

January 30, 2002

Minot Cleanup Effort Continues

MINOT, N.D. -- A Canadian Pacific Railway official said that the railroad is kicking up its cleanup efforts several notches at the site west of Minot where a CP train derailed Jan. 18, the Minot Daily News reports.

Darcie Park, a public relations officer with the railroad, told a news conference that the contractor is bringing in more trucks and the cleanup crews will be working longer hours to complete the cleanup of contaminated soil as soon as possible. She added that the landfill near Sawyer where the material is being disposed of will also be working additional hours. Park said the contractor, Earthmovers Inc., of Minot, plans to haul 2,000 tons of ammonia-laden soil from the derailment site per day. The soil is being taken from the south side of the tracks in the area of Tierrecita Vallejo and hauled to the landfill. Jay Skabo, manager of Safety Kleen landfill, said Monday his facility has been a "busy place." Park said there is no definite date for completion of the large project. She said it's hoped that people displaced by the derailment can return to their homes soon. The new track put in at the derailment site will be permanent as rail traffic gets back to normal. Sixteen trains passed through the site at reduced speeds in a 24-hour period over the weekend, CP Rail said. A railroad official said last week that the average traffic on the line is about 18 trains per day. Park said, however that the main concern right now is air quality at the derailment site. She told the news conference at the city auditorium that the ammonia has been removed from all of the tank cars.

Air quality problems can arise as heavy equipment digs up soil at the site, but it has quickly dispersed, according to health department officials. Anywhere from 100,000 to 150,000 gallons of ammonia leaked into the ground, according to railroad officials. The total spilled into the air and ground was estimated at 200,000 to 300,000 gallons. That figure was later revised, however to 240,000 gallons. Eight tank cars were involved in the derailment. There were 15 cars that contained ammonia. A total of 21 cars were involved. The train had 112 cars, in all. Jim Semerad of the State Health Department said that his department has come up with a detailed plan for air sampling and monitoring and also for checking on groundwater. He said the plan involves a variety of methods, including what he called "real-time" monitoring.

There will also be a route where technicians will travel to a number of the monitoring stations on a two-hour basis. He said some stations have been set up around schools in the area. He said readings at those stations will be on an eight-hour basis and will provide cross-checks with data collected by the other monitors. Semerad noted that all numbers have been very low except where dirt is dug up, but the emissions are well below five parts per million when they reach the city, to the east. He said that where there are "hot spots" or heavy concentrations of ammonia in the soil, workers will remove the soil before it has any chance to hit the water table.

Health department officials said as for water testing, the department is working with the city of Minot. They said the city is currently drawing water from the Sindre Aquifer, well removed from the derailment site. They said because water moves relatively slowly, they will have plenty of time to monitor what is happening, if anything. Monitoring is also under way on the Souris River and private wells in the neighborhood where wells are anywhere from 39 to more than 100 feet in depth.

Tom Parsons, a CP Rail environmental engineer was at the news conference. He said earlier that he is confident that work at the derailment site is "winding down." CP Rail has set up an air quality facility to answer questions from the general public. That number is 839-2203. Darcie Park, a CP Rail spokeswoman said another important number for people who have filed claims with the railroad is 838-9542. That number was incorrect in Sunday's edition of the Minot Daily News. She added that about 3,000 claims have been filed so far.

The claims office at Dakota Square mall was shut down over the weekend, so anyone who has filed a claim and has questions, or anyone who plans to file a claim can now do so over the telephone.

January 18, 2002

Hoeven Updates State on Minot Train Derailment

BISMARCK, N.D. - Gov. John Hoeven said this afternoon that North Dakota's Emergency Management community teamed up to respond quickly and efficiently this morning to a train derailment west of Minot. The situation is ongoing, Hoeven said, but it has stabilized.

A Canadian Pacific Railway train derailed at approximately 1:45 a.m. this morning. More than twenty cars were involved; some of the tanker cars ruptured and released anhydrous ammonia into the air. Earthmovers, a hazardous-materials contractor for the Canadian Pacific Railway, is building a road to the site, which borders the Souris River. The North Dakota National Guard called in the Minnesota National Guard 55th Civil Support team, which arrived about mid-afternoon to provide supplemental support.

A team from the National Transportation Safety Board will arrive early this evening to determine the cause of the derailment. Environmental Protection Agency personnel are also en route. The train was traveling through North Dakota from Canada en route to Minneapolis. "We had a very serious situation this morning - a real test of our preparedness and response capability - and it could have been much worse had it not been for the quick response of our emergency management teams," Hoeven said. "In particular, our first responders from Minot, the surrounding area and the Minot Air Force Base did an outstanding job."

As of about 4:30 p.m. today, one fatality had been reported as a result of the early morning accident. Thirteen people remain hospitalized, six in intensive care. Approximately thirty homes remain evacuated. Local officials are uncertain at this time when evacuated residents can return to their homes. The train was carrying anhydrous ammonia gas, a chemical used in farming as a fertilizer. This gas can burn the nose and throat, causing respiratory distress. Hoeven has encouraged citizens to monitor local media for updates, and adhere to the precautions advised by local health and emergency management officials. Individuals who believe they are showing severe symptoms of exposure should call 911.

"Although we're still working with local officials to monitor the situation, and we continue our cleanup efforts, residents outside of the affected area southwest of the city are free to go about their business as usual," Hoeven said.