experience of 1880 with coal burning locomotives, and other engines will continue to burn coal, including the restored 168, which will make its world debut in 2021. This engine was specially ordered for this line in 1883 and ran on these very same tracks. No. 168 sat for 75 years in Antlers Park in Colorado Springs, exposed to the elements. It has been completely restored and in an exciting moment of railroading history, will once again, be back in service on the same tracks in the spring of 2021.

Is it safe to run coal burning locomotives in dry conditions?

Yes. We take all precautions to reduce the amount of embers, and we follow every train with a service car to detect and put out any rare small fires that are started. In extreme dry times, we have two service cars follow each train. Converting the 489 to oil burning is just another example of our dedication to protecting the environment that we operate in. It gives us yet another precaution in times of extreme fire danger. As we say, passengers will not notice any difference. Many of the trains

operating in Colorado such as Georgetown Loop and Colorado Railroad Museum use oil burning steam locomotives.

If there's any danger to coal burning, why operate that at all? Why not convert all engines to oil?

The Cumbres & Toltec is one of the rare railroads in America that never converted to diesel engines. We always ran steam locomotives. When it looked like the railroad was going to have to close, the states of Colorado and New Mexico stepped up in 1970 and purchased the railroad for it to be preserved as a historic monument to the importance that railroading had to the history of both states. We have since become a National Historic Monument. We are the highest, longest and most authentic steam railroad in the nation and are dedicated to preserving the experience of authentic, coal burning locomotives, exactly as they ran in 1880. We have instituted all possible safety features to mitigate the rare possibility of a train starting a fire. Converting the 489 gives us one more proactive precaution that can be used in extreme circumstances.

How has COVID restrictions impacted the railroad?

Naturally, we saw reduced visitors in 2019, and we were not able to operate trains from Chama, New Mexico until September. But we were able to put in place socially distanced seating, required masks, required temperature tests when boarding, and changes at our lunch stop in Osier Station to make the trip comply with all state ordered restrictions. We even introduced a very popular new policy where families or friends could get their own car just by purchasing ten regular price tickets, and then could add more family members at a greatly reduced cost.

We will of course, comply with all state and federal regulations in our 2021 season to offer a safe, historical and fun experience.