

A series of articles published in The Minot Daily News documenting a train derailment which led to a release of anhydrous ammonia and an emergency response. The articles are shared by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture as a reference for emergency responders.

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/18/2002

Train derailment kills one, sends ammonia cloud over Minot

By: Brian Witte
AP Writer
Posted at 10:26:52 AM

MINOT - A train derailment early Friday sent a cloud of anhydrous ammonia over this city, killing one man and forcing dozens of people to the hospital with breathing problems.

"It was like something just grabbed your lungs," said Randy Schobinger of Minot, who lives about 500 feet from the tracks.

Authorities did not immediately identify the man who died. Ward County Sheriff Vern Erck said he was found outside his home, close to the wreck, which happened about a mile west of Minot.

Erck said 10 people were in the intensive care unit at Minot's Trinity Hospital Friday morning.

Gov. John Hoeven said authorities were working to build a road to the crash site, which he said was about a mile west of Minot. He said about 20 cars of the 112-car Canadian Pacific Railway train derailed.

"A couple of them have rolled away from the track, and there's just a small plume coming out of one of the cars," Hoeven said. He was not sure how many of the cars hold anhydrous ammonia, which is a farm fertilizer that can burn the nose and throat.

Edison Elementary School, in southwest Minot, was set up as one of several temporary public shelters. City schools called off classes, as did Minot State College. The Minot airport was closed for a few hours.

Cliff Black, a paramedic at Edison, said more than 60 people had come to the school.

"We have been given them oxygen as they need it, and flushing their eyes with water," Black said. Erck said more than 45 people had sought treatment at Trinity Hospital.

Schobinger, who is a state senator, said he heard banging on his neighbors' doors at about 2 a.m. As soon as he stepped outside, it was difficult to breathe and his eyes watered, he said.

Fire officials said the derailment site was in a remote area. Residents were being warned to stay inside their homes and turn down their furnaces to keep the gas from being sucked into their homes.

With temperatures hovering around 5 below zero, Paul Behm, who owns a truck stop near the derailment site, put a moist towel over his nose and mouth and went knocking on doors to make sure friends living nearby were not hurt.

"The cloud had started kind of enveloping the truck stop area," Behm said. "It smells just like ammonia cleaner, only higher concentrate."

The derailment, which happened about 1:40 a.m., knocked out power to parts of Minot and to

Burlington, a small town just to the west, said CPR spokeswoman Laura Baenen.

"It looks like things are starting to lighten up a little bit. That doesn't mean that things can't change," Minot Fire Chief Harold Haugstad said. Major streets in the city remained open.

Hoeven and the commander of the North Dakota National Guard, Maj. Gen. Mike Haugen, went to Minot Friday to inspect the situation firsthand.

The cause of the derailment was not immediately known.

"People don't seem to be panicking, which is good," said Dan Draovitch, the Minot police chief. "We're just waiting for it to dissipate ... It's going to take some time."

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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/19/2002

Fifteen hospitalized; long-term effects unknown

By: Jill Schramm
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - The 15 patients admitted to Trinity Hospital with reactions to anhydrous ammonia were in stable or serious condition as of Friday afternoon, medical officials reported at a news conference.

Although five patients were in intensive care, none appeared to face life-threatening injuries.

"I think they have a pretty good shot at recovery," said Dr. Jeffrey Verhey, a pulmonary and critical care specialist.

As of about 3:30 p.m., more than 100 people had come to the emergency room with symptoms of anhydrous ammonia exposure, Trinity spokesman Randy Schwan said. Of the 15 admitted, three were considered serious. At least two were on ventilators, Verhey said.



Jill Schramm/Staff Writer

Dr. Jefftry Verhey and psychologist Richard Townsend talk to the media about Trinity hospital's medical response to the anhyfrous ammonia spill at a news conference Friady.

"There will be some permanent effect from this. How much, it's way too soon to tell," he said.

Some patients might have permanent lung damage or asthma, he said. If they already had chronic lung conditions, those conditions might become worse.

There could be some scarring from burns, Verhey said. He noted no one had widespread burns. Burns have been limited to areas such as hands, feet or airways.

CP Rail has claims representatives meeting with people who come to the hospital to seek treatment.

Verhey said there may be more people coming to the emergency room or seeking out their physicians if symptoms won't go away. People who have chronic respiratory problems might find their symptoms persisting, he said. Some symptoms include burning eyes and nose, sore throat, stomach ache, nausea and headaches.

Verhey said the most severely injured patients were among the first appearing at the trauma center and are believed to be people who live near the derailment site.

Trinity also mobilized mental health workers to talk with patients, families and staff members.

"The main thing we have seen is people who are injured, people who are grieving, people who are scared," psychologist Richard Townsend said. "Our major goal is to provide a little bit of comfort right now and also to help people to figure out what the appropriate support systems are."

Disasters can increase symptoms in people with anxiety disorders or can lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in people who faced threats to their lives or were involved in emergency response, Townsend said. Post Traumatic Stress has a variety of symptoms, including flashbacks, intrusive memories and panic attacks.

Talking about the event helps people process it, Townsend said. If people are experiencing extreme anxiety or stress, they should know it's OK to seek out a mental-health professional or clergy, he said.

Trinity's response system met the challenge

Trinity Hospital's disaster response plan worked well in its first test since becoming the area's only emergency and trauma center last summer, hospital officials said.

Emergency room staff learned of the anhydrous ammonia spill through a couple of phone calls and were able to discern the scope the disaster. Trinity activated its disaster preparedness plan around 2:30 a.m., which mobilized about 200 people.

"The disaster team came together beautifully and it functioned very well," Dr. Jeffrey Verhey said. "We could easily have handled more and done more. thank God that is wasn't as bad as it could have been."

In addition to medical personnel, Trinity's disaster plan brought in support staff in areas such as plant operations and dietary. Most employees were able to make it to the hospital, despite the ammonia fog hanging over the city.

Trinity's critical care helicopter, NorthStart Criticair, transported Verhey and Trinity's other pulmonary specialist, Dr. Maher Daas, to the hospital because the ammonia fog was too thick for them to drive into the city.

"I tried to go in and I actually had to turn back," Verhey said. He met the helicopter at the airport, where he boarded with one of two ambulance patients needing to get to the hospital.

Trinity spokesman Randy Schwan said patients were seen by nurses within minutes and quickly that the most seriously injured got immediate attention. Trinity continues to work on remodeling its emergency room to add two more exam rooms, but Schwan said the staff had the use of a nearby room to see patients with less severe injuries.

In most instances, treatment consisted of supportive therapy to keep patients' airways open, Verhey said.

Trinity President Terry Hoff said offers of assistance came from hospitals in Bismarck, Grand Forks and Fargo. Trinity requested respirators from Medcenter One and St. Alexius Medical Center in Bismarck. Both responded by sending three respirators, but none were needed.
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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/19/2002

Stench of ammonia spreads across city

By: Tom Rafferty
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Minot area residents were greeted by a foul stench of ammonia Friday morning that lingered throughout the city for a good part of the day.

Although a train derailment that caused tanks of anhydrous ammonia to leak happened about a mile west of Minot, the odor was apparent throughout many areas of town.

Jim Rostad, who lives 1 1/2 miles west of the scene of the accident, said he was not ready for the strong ammonia smell in the air when he went outside early in the morning.

"I couldn't believe it, it hit me like a wall," Rostad said. "It really surprised me."

Rostad said he first heard about the derailment after his neighbor called him shortly after 3 a.m. and told him about it.

Rostad said he stayed in his house until he went to work later that morning. When he drove past Behm's Truck Stop on his way to work, Rostad said the ammonia smell was so bad that he had to turn the air conditioner on in his car so that outside air would not enter.

"My eyes were really burning," Rostad said.

Rostad did not seek treatment for ammonia inhalation.

Randy Schobinger, a Minot legislator who lives on East Central Avenue near the railroad tracks in Minot, said he initially thought the derailment was close to his home.

"Down here it was bad," Schobinger said of the smell. "It seemed like it just kind of settled in and came right through here and kind of just followed the river by the valley."

Schobinger said someone banged on his door and told him to get out and head south so he did, because at that time he was not aware of the location of the derailment.

Capt. Dave Womack of the Salvation Army, who lives just south of Arrowhead Shopping Center, said the ammonia odor was also very strong in his neighborhood.

Shortly after the derailment occurred, Womack grabbed a gas mask and headed to the Salvation Army headquarters in Minot to organize a response to the accident.

Jeff Beck, who lives in northwest Minot, said he and his family were very concerned about the smell so they got in their car and drove to Ruthville.

"You're not used to waking up and smelling a toxic smell," Beck said.

After staying at the gas station in Ruthville for a short time, Beck said they returned to town and stayed at a friend's house in southwest Minot.

Beck and his family returned to their house by 9 a.m. Friday. He said the house had an ammonia odor, but they followed guidelines from city officials, such as boiling water, and the smell eventually dissipated.

Beck said the experience was traumatic to his children and something that he will remember for a long time. "It's a smell that you're not going to forget for a while," Beck said.

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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/20/2002

Cause unknown

Reason for crash could take months to release to public

By: Marvin Baker

Editorial Senior News Editor

Posted at

MINOT - It could take up to a year to positively identify the cause of Friday's train derailment and subsequent anhydrous ammonia leak, an official with the National Transportation Safety Board said Saturday.

According to Ted Turpin of the NTSB, teams have been flown into Minot to gather data from the crash site and from the Canadian Pacific Railway train that jumped the track just west of Minot early Friday morning.

The teams will spend about five days scouring the site of the derailment, take facts and what they believe are reasonable causes back to their agency and begin deliberation, according to Turpin. He said the board will then adopt a positive cause and inform the public following careful analysis. "I can't tell you the cause. I have to gather the facts first," he said.

Turpin, who lives in Los Angeles, said he was notified at 6 a.m. PST Friday and three hours later was on a plane bound for Minot. He said other NTSB officials have come in from Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile, CP Rail public affairs official John Bergene said he will not even consider giving the media a theory because there are currently too many variables.

"We have to stabilize the scene first, then stop, then walk in there," he said. "Then we have to get equipment in there, then experts in the industry will assess the situation."

According to Bergene, a tanker car, when filled to capacity, can carry 30,000 gallons of anhydrous ammonia. However, he said he didn't know how much was in the cars that derailed because of pressure. Two rail cars continued to be monitored for leaks late Saturday.



Heidi Weiss/Staff Photographer

Emergency personnel work into the night Saturday to clean up the remaining anhydrous ammonia tankers from a Canadian Pacific train derailment.

Minot City Fire Chief Harold Haugstad told a press conference Saturday the Tierrecita Vallejo area has been stabilized, however, he is asking the public to stay away from the exclusion zone. "It's not completely safe," he said.

"If you're downwind, you'll pick up some smells," Haugstad added. "Rest assured, it's not health threatening, but it isn't safe."

According to Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum, 123 people have been treated in Trinity Hospital's emergency room, 15 were admitted, five were put into the intensive care unit and there has officially been one fatality, John Grabinger, 38, of Minot, whose body was discovered in his yard following the derailment.

Minot Rural Fire Department Chief Bob Wetzler said a water supply point has been established near the derailment site using Minot and surrounding communities' equipment and water is being sprayed on the two tankers that continue to leak anhydrous ammonia.

"We've been monitoring air quality readings and until the derailment site is stabilized, in other words when there's no more product in the cars, we'll consider it stabilized. It's still part of a controlled zone."

According to Turpin, an engineer and conductor were traveling along at about 40 miles per hour when they felt something occur. When the 112-car train came to a stop, the conductor got off the train, unhooked the derailed cars and in the process was overcome. He was later hospitalized.

Wetzler said most of the liquid has turned to gas and dissipated into the atmosphere. He said there might be some runoff contamination from all the water being pumped onto the scene but didn't think it would be serious.

"There could be some runoff and we can't eliminate that, but it is a big help because the river is frozen," he said.
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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/20/2002

The real heroes are the survivors

By: Tom Rafferty
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at

MINOT - After spending several hours on the floor of a pitch-black basement filled with a noxious cloud of anhydrous ammonia, wet rags wrapped around their heads, their minds racing, wondering when someone would arrive to help, the Hintons know exactly who the heroes of Friday morning were.

Dave, Linda and Andy Hinton survived a nightmarish Friday morning, along with all but one resident of the Tierrecita Vallejo neighborhood, after hell broke loose and sent its fury on the neighborhood in the form of a flaming, derailed train that left an aftermath of poisonous gas.

If it wasn't for the neighborhood's quick thinking, emergency workers would have removed piles

of bodies from ammonia-ridden houses.

"The whole neighborhood could have been wiped out," Linda Hinton said. "I give so much credit to that little neighborhood. Those people saved themselves."

John Grabinger, 38, was the only person who perished as a result of the train derailment. The Hintons lived next door to Grabinger.

The nightmare began at around 1:40 a.m. Friday when neighborhood residents heard a loud explosion, followed by the loss of electricity and utter chaos.

"It sounded like thunder, outrageous, unbelievably loud thunder," Linda Hinton said. "The whole back of the house was shaking."

Dave Hinton said after he heard the explosion, he thought it had something to do with the train that goes by the area, but he was not expecting what came next.

It was a thick, inescapable gray cloud of anhydrous ammonia that choked lungs and burned eyes and noses. Nothing was safe from the ominous cloud.

"The cloud was so thick that you couldn't see your hand if it was right in front of your face," Dave Hinton said.

The Hintons frantically tried to protect themselves from the ammonia cloud, but because power was knocked out, it made the task nearly impossible. They were afraid to light candles because they feared it could cause an explosion. They turned to the radio for some kind of information on what was happening, but all they heard was music. They called 911 several times, but operators didn't even ask to take their information.

"The only response we got was that help would arrive soon," Dave Hinton said. Soon there was nothing but cold, dark silence for the Hintons and the rest of the subdivision.

In another part of the neighborhood, another family barely escaped death after a train tanker flew through the air like a bullet, demolishing the corner of the bedroom two of them were sleeping in.

Lee Wieland said he is glad he and his wife, Carmal, stayed put after they heard a noise.

"It's a good thing we didn't get up and look out the window because we would have been standing there when it hit," Wieland said.

Wieland estimated that if the trajectory of the car was off another foot or two, the entire side of his house could have been demolished.

Wieland also said he called 911 several times, but was told each time that someone was on their way.

"There was no rescue attempt that I know of at all," Wieland said. "There was a chopper flying around above us, but nobody came in."

Wieland said he, his wife and son, Jacob, had to stay in a cold storage shed above their garage for a couple of hours until they went to a neighbor's house. The Wielands were not rescued until after 8 a.m., more than six hours after the accident.

The Hintons, who also were not rescued until several hours after the derailment, attempted to leave via their car, but since they could not see anything they eventually found some rags, soaked them with water, wrapped them around their heads and ducked into the basement.

"You could say we all collapsed in the basement," Dave Hinton said.

The Hintons were staying at the International Inn Saturday, along with their dog Jenny, who was not rescued from the house until about 11:30 on Friday night.

Jenny looked tired Saturday evening, her eyes and nose red and scarred from being burned by the anhydrous ammonia, but she was walking around, accepting all the love family and friends were willing to give her.

Dave Hinton, whose eyes were red and voice sounding as if he had laryngitis, said he was glad to be alive. The room they were staying in was kept dark because Dave's eyes are sensitive to the light and when he looks at things they are blurry.

Wieland said his family will be all right, but he gets upset when he watches the news and sees emergency officials patting themselves on the back complimenting each other on the rescue efforts.

"I have yet to figure out who they rescued," Wieland said. "For the life of me I don't know why they've got Gov. John Hoeven up here, except maybe for a media show."

Hoeven arrived in Minot soon after the accident where he flew over the scene in a helicopter that touched down at the parking lot of Dakota Square Mall.

Dave Hinton said he was very thankful for people who helped him and his family, especially two firefighters who pulled his family out.

"All of the people were tremendous once they got us," Hinton said.
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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/21/2002

Neighbors vent

Frustrated residents meet in Minot City Auditorium to discuss disaster

By: Marvin Baker

Editorial Senior

News Editor

Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Angry residents of the Tierricita Vallejo subdivision vented their frustrations Sunday regarding Friday's Canadian Pacific train derailment that leaked anhydrous ammonia through their neighborhood and into other areas of Minot.

At times the already-emotional meeting in the Minot City Auditorium became heated as residents wanted to know why the rescue effort took several hours, why an early-warning system was lackadaisical in getting information to the public and why the county's 911 system was so overloaded and not able to take the estimated 350 calls that were rushing in during the two hours after the disaster happened.

"I told them (911 dispatchers) over and over that my parents need help," said Amy Hinton of Minot. "The answer that dispatch gave me was 'thousands of people need help.'"



Beth Keenev/Staff

Hinton said it got to a point where she demanded the dispatcher write the information down so it wouldn't be forgotten. She said the people of the neighborhood saved themselves from disaster.

Hinton's father Dave, said he got the impression that his family was being left for dead after calling 911 "three or four times" and the dispatchers kept saying that someone would be assisting.

He said he gave dispatch the 36th Street Southwest address, which is a specific address for 911 emergencies, and it didn't seem to register with them.

"We laid in our basement for four hours without sound," Dave Hinton said. "We didn't expect to be rescued in the first hour, but four hours sir? Four hours - four hours? We thought we were dying!"

Minot Rural Fire Chief Bob Wetzler responded to Hinton. "We made every attempt to get into Tierricita Vallejo as soon as we could. I was one of the first on the scene and watched a deputy drive into the cloud and heard his report. It would have done no good to send people in immediately because we would have lost response people."

"I understand the delay to you must have seemed like years but there was no quick resolve to this emergency," Wetzler said. "I am sorry it took so long is all I can say. But we didn't write anyone off as dead."

Kerry Beechie explained that he must have been one of the first people to call into 911 after the train jumped the track at 1:40 Friday morning. He formed that conclusion because he said it seemed like he was talking to someone for a long time.

"But if it wasn't for my boss, who kept contact with a cell phone, I would have tried to flee because your first instinct is to flee danger, not stay in it," he said.

Beechie, whose 12-year-old daughter Kelsey remains in intensive care in a Minot hospital, said what bothered him more than the botched 911 response, was that it was stated at the initial press conference that the evacuation was successful.

"Don't sugarcoat the truth," Beechie said. "The public should know what the real news was. We thought our daughter was dead and my boss kept cell contact to reassure us that help was on its way."

Beechie briefly described the situation as it unfolded following the derailment: "It was clear about 4 o'clock. I could see trees across the street and a rail car in my back yard for two hours before they (rescuers) came. I don't like the message that it took an hour to evacuate when it actually took four hours."

Mike Elm, who said it actually took longer than four hours before rescuers got to his house, was also concerned about the evacuation announcement.

"This was a tragedy and we all have our stories, but the worst of it was the first press conference. You should have talked to us first, then had a conference," he said. "For the governor to come in and say great job to the response - response to what? We waited five hours."

Elm added that when rescuers finally did arrive, they were ill-prepared. "A guy walked into my house at 5:30 with an empty oxygen tank and without water," he said. "It was a bad situation."

He has since talked to people who were turned away from the Minot Air Force Base hospital even after initial reports were telling those in the disaster area to go to the base hospital since the anhydrous cloud was drifting northeastward and in the vicinity of Trinity Hospital in downtown Minot.

"That's ridiculous," Elm said. "We're all distraught and emotional, but our lives were inches away."

Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum, who appeared as stunned as the rest of the panel while hearing the testimony said, "This is all very painful, but I think we need to hear it."

Lt. Fred Debowey of the Minot Police Department tried to explain the situation in which few people heard early warnings and why the sirens didn't sound immediately as well as what happened to the 911 overload.

Debowey said the sirens didn't sound immediately because dispatch didn't know exactly what it was. Until they know what they're dealing with, and get direction from a higher authority, they won't respond. Debowey added the sirens that were designed for civil defense, are now used for weather-related emergencies and admitted that they don't always work as well as they should.

Debowey said there are four dedicated telephone lines to handle 911 calls and if all four meet their capacity, the calls will roll over to seven additional lines that he called basic 911. In other words, those lines don't trace addresses, which would explain why several disaster victims were asked their addresses.

"Think of what my 911 dispatchers were going through and they aren't done with this," Debowey

said.

Elm responded, "Don't think for us, warn us."

A number of Tierracita Vallejo residents complained that they needed a "Plan B" to initial reports that said they should run hot water to increase humidity in order to lessen the anhydrous smell. Since those residents have wells and not city water, and their electricity got knocked out, they didn't have water for a time and didn't know what else to do.

Others complained that local radio stations didn't switch programmed music to emergency broadcasts.

Still other residents suggested the Air Force or National Guard should have been dispatched to assist, rescue workers perhaps should have issued gas masks to affected residents, and helicopters should have flown over with loudspeakers to warn everyone or at least reassure them the situation wasn't catastrophic.

Ted Turpin, an investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board in Los Angeles, explained that this wasn't the worst rail-car accident he has witnessed. He did say, however, that it was a "large" accident.

"I know I'm from the outside. I am from the government and I know you're emotional right now," he said. "We are going to figure this out. We will track this and get recommendations."
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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/21/2002

Crews begin removing derailed cars

By: Tom Rafferty
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Crews worked steady Sunday removing rail cars from the site of a deadly derailment approximately one mile west of Minot in the Tierracita Vallejo neighborhood.

The accident happened shortly after 1:40 a.m. Friday and left a thick cloud of anhydrous ammonia over much of Minot that has been dubbed the "death cloud" by many local residents.

The scene of the derailment was very orderly Sunday, with dozens of workers scattered everywhere in the vicinity of the accident.

The crews included Canadian Pacific Railway employees, National Transportation Safety Board workers, general contractors and local and state emergency and health officials.

CP Rail workers escorted the media to the site Sunday, but limited reporters to a distance of a couple hundreds yards from the tracks, in addition to requiring them to stay in the vehicle they



Beth Keeney/Staff Photographer

Crews at the site of the Canadian Pacific train derailment Sunday work to contain and remove remaining anhydrous ammonia and debris. The tanker cars were emptied into waiting semitruck transport tanks.

rode in.

The stinging smell of anhydrous ammonia was not apparent until a person came within a couple hundred yards of the train tracks.

Dozens of large semi trucks, payloaders, pickup trucks and other vehicles stood on both sides of the makeshift road leading up to the tracks. Many of the semi trucks had "oversized load" signs on them and were sitting idle.

Closer up to the scene of the accident, there were empty, mangled rail cars that once contained anhydrous ammonia or another type of fertilizer, piles of train axles, dirt and sets of new track that were set aside and ready to be put in place after the train wreckage is removed from the scene.

Workers on or next to the railroad tracks wore gas masks and protective gear and were busy helping remove train cars or inspecting the site.

Not all of the workers were wearing gas masks, only the ones who were very close to the tracks.

Special cranes were on the scene to lift cars off of the tracks and semis equipped with tankers were used to transfer anhydrous ammonia out of the train cars. Once the anhydrous ammonia was drained from the cars, it was then hauled away.

According to Ian La Couvee, a public affairs representative for CP Rail, the entire site could be completely cleared of wreckage and cleaned up within the next two days. When the site is cleared, La Couvee said state and local health officials will determine when people can return to their homes.

It may take longer than two days, La Couvee said, because railroad officials are working closely with the NTSB to aid them in their investigation into the accident.

"The NTSB works very closely with us because they have to preserve evidence," La Couvee said.

He added the railroad is also testing soil to determine the amount of anhydrous ammonia in it. La Couvee said he did not know how much soil would have to be removed, but that there definitely will be some soil taken away.

La Couvee said the railroad will try to get the site back into its original condition.

"We always try to restore the site to the way it was before the accident," La Couvee said.

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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/21/2002

Media gets update on minot crisis

By: Marvin Baker
Editorial Senior News Editor
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Local, state and federal officials updated the media Sunday at noon concerning the train derailment Friday that left one man dead and 160 treated for disaster-related injuries.

A Canadian Pacific freight train carrying anhydrous ammonia, urea fertilizer and lumber, jumped the track in the Tierricita Vallejo subdivision of Minot Friday at 1:40 a.m. puncturing at least three of 15 anhydrous tankers and sending an ammonia cloud over northwest Minot and thrusting police and fire officials into action.

The 112-car train, according to Ted Turpin of the National Transportation Safety Board, had an engineer and conductor aboard when the accident occurred. It was traveling at 40 miles per hour causing the weight from the rear of the train to push the front cars off the track.

"This is still a very dangerous site and we're working to make it safe," Minot Mayor Carroll Erickson said. "We've had calls from our congressional delegation and they have promised us their staff will attempt to speed up the process of assistance."

According to Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum, of the 160 people treated thus far, 47 were given aid at the Edison Elementary School makeshift aid station, 19 were admitted to Trinity Hospital and seven remain hospitalized with three in intensive care.

There was one fatality. John Grabinger, 38, was found dead in his yard after being overcome by the anhydrous. Mellum also elaborated on a rumor suggesting a second person died as a result of the crash. "There has not been a second fatality," he said.

Minot Rural Fire Chief Bob Wetzler said his department is focused on water supply since one rail car continues to seep anhydrous. He has enlisted the cooperation of several neighboring fire departments to assist with pump trucks. He added the rally point has been moved north from where it was originally set up to help facilitate the removal of damaged rail cars.

According to Ward County Sheriff Vern Erck, the worst of the disaster is over and following a briefing of officials, it was determined that residents could be allowed back into their homes Sunday afternoon for short periods of time. While there, air and water quality was expected to be monitored by health officials.

"I took three trips around the perimeter this morning (Sunday) and it appears everything is normal," Erck said. "Our intention is to get everyone in there for basic purposes."

Lisa Clute of First
[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/22/2002

Questions remain in wake of Disaster

Police detective tells of family flight from Minot neighborhood

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - More than a dozen Minot Police Department employees and several firefighters were exposed to anhydrous ammonia while performing their duties during the disaster.

Fire chief Harold Haugstad said none of his firefighters went to the hospital, but he said they have had scratchy throats and burning eyes from their exposure.

Police Chief Dan Draovitch said his employees, several of them dispatchers, were checked over at the hospital. "I've signed 12 or 13 Workmen's Comp forms," he said.

Draovitch said he was going to the hospital Monday afternoon, himself, for a checkup. He said he had driven through the cloud of ammonia and had inhaled some of the gas. The chief had returned to duty last week after being off for several days with what was thought to be a bout of pneumonia.

Draovitch said Monday he had considered closing down Minot Central Dispatch for a time after the fumes got so bad in the police department.

He said he sent two dispatchers to the main fire station where a command center had been set up. "I did that for continuity in case we had to close down the dispatch center here," the chief said.

He held up two fingers and said, "We were this close to closing down the operation, but then the cloud lifted somewhat and everybody stayed put."

One of his officers, Chad Eagleson, who lives on North Hill, drove into the ammonia cloud on his way to the police station. The chief said Monday he had talked to Eagleson, who is now back on the job.

Ward County Sheriff Vern Erck said one of his deputies spent about 45 minutes stranded in his patrol car after he drove it off into the ditch on the east side of the U.S. Highway 83 Bypass. He said Deputy Scott Erb took the night off Sunday night after his experience.

Erck said Erb stayed in his car and covered up with his coat. He said the deputy told him he couldn't see out the window.

Erck said Erb was caught in the cloud while on patrol at about 1:45 a.m.



Heidi Weiss/Staff Photographer

Debris lays around the Lee and Carmel Wieland home after an anhydrous tank destroyed a portion of their house.

"He had all of his emergency lights and his spotlight on in the car and rescuers could just barely see the car," Erck said.

Erb was sent to the hospital to be examined after the incident.
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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/22/2002

Cleanup resumes

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Cleanup of a train derailment west of Minot resumed Monday having been halted the night before after dangerous levels of anhydrous ammonia gas were detected at the crash site.

An estimated 200,000 gallons of anhydrous ammonia escaped from seven of the 15 rail tank cars that derailed early Friday morning west of Minot, according to a Canadian Pacific Railway official.

Pat Pender said he didn't know if the amount of ammonia released was a record for any derailment in the country, but said it was a "large" amount.

It was large enough to send 320 people to the hospital for treatment. Emergency officials said Monday of that number, 12 remained hospitalized Monday, two of them were in intensive care.

There was one fatality. John Grabinger, 38, who lived in Tierrecita Vallejo, was found dead in his driveway after his pickup crashed into a house. His wife managed to get to another house but was later hospitalized.

Pender, a CP Rail vice president from Canada, told a news conference at the Minot Auditorium Monday that the railroad has developed a two-phase plan to accelerate the end of an evacuation at the site.

Railroad crews are about half way finished with the first phase of the project that involves removing 31 derailed cars from the site. The remaining loads of ammonia are being recovered from damaged tank cars.

He said it wasn't known how much longer Phase 1 will take. Phase 2 will consist of mitigation and cleanup of the site.

Crews were called off Sunday night shortly after 9 p.m. when a tank car was being lifted up and there was a "spike of ammonia." Work resumed Monday after air monitoring equipment indicated it was safe to return.

Pender said the spike was caused by ammonia that had leaked into the ground, surfaced and



Heidi Weiss/Staff Photographer

Semitrailers sit lined up ready to haul away damaged train cars.

turned to gas at the site. Railroad officials said ammonia is a colorless liquid at temperatures below minus 33 degrees centigrade and turns into a gas at higher temperatures.

The railroad is applying a neutralizing agent to soil at the derailment site. That is designed to reduce vapors to safe levels and minimize exposure to the public, he said.

Air monitoring will continue throughout the cleanup and crews are working closely with local and state officials.

Jerome Gruenberg, a Ward County commissioner and mayor of Burlington, talked about the power situation in Burlington, caused by the derailment. He said the community is normally served by Xcel Energy. Xcel patched into Verendrye Electric Cooperative lines to restore power.

Gruenberg said the community is having problems with sewer and water pumps because of the phasing of the power. He said that the city is rounding up generators to run those pumps so they don't burn out.

He also warned people to unplug their electronic equipment such as TVs and computers that could be "fried" by power spikes. He said he has been told that appliances such as refrigerators and freezers should be OK on the present power source.

Ted Turpin of the National Transportation Safety Board said his crew is continuing to collect physical evidence at the scene. He said it could be several months before a cause of the derailment is known.

There has been criticism from some residents of Tierrecita Vallejo about being stranded in their houses for as many as four hours before being rescued. Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum said, "We had mutual aid and had resources staged and ready to help, but there were times when we just couldn't get there."

Mellum said, "As soon as we get through this we will have public meetings to talk about this disaster."

The derailment occurred at 1:40 a.m. Friday on the western outskirts of Minot. The train that derailed carried a total of 112 cars. It originated in Edmonton, Alberta, and was destined for St. Paul, Minn. A total of 31 cars, include 15 containing ammonia, derailed.

Pender said the train crewmen, an engineer and a conductor have been interviewed. Their testimony has not yet been made public. CP Rail had announced earlier that the eastbound train was traveling at 40 mph, the speed limit in that area, according to the train's "black box."

Another news conference has been scheduled for today at 1 p.m. in the auditorium.
[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/23/2002

Residents flood claims center

CP Rail reimburses those financially impacted by the train derailment and chemical spill

By: Jim Mattson
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - The Canadian Pacific Railway claims center kept issuing checks to area residents Tuesday.

Derek Anderson and Amanda Duchsherer, Minot, said they were satisfied with the settlement they received at the CP Rail claims center in Dakota Square Mall. "It's a pretty good thing," Duchsherer said of the claims center. "But they could be a little more organized."

They were reimbursed for missing work, and CP Rail also included money in the claims check for their baby's brief stay in the hospital, the couple said.

Inside the large, drab room, John Krcmar, a casualty management representative for CP Rail, said his company wanted to reimburse residents financially impacted by the train derailment.

"This is a tragic event that affected a lot of people in Minot," Krcmar said. "We want to make people whole for their out-of-pocket expenses."

There were about 30 people waiting to talk to a representative at mid-afternoon Tuesday.

Krcmar said there have been waits of up to an hour, but most of the people have been patient.

"By the time they got up to me, they were happy because they knew they were getting a check and walking out the door," he said.

Nine representatives were taking claims. At 6 p.m. the room was packed; the number waiting was at more than 100. A line of people was snaking its way around the large room located next to Radio Shack in the mall. Others were seated in chairs, waiting their turn. People, for the most part, were good-natured and a sense of camaraderie was in the air. It may have been the reaction people have toward one another when they've experienced something together.

Krcmar said residents have been mostly polite and patient toward representatives of the railroad.

"There are wonderful folks here," he said. "Great small-town values. People have been very understanding and very grateful for what we've been able to do."

Most residents are being reimbursed for expenses incurred during Friday and the weekend.



Heidi Weiss/Staff Photographer

Jerry Boehm fills out a claims form in the Canadian Pacific Railway claims office set in Dakota Square.

Some of those expenses covered by the railroad include hotel costs, restaurant meals and wages lost due to a business closure or work shut-down. CP Rail is also working with businesses to reimburse them for losses incurred because they were forced to close.

Krcmar said CP Rail is also working out an agreement with Trinity Hospital to pay the bills of those who needed treatment

He was encouraging those with auto claims to submit them to their insurance companies. He said the railroad would likely make reimbursements.

Personal injury settlements are not being discussed now, Krcmar said. He said those will be dealt with later.

Any settlement made with residents now does not mean that other grievances will not be addressed in the future, Krcmar said.

"We're not trying to get them to sign any quick releases or anything," he said.

Krcmar said very few people have been trying to take advantage of the claims system. One of the few, a man trying to submit a claim, wasn't even a resident of Minot, he said.

Many people are content to be able to tell someone their own disaster stories, Krmac said.

"The people seem to want an opportunity to vent and to just talk," he said.

Krmac said the staff at the center is working daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. He said the claims center has been open since Saturday and would probably remain active until Friday night.

Wade Huus, Minot, was one of those waiting for an opportunity to talk to a representative. Huus, self-employed, said he was unable to work Friday and was submitting a claim for his lost hours. Like others at the claim center, Huus said he learned of the process through word-of-mouth.

"My partner notified me," he said.

Jason Skaggs was waiting in line with his wife, Amanda. He said he appreciated what CP Rail was doing.

"I think it's a very good gesture," he said.

He said their home was hit hard by the toxic cloud in the northwest section of the city near Minot State University. Jason Skaggs said he developed a fever and bad cough because of exposure to the anhydrous ammonia. He said they were submitting a claim for the evacuation and illness.

"Mainly for just being put in that kind of situation," he said. "Then there's the thought we could have lost our lives."

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/23/2002

Car removal nears completion

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - The task of moving rail cars from a crash site that leaked fertilizer on the west edge of Minot neared completion Tuesday while residents of a nearby Tierrecita Vallejo waited to return home.

All 31 cars that derailed early Friday were to be moved from the scene and secured by midnight, said John Bergene, a spokesman for Canadian Pacific Railway. After the cars were moved, officials planned to start removing anhydrous ammonia that had leaked into the soil.

In an update on the amount spilled, Bergene said 10 cars carrying anhydrous lost all of their contents, about 300,000 gallons, in the derailment. A cloud of the chemical that drifted over the city killed one man and injured hundreds more.

"We expect to have the track usable sometime later (Wednesday)," Bergene said.

One of the victims whose story was partially told in 911 soundbites released to electronic media Tuesday is improving, according to her father.

Kerry Beechie said his daughter, Kelsey, 12, is improving after suffering burns when she went outside after the spill.

"She is getting second-degree burn treatment," he said. "She has huge blisters the size of baseballs on her feet, tops and bottoms. Her mouth is burned. She hasn't been able to eat anything yet."

The Minot Daily News has requested printed transcripts of the emergency calls and will publish a representative sample of them when they become available.

Canadian Pacific Railway expected to have all of the wrecked rail cars removed from the derailment site west of Minot by midnight Tuesday. But, a State Health Department official said Tuesday that it will be a long time yet until all of the anhydrous ammonia is gone.

At a news conference Tuesday afternoon, Terry O'Clair of the health department said about half of the ammonia on board the tanker cars has sunk into the ground and has been causing problems for workers trying to clean up the mess.



Heidi Weiss/Staff Photographer

Packages of zeolite sit near anhydrous tanker Monday afternoon. The zeolite was used to soak up anhydrous ammonia from the ground.

Some of the ammonia has come out of the ground and turned to gas and that has caused higher readings on air monitoring equipment at the site. Those so called "spikes" have at times halted cleanup operations at the scene.

O'Clair said there was a small discharge of gas from the soil again Monday night. Work had been stalled for several hours after readings reached high levels Sunday shortly after 9 p.m. Work didn't resume until Monday.

He said it isn't yet known for sure how much of the chemical remains in the soil. He said the health department will drill some holes to check. He also said that absorbent materials being put over the ammonia spills have soaked up some of it. The material was likened to kitty litter.

While the spikes are causing problems for workers, they also mean that people from the half-mile area around the derailment site who are out of their homes, might not be able to go home for several days yet, O'Clair said.

"We have to be sure that it's safe before allowing them to go back into their homes," he said.

O'Clair said wells in the Tierrecita Vallejo area will have to be checked and the department will monitor the nearby Souris River as well. He said preliminary samples of well water will be tested before residents move back into the area and will be checked periodically after that. "It will probably take months to complete the monitoring," he said.

O'Clair said there could be some fish kills in the river. He also said that the city of Minot is not using the river now as a water source and probably won't until samples downstream from the site can be tested and found to be free from contamination from the wreck site.

O'Clair said the ground at the site will be giving off a gas smell into the city to the east, but O'Clair said there should be only low levels of the smell. He said strong winds would help clear up the smell, "But unfortunately since the derailment we haven't had a lot of wind."

In other news, Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum announced that he plans to ask the county commission to seek a disaster declaration for all of the county because of the derailment.

Wetzler told those at the conference that he has ordered some of his fire equipment removed from the derailment scene and put back on regular duty. The department and other fire departments in the areas have been pumping and spraying water at the derailment site for several days to hold down the ammonia fumes.

Wetzler sounded tired when he said, "My firefighters are physically overtaxed. They're physically beat and have taken an emotional beating as well ..."

Ted Turpin, a representative from the National Transportation Safety Board told the group that his team has about finished collecting physical evidence at the scene. He said material gathered on the site will be coupled with historical data and interviews with the train crew.

Turpin said the team will assemble in several months in Washington, D.C., to come up with a probable cause for the derailment. He said the study will also include recommendations to the transportation board. He said the findings will be made public and the board will use the pressure of the public to make improvements so a derailment such as this will not happen again.

Turpin said the speed limit at the accident scene will be restricted for quite a while after the tracks are rebuilt to make sure that everything is operating smoothly.

The NTSB team leader said that by talking to train crews that passed over the stretch of track west of Minot previously, the team didn't find any problems with the rails at that point. He added that electronic tests had been conducted on the rails nine days before the derailment. He said the track had been visually inspected last Tuesday.

Turpin said again Tuesday that the probable cause of the wreck won't be known for about nine months.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.
[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/24/2002

Phase one completed

CP Rail says track has been rebuilt and trains have used it

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

- A Canadian Pacific Railway official announced Wednesday that phase one – the removal of the 31 derailed freight cars from the immediate derailment site west of Minot – has been finished.

John Bergene, a public affairs official with CP Rail, told a news conference at the Minot Auditorium that the track has been rebuilt and the first train came through the area at a much restricted speed at about 9:30 Wednesday morning.

Bergene said rail traffic through the area will be irregular for the time being and will be scheduled around the efforts to further clean up the site.

The railroad official said all of the cars have now been moved at least 100 feet away from the derailment spot. He said there are still two tank cars with ammonia in them and it would be transferred to tanker trucks for removal.

He said of the 15 anhydrous tank cars on the train, eight lost their entire contents and five others are intact.

Bergene said the amount of ammonia that escaped from the wrecked tankers was pegged at about 240,000 gallons. He said it was hard to come up with an exact figure on the escaped gas. He added that in his 32 years with the railroad, he had never had a derailment with that much product on board.

Earlier, railroad officials had said as much as 300,000 gallons of ammonia in 10 cars had escaped.

Bergene told the news conference that some of the heavy equipment has already been removed from the scene, as have some of the workers. He said anywhere from 100 to 200 people have been working at the site.

Bergene said phase two, the cleanup, is now under way and will continue for some time. He said the wrecked cars will be cut up and removed. The work of removing the anhydrous that seeped

into the ground will continue.

Meanwhile, it was announced that the emergency operations center in the auditorium was closed down at 5 p.m. Wednesday. Health and environmental agencies will continue to operate from there, however.

Figures released Wednesday indicated that 370 people had been examined at the hospital emergency room and Edison Elementary School. Thirty-two people were admitted to the hospital and four remain. None are still in the intensive care unit.

Thom Mellum, Ward County's emergency manager, announced that the National Transportation Board team will attend a news conference today to provide additional information on its activities.

Terry O'Clair of the State Health Department said all schools in the affected area have been checked with air monitoring equipment. He said all of the readings were zero.

The Park Board said it has swept and re-iced all of the outdoor skating rinks in the area. There had been some complaints of ammonia smells on clothing of people using the rinks.

O'Clair had bad news Wednesday for residents of the Tierrecita Vallejo neighborhood, where about 20 families there are out of their homes because of the derailment. O'Clair said they won't be able to move back in for possibly a week. He said he planned to meet with residents of that area Wednesday.

O'Clair said the problem has been "spikes," or elevated levels of ammonia caused by the moving of equipment over the derailment site. When the spikes occur, the cleanup operation is suspended to protect the workers.

Mellum said Wednesday the closure of the emergency operations center marks the end of the emergency response activities, but that authorities will stay alert to any possible change in the situation.

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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/24/2002

Ammonia kills wildlife

By: Tom Rafferty
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - As many as five dead deer have been spotted on the Souris River near the site of last Friday's deadly train derailment in which anhydrous ammonia escaped into the atmosphere approximately one mile west of Minot.

Judy Behm, who lives behind Behm's Truck Stop, spotted one dead buck a couple of hundred yards from her house, but said she knows people who have seen as many as five additional dead deer.



Tom Rafferty/Staff Writer

A dead deer is spotted on the Souris River behind Behm's Truck Stop. About five or six dead deer have been found in the area by local residents.

The deer spotted near Behm's home appeared to have had blood run from its nose and mouth.

Behm said when the cloud of anhydrous ammonia hit the area, it was so thick in her yard that she couldn't see outside. When she first opened a door to see what was going on, one of her dogs ran outside.

She later got her dog to come back inside. The dog is now taking eye drops and antibiotics for her lungs. Behm said she too is taking eye drops.

Since the deadly ammonia cloud covered much of Minot early Friday, there has been concern about the health of animals.

Mark Larson, who is in the process of building a house near the Tierrecita Vallejo neighborhood, said he is concerned with the health of his horses that were in a barn when the accident occurred.

Larson said the horses have shown signs of skin and nasal problems.

Aside from being pets, Larson said his six horses are performance horses used in competitive events and he is worried how they will perform in the future.

"Their main function is to be able to go into an arena and move quickly and effectively and carry you as fast as possible," Larson said. "If they don't have good lungs that's a problem."

Larson said he is monitoring the horses' temperatures and will have a veterinarian check the horses.

Ron Thunshelle, a Minot veterinarian who lives a short distance west of the derailment, said his horses seem to be doing well. He is concerned about one of the older horses, however, because it is having some breathing difficulty.

"They're doing better than I would have expected," Thunshelle.

Thunshelle said he has received several calls from people asking about the health of their animals and he will be taking a look at some horses in the next few days.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/25/2002

New rail is suspect

National Transportation Safety Board representative said Thursday that a foot-long section of rail was replaced 18 months ago

By: Ken Crites

Editorial Staff Writer

Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - A National Transportation Safety Board representative said in Minot Thursday that a 36-foot-long section of rail replaced by the Canadian Pacific Railway 18 months ago is a suspect in the train derailment west of Minot a week ago.

Ted Turpin, who heads the NTSB team examining the incident, was quick to point out, however, that the exact cause of the derailment won't be known until probably next fall at the earliest.

He said the NTSB team learned that the section of rail was replaced after an electronic detector had determined that a portion of the rail at that point was defective. He said the railroads have machines that can look inside a rail to make a determination.

Turpin said the team pulled that section of rail aside and reassembled it in a nearby field, away from the derailment site. He said it was similar to the way the board reconstructs airplanes in a search for the cause of a crash.

He said investigators noticed slight damage, what he called "dimples," on wheels on the left side of two locomotives and three cars that remained attached to the locomotives during the derailment. Turpin said the dimples indicated that the wheels struck something.

Turpin said that interviews with the train crew indicated that the train hit a "rough spot" while in the area of the derailment site and brakes had been applied in an emergency manner.

He said the replaced rail was on the north side of the tracks. It had been held in place with steel plates called splice bars on both ends where it was joined to the existing rail when the section was replaced. He said the splice bars were broken at the joints.

Turpin said the east end of the rail was deformed at the top. He said the damage is called "battering." He said damaged portions of that rail have been cut off and sent to a laboratory for analysis to see if the battering occurred before or after the derailment.

Turpin said interviews with the previous train crew that crossed over the same section of track an hour earlier, at about midnight, indicated that they did not feel anything unusual at that spot in the tracks.

Turpin said he will be leaving Minot, but that two other groups of investigators from the NTSB will remain to continue looking at the rail and also the ammonia tankers.

Turpin said an investigation requires cooperation. He said local agencies and CP Rail have gone out of their way to cooperate. "Our team members were treated graciously," he said.

Officials at the last daily news conference Thursday talked about an emission of ammonia from

the site that occurred earlier that morning in northwest Minot.

Officials of the Environmental Protection Agency said there was an air inversion in the area of northwest Minot Thursday morning, causing the cloud of ammonia to stay close to the ground. One area that was checked closely was Bel Air School.

Kids were already in school when the cloud formed. The children were kept inside until a check of air quality by the EPA and Health Department determined that the levels inside the school and outside were safe. An EPA official that "sheltering in place" is the best way to handle anhydrous ammonia.

That was the same advice local officials put out last Friday during the release of ammonia from the derailment.

Health officials said air quality readings have been taken all over the area and the four schools that are located there. Readings will be taken every morning until the derailment site is completely cleaned up.

The policy for school attendance is that if levels of ammonia should become high before school, the schools would be closed for the day. If a problem develops after schools start classes for the day, children would be kept indoors.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/25/2002

Minot anhydrous leak could be largest on planet

By: Ken Crites

Editorial Staff Writer

Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - "The largest anhydrous release on the planet" is what an internal memo calls the derailment of a Canadian Pacific Railway train on Minot's west edge a week ago today.

A copy of the undated fax memo was obtained by the Minot Daily News Thursday. The cover sheet was missing, so it's not known who sent it or to whom it was addressed.

According to the memo "...100,000 gallons of anhydrous ammonia is near the Souris River."

CP Rail officials said earlier that between 240,000 and 300,000 gallons of anhydrous ammonia were contained in eight rail tank cars that were wrecked in the early morning hours last Friday.

A portion of the ammonia was released into the air, causing a dense cloud that sent more than 370 people to medical facilities and killed one person in a neighborhood near the derailment site.

The memo was apparently directed to contract workers in charge of the cleanup efforts that are under way.

The memo cautions, "NO cowboys out there, make sure we're doing it safe. Remember temperature issues – Level A or Level B with appropriate skin protection – be very careful."

The memo also discusses plans for getting the remaining ammonia removed from the site.

Pat Pender, a CP Rail vice president from Canada who leads the railroad's contingent in Minot, told a news conference Thursday that phase one, the emergency response effort, has pretty much wound down and phase two, the remediation process, is in full swing.

He said they are looking at the concentrations of ammonia and are putting together a plan to reduce it and eventually remove it in conjunction with several agencies. Pender said workers are capping areas with high concentrations of ammonia with clay-like materials, called zeolite, to help contain vapors.

Pender said the railroad is also planning to open some kind of a facility to report on air quality to the public in the area. He said there are plans to equip the facility with telephones and "real-time" information will be accessible.

The railroad will also work with the electronic media to pass on information as well. In addition, Pender said the railroad is planning to put out a daily bulletin about what is going on and what is planned for the next day.

He said he hopes to have the facility up and operating within the next day or so.

Pender had kind words for emergency response agencies in Minot and the county.

"The agencies performed at peak levels for countless hours. It was a pleasure to work with them. We received first-rate cooperation," he said.

Pender also thanked the people of Minot for their "cooperation and bravery. I've enjoyed the local folks' hospitality," he said.

However at the press conference Thursday, some not-so-kind words were directed at the local news media.

Thom Mellum, Ward County's emergency manager, said he was upset by some editorials in the Minot Daily News.

And Bob Wetzler, the chief of Minot's Rural Fire Department, said he was not speaking in defense of anyone, because the actions of rescue and emergency personnel don't need defending.

"The emergency response community worked admirably," said Wetzler, who said earlier during [MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/26/2002

Lawsuit filed against CP Rail

By: Jim Mattson
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - A lawsuit seeking damages was filed Friday against Canadian Pacific Railway. The suit, filed in federal court in Bismarck, was started in response to the derailment of a CP Rail train and the subsequent spill of anhydrous ammonia near Minot in the early-morning hours of Jan. 18.

The Fargo law firm of Solberg, Stewart, Miller, Johnson, Tjon & Kennelly, LTD., filed the suit.

"We feel there are very substantial damages for the people who received serious injuries as well as the people who sustained property damage," said Mike Miller, one of the firm's attorneys who will be working on the case.

Miller said the firm will be seeking class-action status.

Local plaintiffs in the suit were named as Trina Mehl, Jason Olsen and Susan Olsen, all of Minot.

Trina Mehl, when contacted at her home, said she had no comment. No phone number was listed for either Jason Olsen or Susan Olsen in Minot.

In addition to the three people named in the lawsuit, the class-action complaint states it seeks to represent all others impacted by the accident.

Miller said the railroad has 30 to 45 days to respond after being presented with the complaint.

John Bergene, assistant director of public affairs for CP Rail, said late Friday afternoon that his company had not seen the lawsuit. He said the railroad company would not have any comments until its officials were able to study the lawsuit.

In the suit, attorneys said the plaintiffs have incurred damages in excess of \$75,000. Miller said damages will actually far exceed the \$75,000 mark, but that is the benchmark sum that needs to be included in a class-action complaint.

Miller said his firm will be advertising locally in order to get names of people wishing to join the class-action suit. He said there could potentially be thousands who are included in the lawsuit. He said the firm will be sending experts to Minot to obtain information.

"We do not know the extent of the injuries and damages suffered by the people up there," Miller said.

In order to have class-action status, the lawsuit needs to be certified by a judge.

Miller said two other law firms, both with extensive experience in class-action lawsuits, will be working with the Fargo firm. They are Zimmerman Reed, Minneapolis, and the Law Office of Daniel E. Becnel Jr., Reserve, La.

A number of allegations were listed in the lawsuit. It said the anhydrous ammonia cloud drifted for

many miles from its site and caused fear, inconvenience, property damage and personal injuries to plaintiffs and others similarly situated.

The suit further stated the derailment and emissions were caused by the fault and negligence of CP Rail. It also said people in the vicinity sustained personal injury and property damage, along with emotional and mental damages.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/26/2002

Officials will have to address issues

By: Tom Rafferty
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Local government officials will eventually have to address some issues related to the Jan. 18 train derailment after things begin to return to normal for Minot residents affected by the accident.

Minot City Council member Curt Zimbelman said some issues concerning the accident may come up at next week's City Council subcommittee meetings, but he hasn't heard of anything definite.

"I think we're trying to get over the tragedy first," Zimbelman said.

City Council member Stephan Podrygula said there are several things that the local officials should be considering in light of the accident.

One concern Podrygula has is the proximity of the police station to the railroad tracks.

The City Council recently approved a major remodeling project for the police station, but Podrygula said they may want to reconsider the project. Podrygula suggested that the city could even build a new station somewhere else.

"It seems like asking for trouble," Podrugula said. "You could have a train derail anywhere, but we know there's a lot of bad stuff going by those tracks and why would we want to tie ourselves into a command center that is going to be 100 yards away?"

A short time after the accident, Minot Police Chief Dan Draovitch came close to evacuating the police station but decided not to.

Podrygula has been a strong supporter of adding staff to the fire and police departments in Minot and he hopes the accident will convince more people of the need to put more resources toward public safety.

"I've always argued for the need to attend to more public safety issues and I hope this gives it more energy," Podrygula said.

Another issue that will likely be discussed in future government meetings is how to pay for the additional manpower and resources that had to be used for the rescue efforts.

Zimbelman said he expects Canadian Pacific to reimburse the city for expenses.
"Eventually we will certainly be looking to recoup some of our costs," Zimbelman said.

Last summer, CP Rail settled with the City of Red Deer, Alberta, for \$375,000 in Canadian funds for expenses related to an anhydrous ammonia spill there in February.

Ward County Commissioner Vern Link said most of the county employees received the day off the Friday the accident occurred and the sheriff's department has spent additional money for overtime. Link said additional cost directly related to the accident that the county incurred could be about \$25,000.

At the commission's next meeting on Feb. 5, Link said there will be a disaster declaration made for the county and commissioners will likely receive updates on the status of the accident.

Emergency policies and procedures might also be discussed in the future, but first, all of the agencies that responded to the accident will have to get together and discuss what happened, Zimbelman said.

Despite some complaints from residents affected by the accident, Zimbelman said he thinks the emergency workers did a good job.

"You've got to look at the overall picture and what the results were. Although we lost a life, it could have been many more," he said.

Link said he was proud of the way emergency workers handled the accident, especially the way several agencies worked together.

The only way rescue workers could have gone into homes to rescue people is if they all had some sort of protective masks with respirators, and even then, rescue workers would have had to provide the protective equipment to the victims, Link said.

Link said it would be difficult to stockpile and maintain enough gas masks and respirators to provide victims with in the event of another large accident.

Through whatever comes out of the accident, most people agree that the community should evaluate what happened during the accident and rescue effort and learn from it.

"Let's not make any judgments yet and let's give it some time and work through it, not just forget about it, but learn from it," Zimbelman said.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/28/2002

Cleanup continues

60 to 70 loads of contaminated soil taken to landfill daily

By: Marvin Baker
Editorial Senior News Editor
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - A Canadian Pacific Railway official working at the site of the Jan. 18 train derailment west of Minot, doesn't have a timeline on the clean up, however, he is confident it is winding down.

In addition, 16 trains are passing through the area every 24 hours, but are restricted to a maximum speed of 10 miles per hour.

Tom Parsons, an environmental engineer from CP Rail's Minneapolis office, said Sunday that even though work continues at a fast pace, it has become routine in the past couple of days.

"We've been working 10-hour days and we'll be increasing that to 12 hours," Parsons said. "We have 16 trucks hauling dirt to the Sawyer Landfill. We're still punching holes and hope to get an estimate (today) on how many yards of dirt we still have to remove. We can only load so many loads in a day and the landfill can only accept so much in a day."

An estimated 60 to 70 loads of contaminated soil are going to the landfill daily. On Saturday, 451 tons were hauled out and Parsons expected 600 tons to be removed Sunday.

A backhoe operator, who works in a supplied oxygen environment, is digging down at least 10 feet on the south side of the tracks, according to Parsons, to scoop up the contaminated soil. Zeolite, a mineral that traps the ammonia smell, is added to the soil before it is trucked away.

"This is the first time we've used zeolite and it's doing an excellent job knocking down the odors," Parsons said. "Zeolite is going to Sawyer and it's subduing the smell."

He added there's a requirement at the landfill in which dirt with high concentrations of anhydrous won't be accepted. He didn't say what constitutes a high concentration. "When it leaves here, you won't be able to smell anything coming off the truck," Parsons said. "There's a lot of work yet to be done, but we are clearing it up."

Parsons also had high praise for Earthmovers, the Minot company contracted to do the clean-up work. He said they are doing a great job.

Russ Gohl, the owner of Earthmovers, said he now has 23 people working to remove the



Beth Keeney/Staff Photographer

An air quality controller tests levels of anhydrous ammonia Sunday at the site of the Jan. 18th derailment.

contaminated soil. He said he and his crews have cleaned up other derailment sites, but nothing of this magnitude. There are also 15 environmental people on site.

Gohl, who observed the derailment site by helicopter shortly after it happened, said the railroad has sent him to training for just such a disaster. He said he spent five days working with live anhydrous, learning about how to respond and how to work in the environment.

"From a third-party haz-mat person observing, they (first responders) did everything correctly," Gohl said. "Vehicles would not run at 2 a.m. (after the accident at 1:40 a.m. Jan. 18). Laws of physics would not allow them to run. We have no problems now, it's irrelevant, but going back in defense of the firemen, they did the right thing. They couldn't get in to the cloud of anhydrous. There was no oxygen in the air."

Like Parsons, Gohl isn't sure how long his crew will be at the site. He said Environmental Protection Agency personnel are still drilling test holes and monitoring for acceptable levels. "So right now, we're doing what we know how to do," he said.

According to Parsons, working conditions have been favorable. There have been some minor setbacks, such as pockets of high concentrations of anhydrous, however, the general work has become routine.

Five people from the EPA and the North Dakota State Health Department are doing constant air monitoring. Six test wells have now been dug on, or near the site, and more are expected so health officials can monitor ground water, according to Parsons.

"This way, we can be assured that the ground water leaving the site is clean," he said. "A lot of safety precautions are still being taken. This is still an emergency area."

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/29/2002

Cleanup effort picking up

Crew will be working longer hours to eradicate contaminated soil

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

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

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.



Beth Keeney/Staff Photographer

A front end loader and backhoe are used to fill trucks with dirt contaminated with anhydrous ammonia from the Jan. 18th CP derailment. Once filled the trucks departed for the Sawyer Landfill.

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 side. 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.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/30/2002

Soil removed, worries remain

Massive amounts of ammonia-laden soil have been taken to landfill

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Darcie Park, a public relations specialist for Canadian Pacific Railway, said Tuesday that activities have quieted down considerably at the derailment site west of Minot.

Cleanup efforts are still under way, however, and are expected to continue for several more days. Massive amounts of ammonia-laden soil have been removed from the site a short distance from the U.S. Highway 83 Bypass in west Minot. The dirt has been trucked to a landfill near Sawyer for disposal.

It's not yet known how much soil destined to be removed remains there.

Park said that CP Rail's claim facility is now open. She said anyone who has filed a claim or is planning to do so can call the center at 838-9452.

Information from the company's air quality facility is also available. That number is 839-2203.

There was no indication when the evacuated families will be allowed to move back into the neighborhood around the spill site. Another news conference is scheduled for today at the city auditorium.

Meanwhile, Scott Radig of the State Health Department said Tuesday that some preliminary sampling of water wells in the derailment area has been completed. He said the samples are used as background information to compare to future test results.

Radig said that low levels of nitrates have been found in private wells tested so far, but said that is not unusual and the levels are well within standards. Radig said the nitrates found likely existed in the wells before the massive derailment and release of anhydrous ammonia from the wrecked rail tankers. He said nitrates found so far could have



Heidi Weiss/Staff Photographer

Dump trucks unload dirt from the train derailment site in the Sawyer landfill. An employee of the landfill helps the drivers to know where to dump the dirt. Between 100 and 200 loads of dirt are brought to the dump each day.

come from fertilizer and sewer systems in the area.

Existing wells have been checked and four or five new wells have been drilled in various areas near the spill site. Two wells, one shallow and one deep, have been drilled at the derailment site and will be monitored on a regular basis to see if ammonia has invaded the watertables.

He said, however, that it is still too soon to have water migrate through the 50 feet of soil that overlays the groundwater in that area.

City of Minot officials said earlier that the city is not drawing water from a well about a mile from the derailment site. The city is also not using water from the Souris River.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 1/31/2002

More seek medical attention

Almost 1,000 people have been treated since the anhydrous ammonia spill

By: Ken Crites

Editorial Staff Writer

Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - The number of people who have sought medical attention and are continuing to do so because of the anhydrous ammonia spill west of Minot Jan. 18, has increased dramatically.

Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum told a news conference at the city auditorium that as of noon Wednesday, 590 people have been treated at clinics and doctors' offices. That's in addition to the 400 or so people who had been treated at Trinity Hospital and the Edison School aid station earlier.

Mellum said 32 had been admitted for treatment, but that all had been released.

Meanwhile, Canadian Pacific Railway officials told those at the news conference Wednesday they are working as fast as possible to clean up the derailment site west of Minot and allow evacuated people to return to their homes.

Darcie Park, a public relations specialist with CP Rail, said that nearly 50 dump trucks and associated equipment are working at the derailment site to remove ammonia-saturated soil. She said that as of noon Wednesday, 5,400 tons of soil had been scooped up and hauled to a Sawyer landfill.

Justin Meyer, a CP Rail environmental engineer, said cleanup crews are working on both sides of the tracks and have gone down from one to three feet at the derailment site to remove soil.

Park said it's still not known when the clean-up effort will be completed and when the evacuees will be allowed to return home.

There was the smell of ammonia for a time in west Minot Wednesday morning after workers digging at the derailment site hit a spot containing a high concentrations of ammonia. The spot was quickly covered up with the mineral zeolite and soil to knock down the fumes.

Scott Radig, an environmental engineer with the State Health Department, said the reading from the "spike" was too low to be considered a health risk, but the smell was there.

Meyer said crews have used zeolite to soak up ammonia in the ditches on both sides of the railroad tracks in and near the derailment site.

Meyer was asked if the area directly beneath the tracks had been cleaned up. He said the railroad hadn't done anything yet under the track, but that soil boring would be done to determine if there is any remaining ammonia there.

He added the railroad is prepared to take ice off the Souris River that was contaminated by the spill. Water samples have been taken from the river and the ice and crews will cut out the ice if necessary. Health Department officials said the ice covering on the river prevented ammonia from getting directly into the river.

Radig reported Wednesday that preliminary indications are that water in the water table flows to the northwest of the derailment site rather than toward the river and underground aquifers.

"At this point, water is safe in the area," Radig said. He stressed, however, that monitoring will continue on a long-term basis.

The engineer said Tuesday that wells in the neighborhood near the derailment site had shown only background amounts of nitrates in them – from natural sources. He said the early samples taken from the wells will be compared to any future samples to determine if contamination has occurred.

The next news conference has been scheduled for noon Friday.
[MINOT

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 2/2/2002

Disaster response issues

Emergency people meet to look at communications

By: Ken Crites

Editorial Staff Writer

Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - City and county emergency people put their heads together with representatives of the electronic media Friday to try to solve some communications problems.

The problems came to light with the derailment and massive anhydrous ammonia spill early on Jan. 18.

Police Chief Dan Draovitch led the "brainstorming session" to find out what went wrong with communications and how to fix the problem.

Don May of KCJB Radio told the group that he was notified at home by Lt. Kurt Smith of the Minot Police Department by phone. Smith was the overnight shift commander. May said the EBS system at the station did not work and phone lines there were jammed.

Jim Olson of KXMC-TV and Kim Fundingsland of KMOT-TV were also notified. All three responded to their stations and began broadcasting information about the derailment and advice about what people should do.

In the case of the ammonia spill, the advice to the public was to shelter in their homes.

May said that Jerry Michels was the only person on duty at KCJB at the time. Michels, in a recent interview, said he was angered because the EBS system at the station didn't work. He said he didn't know what had happened and was waiting for some official word about the disaster and it didn't come.

May told the group that the EBS hotline between Minot Central Dispatch and the station has been redone and now works. KCJB Radio and KMOT-TV are the official EBS stations in Minot to provide information in such an emergency.

May said a hotline has also been established between his station and KXMC-TV. Fundingsland said emergency officials can contact overnight operations people of his headquarters station in Bismarck who can broadcast a "crawler" across KMOT-TV screens in Minot, even if there is nobody at the local station.

There were also suggestions to explore the possibility of having local officials contact the National Weather Service office in Bismarck, which in turn would alert broadcast station operators through the severe weather warning system.

Olson said KXMC-TV had gone off the air at about 2 a.m., shortly after the derailment had occurred. Those called to the station started broadcasting shortly thereafter.

All three media reps stressed the importance of having officials on the air giving people official information and advice on what to do.

There were also suggestions that in the case of a power outage during a disaster that people have portable radios with fresh batteries readily available so they can tune into the EBS station.

The emergency people on hand stressed the need to get the message out to the public. They said that educating the public is an important part of the notification process and "things should work." They stressed that the public will be hearing and seeing more tests of the emergency broadcast system.

A number of other suggestions came from the group regarding notification procedures, including the installation of "hot lines." Those will also be studied.

The emergency officials said they would take the information they gleaned from the session back to the Minot Area Response Council for further work.

[MINOT

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 2/3/2002

Residents look for answers, and a comfortable couch

By:

AP

Posted at

- Tom Lundeen and his family want answers to mental and physical health questions that threaten their future. For now, they would settle for a home-cooked meal and a comfortable couch.

The Lundeen family is among 20 still waiting to return to their homes near the site of a Jan. 18 train derailment that sent a cloud of anhydrous ammonia drifting over Minot while residents slept. The toxic farm fertilizer killed one man and injured hundreds more.

Experts who have studied the physical effects of anhydrous ammonia and the emotional aspects of surviving a disaster say the lives of many will forever be changed.

"You can't even think about anything else other than the fact that we have our lives totally disrupted," Lundeen says. "Your whole life is just turned upside down."

At work at an exercise equipment center, Lundeen arranges a meeting with a friend and ends the conversation with, "I'll meet you you-know-where — the home away from home," referring to the hotel room he and his family now call home.

It is likely to be their home for a long while.

Lundeen, his wife, Nan, and two teen-age children were sleeping Jan. 18 when they were awakened by what they thought was a plane crash. Within minutes, they could smell the ammonia, and then the cloud "just engulfed us," Tom Lundeen said.

The Lundeens went to the basement of their house, which is about 350 yards from the railroad tracks, and waited to be rescued. It took nearly four hours.

The family now tries to maintain a normal routine living out of a hotel room, but it is not easy. Offers from friends of home-cooked meals are a luxury.

"We're actually catching ourselves calling it home," Lundeen said. "It's a hotel. It's not the same.

"I have a Super Bowl party every year," he said. "I told my friends I think I'll have a party again,



Beth Keeney/Staff Photographer

but it'll be a cleaning party."

In Minot, Canadian Pacific Railway spokesman John Bergene said the railroad has been focusing on helping residents with expenses in the immediate aftermath of the derailment.

"We really have no idea what the numbers of people might be who will have some medical ill effects from this," he said. Mental health and other issues "need to be covered" at some point, he said.

At least one lawsuit has been filed against the railroad. Others are being considered.

The cause of the crash may not be determined for months. Federal officials have been studying a section of rail that was replaced 18 months ago.

About 75 percent of people involved in a disaster suffer some sort of post-traumatic stress disorder, said Donald Dossey, a behavioral scientist and founder of the Stress Management Center and Phobia Institute in Asheville, N.C.

"Twenty-five percent are going to have a full-blown phobia about anything that's going to be similar, like smells, sight, sound," he said. "The symptoms vary from full-blown panic attacks to just a nagging sense of doom.

"You don't know when it's going to hit if it's going to hit, and then it's misinterpreted usually, even by the people suffering from it," he said. "People usually think they're going crazy."

In February 1994, a train derailed in Burlington, just a few miles west of the Jan. 18 derailment site, destroying a nearby family home and seriously injuring Chad Yale, who was 16 at the time.

Jim Semerad, manager of permitting and compliance with the state Health Department's air quality division, said air monitoring at the Jan. 18 derailment site likely will continue for weeks. Water monitoring might go on for months, especially near wells, he said.

Preliminary tests show no contamination of area drinking water wells or the nearby Souris River, health officials said.

Lundeen said Minot residents are preparing themselves for a long battle, though they are not even sure yet what they might be fighting.

"Everybody is very nervous about wanting to get the answers and not knowing if we're ever going to get them, about how this is going to affect our futures," he says.

The phone rings once again as he sits at his desk at work. The caller is a customer who also is a nun, he says, and she offers encouragement.

"Those prayers can't hurt," Lundeen says with a laugh as he hangs up the phone. "She's got good connections."

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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 2/5/2002

Allowed home - for a while

Tierrecita Vallejo residents allowed in for two hours to pick up a few things

By: Ken Crites

Editorial Staff Writer

Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Residents of Tierrecita Vallejo were allowed to go back to their homes for a couple of hours Sunday afternoon.

The neighborhood has been evacuated since Jan. 18 when a Canadian Pacific Railway derailment caused a massive amount of anhydrous ammonia to leak into the ground and air.

Tierrectia Vallejo is adjacent to the railroad tracks in that area. Because of the cleanup efforts there, a few residents have been allowed back into their homes several times for short stays, usually 10 to 15 minutes.

Mike Elm said he was among those returning home for the two-hour period Sunday to "pick up a few things." He added there wasn't much to do in his home, except watch TV and smell the ammonia.

Elm said he's been told that the day when he and his family and other families can return to their neighborhood permanently has been pushed back.

There were plans to have the residents return by this week, but Health Department officials have put their return "on hold" until they are convinced that such a move would be absolutely safe.

There had been plans Sunday for cleanup and excavation operations to be suspended from 3 to 5 p.m. so that the residents could go back to the neighborhood. Emergency Manager Thom Mellum said Monday that as it turned out, the wind was right and the cleanup continued while residents were allowed to return.

Mellum said the air quality in the neighborhood and areas around the derailment site was monitored during the return visit.

Elm said he didn't know how many of his neighbors ventured back into the area. He said he saw some. He said he had been allowed to go back into the area on Friday, as well.

Asked how things are going for him and his family, Elm said they were just taking things "day-to-day."

Elm said he and his family had been living in a Minot hotel but are now staying with his in-laws.

"It was too hard on the kids," Elm said of being in the hotel. He said they liked the swimming pool, but added that it was tough not being on a regular schedule.

Steve Tillotson of the state Health Department said Monday that a new "hot spot" of ammonia has been discovered near the derailment site. He said some of the spilled chemical had drained

into a water-filled depression southeast of the site. He said the water had been pumped out, but it's still not known how much ammonia is present there.

That is apparently part of the holdup in allowing residents back into the area permanently.

Tillotson said a grid system has been developed for the entire derailment site. It consists of 50-foot squares that will be thoroughly examined to determine how much more excavation will be necessary to remove the spilled ammonia. He said the results should be available in a few more days.

A CP Rail spokeswoman had said earlier that soil samples taken at the site had been sent to a lab for analysis to determine how much more dirt would have to be moved. The results of those studies have not yet been released.

Tillotson said cleanup crews had been operating on the north side of the site. As of Monday, some 21,000 tons of soil had been dug out and transported to the Safety Kleen Landfill at Sawyer.

The health official said the cleanup workers have been doing a good job and have been putting in 12-hour days. They are removing 3,000 tons of soil a day, he added.

Tillotson said the cleanup has been "a really big job." He said it was twice the size of any cleanup site in North Dakota and that includes coal-mine cleanups. He added that it has probably the largest ever cleanup in the state.

Tillotson said the derailment site has been "pretty quiet now." He said there had been a vapor released on occasion by the digging, but no serious problems.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 2/6/2002

Commission declares disaster

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - The Ward County Commission Tuesday approved a disaster declaration in connection with the CP Rail derailment west of Minot on Jan. 18.

The county's emergency manager, Thom Mellum, presented the document, but said it does not call on the governor or president to make state and federal resources available at this time.

Mellum said the purpose of the declaration is that in the event CP Rail does not totally clean up the site for some reason, the county is on record and could call on the Environmental Protection Agency to request a Superfund designation for the area.

Mellum quickly added, however, that he expects the railroad to completely clean up the site and pay for damages caused by the derailment and resulting release of anhydrous ammonia.

John Bergene, a CP Rail public relations spokesman stationed in Minneapolis, said the railroad is taking responsibility for the cleanup. "Moving the cars and restoring the track, the removal of the

soil – the things we think are necessary – we'll undoubtedly pay for," he said Tuesday.

Mellum received a pat on the back Tuesday.

On a 3-1 vote, the commission voted to commend Mellum for the work he has done since the derailment occurred.

Commissioner Jim Lee was the lone dissenting vote. "It's not because I don't have admiration for Thom, but I think it's premature." Lee said he knows what Mellum has done, but wants to know more about the emergency activities.

Mellum said an "after-action report" will be presented at a public meeting to be held sometime next month.

The other three commissioners had nothing but praise for Mellum. Commission Chairman Jerome Gruenberg said Mellum did an outstanding job. Commissioner Vern Link agreed and said, "Thom did what he was supposed to do. The derailment occurred in the county. His job was to get ready for potential developments."

Commissioner Sally Pufall said, "Thom did his job as did all people involved in the response." She said she had received many responses from other agencies. "I heard nothing but praise for Thom's performance," she said.

The commissioners voted to put a letter of commendation in Mellum's file.

Mellum, meanwhile, said about 20 families living in Tierrecita Vallejo, the sub-division adjacent to the derailment, will likely be out of their homes at least until next Monday.

The reason for that is that work crews found a "hot spot" of ammonia near the development on Monday. A small, water-filled slough was found to have high concentrations of ammonia in it. The water was pumped out and work on cleaning up the chemical is under way.

Mellum said the State Health Department is "Erring on the side of complete safety, or as complete as possible."

A news conference is scheduled for today at the city auditorium at noon.

Mellum said he hopes to have word from CP Rail as to what their policy will be for paying for the cleanup of homes that were affected by the ammonia spill. He said Monday that people have been waiting to see what the policy will be before they call in cleaning crews.

"We don't want to have people hire the cleanup companies and then find out the railroad's policy won't pay for the things they want done," he said.

(The Associated Press contributed to this story).

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 2/7/2002

Scientist addresses questions on cleanup

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - It's still too early to tell how much the Canadian Pacific Railway derailment west of Minot Jan. 18 is going to cost the railroad.

That was the word from a CP Rail environmental engineer during a news conference in Minot Wednesday. Justin Meyer said it will be some time yet until all of the costs have been tallied.

According to the railroad, 3,600 claims have been registered with the CP Rail claims center, as of Wednesday.

Bill Gunnerson, an environmental scientist with the State Health Department, said no firm decision has yet been made about removing contaminated ice from the Souris River near the derailment site. He said officials should know more sometime this week.

Gunnerson responded to opinions from some people that rather than haul the contaminated soil to the Safety Kleen Landfill at Sawyer, it could be instead spread on fields.

The scientist said the land treatment method would not work because of the high levels of ammonia present. He called disposal at the landfill more appropriate.

Gunnerson said the soil is being placed in a disposal cell at the landfill. So far, nearly 28,000 tons of soil have been removed and hauled there. There was no indication how much more will be removed or how long the process will take.

Gunnerson said there are still spots at the site that contain higher concentrations of ammonia.

Meyer said 129 soil borings have been made and information gathered, but 25 borings remain to be analyzed.

Gunnerson also said it's not yet known when residents of Tierrecita Vallejo will be allowed back into their homes, permanently.

He also noted that a decision on when the 20 or so families will be allowed back will not be unilateral. He said the decision will involve everyone, including the residents themselves. He added that it's premature to set any return date at all at this time.

The next news conference has been scheduled for noon Friday at the Municipal Auditorium. It's expected that updates will be provided on people treated for exposure to the fumes, the railroad's policy for cleaning up affected homes, timetables and other information.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 2/8/2002

Tainted ice to be removed

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Workers will be fishing around in the Souris River west of Minot starting today in an attempt to remove about 43,000 cubic feet of ice.

The ice will be cut at the site near the Canadian Pacific Railway derailment, taken out and hauled to the city landfill for disposal. Ice on the river was contaminated by an anhydrous ammonia spill following the derailment Jan. 18.

It's expected the ice-removal project could last well into the weekend, officials said. The process will be monitored by the State Health Department.

Meanwhile, the excavation of ammonia-contaminated soil at the site has been suspended pending soil-boring tests on the north side of the tracks to determine acceptable levels of organic nitrogen that can remain.

A CP Rail official said Wednesday that 129 test borings have been made to check ammonia levels. Test results are being returned. About 30 new test boring sites have been identified.

A meeting was conducted Thursday between State Health Department and railroad environmental people to develop further plans concerning air, water, soil and snow and ice issues.

No date for completion of the excavation effort has yet been determined. To date, officials say 27,731 tons of soil have been removed and taken to the

Safety Kleen landfill near Sawyer

According to Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum, CP Rail is now starting to address the issue of medical claims (rather than simply out-of-pocket expenses, lost wages and other such things).

The Red Cross has announced that families displaced by the chemical spill will now be able to rent houses in which to live until they can return to their own. CP Rail will foot the bill.

The speed limit of 10 miles per hour at the derailment site is still in effect for trains passing through. An average of 18 trains a day are rolling through the derailment site. That is about the number that used the tracks before the wreck.

More information on claims processing is expected during a news conference at noon today in the city auditorium.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 2/9/2002

Contaminated ice being removed from river

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Workers wielding long-bladed chainsaws were cutting out huge slabs of ammonia-contaminated ice on the Souris River west of Minot Friday afternoon while a crane was lifting the slabs into waiting dump trucks.

The ice slabs were being hauled to the city's sewage lagoons on Minot's east edge for disposal. In the spring when the ice melts, the water will be mingled with other wastewater in the lagoons and aerated to remove the nitrate.



Heidi Weiss/Staff Photographer

A chunk of contaminated ice from the river by the train derailment site is put into a dump truck to be hauled away Friday afternoon.

Minot Public Works Director Alan Walter said Friday, that he has been told by the State Health Department that the ice contains about the same amount of nitrate that regular sewage contains and that the process is safe.

Walter said ammonia turns into nitrate as it breaks down and can be handled just like sewage. After treatment in the lagoons, the water can be safely disposed of in the river.

The stretch of river at the derailment site, about a city block or more long, has been fenced off on both ends with plastic fencing to keep snowmobilers and others from venturing into the area where the ice is being removed.

Dennis Fewless, director of the Water Quality Division of the state Health Department said Friday the ice-removal project is expected to take three to five days to complete. It's expected that about 45,000 cubic feet of ice will be removed.

The ice, about 18 inches thick, appeared to be a pale green in color. The water underneath appeared to have a slick, similar to an oil slick on it.

Fewless said the water in the river at the derailment site would continue to be monitored.

Even as the ice-removal project was under way, heavy equipment was busy excavating soil in the area and loading it onto trucks for the 70-mile round trip to the Safety Kleen Landfill.

The area around the derailment site resembles a war zone with broken trees piled up all around. The site is also noisy with all of the heavy equipment working.

People at the site were monitoring air quality at all times with portable monitoring equipment. On occasion there would be a whiff of ammonia, but an escort from Earthmovers Inc. said his machine showed that the area was safe.

It's still not known how long the excavation will take. Lee Huber, a Health Department

environmental scientist, said Friday the department is still looking at how much more contaminated soil must be removed. He said they should have an answer by next week.

Huber, responding to a question about contamination of the railbed itself, said Canadian Pacific Railway is working to employ technology that can remove ammonia from the railbed without digging. The ditches along the track have been dug out and capped with zeolite to absorb the ammonia.

The Health Department people, who have been in Minot on rotating shifts, said they can't tell when the site will be completely cleaned, but said it's looking better from an air quality standpoint.

Huber said the residents of the housing subdivision still can't move back until the site is declared completely safe. He noted there are still some long-term issues that have to be handled after all the soil that will be removed, is gone.

Dave Glatt, director of the Health Department's division of waste management said that additional rain or snow, such as that expected this weekend would not have much impact on the ongoing work except that moisture could turn excavation areas into mud and make work more difficult.

Meanwhile, on the legal front, Dwight Kautzmann, a federal magistrate judge in Bismarck, signed an order Friday that allows the plaintiffs in a class action lawsuit against CP Rail, access to the derailment site.

Additionally, the court ordered the railroad to preserve all evidence in its possession or control related to the accident.

The lawsuit alleges the derailment and the release of anhydrous ammonia Jan. 18 was because of the negligence or fault of the railroad in failing to properly maintain its train and track.

The suit was filed by the Fargo law firm of Solberg, Stewart, Miller, Johnson, Tjon and Kennelly, Ltd.

Kautzmann's order denied a motion by the plaintiffs regarding evidence in the possession or control of the National Transportation Safety Board.

The judge said the plaintiffs had provided the court no basis under which it can find it has authority over the NTSB in that regard.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 2/14/2002

Air quality at derailment site has improved

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - There was some good news for residents of Tierrecita Vallejo Wednesday.

Air quality levels in the subdivision near the Canadian Pacific Railway derailment site have improved to the extent that residents will be able to return to their homes there for longer periods of time.

That was the word from Jim Semerad, an air-quality specialist with the State Health Department. Since the derailment and ammonia spill Jan. 18, residents had first been allowed to spend only a few minutes retrieving things they needed from their homes.

About a week ago, that time limit was increased to about two hours.

Now, residents will be able to make assessments and repair damage to their property on longer visits. But just when they will be allowed to return permanently is still up in the air. Semerad said the air will constantly be monitored while the residents are in their homes.

He said the longer visits are possible even though the soil removal project is only about half finished because workers are encountering fewer "hotspots" away from the derailment site itself. Hotspots are places where the soil was heavily saturated with ammonia and can emit fumes.

Semerad said Health Department officials will be meeting with the residents. He said some people will have more cleanup work to do than others before returning to their homes. He cited the home that was struck and damaged by a derailed tank car, as an example.

Semerad said excavation work will continue near the subdivision, but that the area is not as "hot" as it was previously.

He said health officials haven't done long-term testing of the area yet but will continue to test on a day-by-day basis.

The health official said the ice removal project has made good progress Tuesday, but said conditions such as Monday, when the wind blew hard, might hamper those operations.

Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum said Wednesday that CP Rail has sent out letters to those who previously visited the railroad's claim center.

The letter from Brian Toole, director of casualty management for CP Rail, said railroad officials are now interested in learning whether people have suffered injuries from the ammonia.

Toole said people who think they were injured, or have consulted a medical provider, should call or write the Minot office. The phone number is 838-9452.

The address is Canadian Pacific Railway, P.O. Box 1868, Minot, ND, 58702-1868.

"When you contact us, we will want to learn about your symptoms and you will be asked to completely describe any injuries and medical care. You will also be asked to sign an authorization, allowing us to see your medical records.

"After reviewing the necessary information, we will be better prepared and able to process your information, discuss it with you and hopefully finalized this matter," he wrote.

As for claims involving the cleanup of residences, Laura Banen, of CP Rail in Minneapolis, has urged people to contact the CP Rail claims center in Minot. She said all claims should be directed to that office.

The next news conference will be Friday at noon in the city auditorium.
[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 2/16/2002

Anhydrous cleanup continues

Official: Cleanup should be done soon

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

- Tree and shrub experts say it's still too early to tell about vegetation damage caused by the anhydrous ammonia spill Jan. 18.

Steve Wharton, horticulturalist with the Minot Park District, and Brian Johnson, the Minot city forester, say they have been receiving questions about possible damage to trees and shrubs when they break dormancy in the spring.

They say several things can happen in those areas closest to the spill and in areas of the city covered by the ammonia cloud. Evergreens will probably be the most affected, Wharton and Johnson said in a news release issued Thursday.

Evergreens might exhibit scalding on the needles, become dehydrated and suffer needle loss. That could result in death with those plants closest to the spill area. If the damage is minimal, the plant may recover over time. They might not exhibit damage until spring.

As for the deciduous trees and shrubs, those that lose their leaves, the experts say it will be hard to tell until spring arrives. Those plants were dormant and the time frame of the ammonia cloud exposure was short. There could be tip burn on new growth and in some instances, trees might die if the exposure was too intense.

On the other hand, the experts said, there could be an abundance of new growth on the areas



Beth Keeney/Staff Photographer

Brian Johnson, City forester for the Minot Park District, inspects trees in the Centennial Forest near the site of the Jan. CP train derailment for evidence of damage from the ammonia cloud.

exposed because ammonia acts as a fertilizer when applied properly.

And, the third possibility is that there will be no immediate effects from the spill, however that is doubtful and some damage will be seen in the immediate area, they said.

Johnson has advised that trees should not be washed down at this time.

Wharton and Johnson can be called if people have questions.

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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 2/21/2002

Train derailment

Pomeroy commends emergency management

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Rep. Earl Pomeroy, D-N.D., made a return visit to Minot Wednesday to talk with emergency management people about the derailment of a Canadian Pacific Railway train last month.

Pomeroy, who had visited the city shortly after the disaster, told emergency people at a fire hall meeting Wednesday morning that he was impressed that local officials had hired an outside expert to critique the actions they took.

"I commend you for this. You have brought in a consultant to tell you what you did right and what can be improved of those affected by the anhydrous ammonia spill."

Pomeroy said that what happened in Minot is being looked at around the country, especially following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The congressman said that a bill calling for \$1 billion to fight terrorism has been passed by the U.S. House and is awaiting action in the Senate.

"This (the derailment) was an accident, but it could have been a terrorist act. Because of the elevated risks, everyone is going to have to elevate their preparedness. I wouldn't wish this (derailment) on any community, but there are lessons to be learned," he said.

Shortly before Pomeroy arrived at the fire hall, those involved in the disaster from several different agencies were finishing up a two-day debriefing session with the outside consultant, Paul Riopel of Emergency Response Management Consulting Ltd., of Edmonton, Alberta.

Riopel had met individually with some of the leaders of the emergency response teams earlier and Wednesday morning met with the whole group.



Submitted Photo

Minot fire chief Harold Haugstad listens as Rep. Earl Pomeroy, D-N.D., talks with a group of emergency responders during a gathering Wednesday in the main Minot Fire Station. Pomeroy was in town to talk about the train derailment west of Minot Jan. 18 and the emergency response to it. He also talked to some of those affected by the anhydrous ammonia spill.

Riopel told Pomeroy and others at the open meeting that, "A lot of things worked well. There were some problems with communications, but that didn't stop them. This was so much bigger than what emergency responders normally train for, but they adapted quickly."

"This group has a lot to feel good about." He added that, "Nobody is harder on emergency managers than emergency managers themselves."

Riopel will take the information he has gathered, critique it, then send his report to Minot officials. A town-hall meeting will then be scheduled so everyone in the community can have a chance to talk about the derailment.

Among those in the audience was S.C. Norlander, an emergency preparedness manager with a Canadian company called Agrium, based in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta. Norlander said the anhydrous ammonia industry has to work with communities to make the shipping of anhydrous safer.

He said he was in Minot to learn about the derailment and the response to the ammonia spill. He said people need chemicals such as anhydrous, which is a fertilizer. He told the group, "I urge you to continue to train." About the spill, he said, "It was big and would have overwhelmed any response efforts. Coordination is critical."

Norlander told the group the ammonia tank cars used by CP Rail were new and up to specifications. He said that CP Rail has been aggressive in improving safety in moving anhydrous. "We have to learn how to make the movement of it safer."

Pomeroy said he had heard about individual acts of heroism and wanted to hear more. "As we sort out what happened that night, people should know that other people put their lives on the line."

Minot Fire Chief Harold Haugstad said there were many call backs of people who were off duty at the time of the early-morning derailment. "I call it pure dedication," he said.

Minot Rural Fire Chief Bob Wetzler told the congressman, "We're trying to evaluate all actions to see what we have to work on." Pomeroy asked about negative emotions at the time of the disaster. Wetzler said he feels that, "As time moves on, people will feel a little bit better as they come to understand some of the problems."

Police Chief Dan Draovitch said the scope of the disaster was bigger than anyone had even thought about, let alone trained to handle.

"We need redundant (communications) systems. We have to show the community that we need systems that work. We've learned a lot of things. We've become aware of other systems. We have to first learn the identity of the threat and then be able to communicate that threat to others."

Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum said he was pleased that there has been an outside audit of the emergency response teams. "I want taxpayers to have confidence in what we are doing."

Following his meeting at the fire hall, Pomeroy said he was on his way to meet with some residents who are still out of their homes. "This has been the start of an ongoing dialogue," he said.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 2/23/2002

Official: Little residue found

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - A North Dakota State Health Department official says not much anhydrous ammonia residue has been found in houses affected by the Canadian Pacific Railway derailment last month.

Ken Wangler, manager of the department's radiation and indoor quality program, said more than 100 houses have been tested for remnants of the chemical. "We're not finding safety problems," he said.

Wangler and Scott Radig, an environmental engineer with the Health Department spoke at a news conference at the city auditorium Friday.

Radig said the excavation work of removing soil at the site of a CP Rail derailment might be completed by today. Officials said about 63,000 tons of soil have been dug up at the site and hauled to a landfill in Sawyer since the work began.

Radig said his crews have been supervising the cleaning and disinfecting of private wells in the Tierrecita Vallejo neighborhood.

The work is necessary before residents can move back into their homes because the wells and plumbing in the homes have not been used since the area was evacuated, he said.

He said after the wells are cleaned and flushed out, more tests will be conducted to ensure that the wells are safe to use. Radig said the testing should only take a couple of days to complete. He noted that some of the 21 evacuated homes have more than one well.

Wangler said cleaning of the homes in the subdivision started Thursday and will continue next week. He said the cleaning work is being overseen by the Health Department and a number of tests are being conducted.

There was still no word Friday about when the residents there will be allowed to return home.

Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum told a news conference in Minot Friday that he has been told a formal policy on paying for residential cleanup will likely not come from CP Rail.

Mellum said both the Minot city attorney and the county's state's attorney have said it's a civil matter and they will not be taking any action.

Mellum sent the letters because he said he had not heard from the railroad about cleaning up residences.

Meanwhile, the railroad Thursday started giving out checks of \$250 each to residents of the city affected by the ammonia spill. In return, the recipients signed a release saying they would not sue CP Rail.

When the word got out, the railroad's claims center at Town & Country Shopping Center was jammed Thursday with those seeking the checks. The railroad later said it would handle those

claims only on an appointment basis.

The claims center number is 838-9452.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 3/2/2002

Soil tests reveal 'hot spots' near derailment site

By: Ken Crites
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - There was some good news for Tierrecita Vallejo residents Friday, but bad news for finishing up the excavation work at the derailment site.

Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum said Friday that State Health Department and Canadian Pacific Railway officials are to meet with residents of the Minot subdivision Monday. On the agenda will be discussion of environmental issues and a timetable for permanent return to their homes.

Mellum, in a situation report issued Friday afternoon, said there would likely be no return until at least Tuesday. The residents have been out of their homes since the derailment Jan. 18.

The bad news was that cold weather the past couple of days has halted the finishing touches on excavation at the derailment site. Mellum said soil tests have revealed several so-called "hot spots" — areas of heavy concentrations of anhydrous ammonia from the spill, on both sides of the tracks.

He said excavation has been halted because of the cold weather because newly excavated soil is too wet and freezes in truck boxes en route to the landfill.

The emergency manager said there is about an hour's worth of excavation work to be completed on each side of the tracks.

To date, Mellum said, 69,539 tons of soil have been removed from the derailment site and taken to a landfill in Sawyer for disposal.

In another railroad-related development: Minot Alderman Neil Leigh has proposed a resolution for action at the City Council meeting Monday night dealing with the storage and switching of rail cars containing anhydrous ammonia.

Leigh's resolution calls for asking the president of Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad to store and switch cars containing ammonia at Gavin Yard, east of the city, instead of in southeast Minot.

The alderman said the area presently in use is close to both residential areas and Roosevelt Elementary School.

Leigh said, "...It is the desire of the Minot community that steps be taken to improve safety related to the transport of hazardous chemicals through our community to the greatest extent possible.

If his resolution is approved by the council, a copy of it would be transmitted to Matthew Rose, BNSF president.

CP Rail also does some switching and storage of chemical tank cars in the city, Leigh said. That will also be addressed by the council.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 3/7/2002

Canadian Pacific Railway

Derailment cleanup pretty much done

By: Ken Crites

Editorial Staff Writer

Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - The cleanup of the Canadian Pacific Railway derailment site west of Minot is pretty much over and Russ Gohl, the man in charge of coordinating the massive effort, said Wednesday he was going to go home at 5:30 for a change.

Gohl of Earthmovers Inc., had been working shifts of 20 hours a day during the first part of the operation, but that has gradually wound down, a little bit.

Gohl said that on the morning of Jan. 18 he got a call from CP Rail at 2 a.m. telling him of the derailment and the release of anhydrous ammonia. He said he got on the phone with Trinity Hospital and asked for the use of their helicopter. He said Trinity cooperated fully. "That was the easiest way to get a look at the scene," he said.

In the eerie, early morning hours, Gohl and the helicopter pilot circled over the derailment site. "We couldn't see much, but we could see the ammonia plume spreading out from the derailment site. He said he relayed that information to Harold Haugstad and Bob Wetzler, the fire chiefs involved, to assist them.

Gohl said by 8:30 a.m., he and others wearing hazardous material (HAZMAT) suits were on the scene. One of the immediate problems was reaching the site. He said a gravel road was built in three or four hours to provide access for the cleanup crews.

He was asked if he was overwhelmed by the massive spill. He replied matter-of-factly, "No we train for this stuff day in and day out. We're trained to deal with it."

The spill has been placed at anywhere from 200,000 to 300,000 gallons and has been called the largest spill of ammonia on record.

The spill required that ammonia-soaked soil from the site and contaminated ice be removed from the nearby Souris River.

The soil removal, pegged at more than 69,000 tons, was hauled to the Safety Kleen landfill near Sawyer, where it was dumped into a cell there.

City Engineer Bob Amptman calculated the amount of dirt moved as the equivalent of 2 1/2

football fields piled 10 feet deep. That's a lot of dirt. Gohl took that perspective in stride. He said simply, "It took 56,000 man hours and there were no injuries. That's what I'm here for."

Haugstad, Minot city fire chief, Wednesday corrected that injury report. He said somewhere along the line, Gohl suffered a paper cut, but he did not elaborate.

Gohl said for the first eight days there were 211 people, including support people working at the scene. He said in the first six days, the site had been cleaned up enough to get the railroad tracks rebuilt and back in operation.

Asked how he coordinated all those people, Gohl pointed to a certificate on the wall of his office that indicated that he had been trained as a disaster operations commander and that was the job he did at the site.

Gohl said training and safety are top priorities for him and his crews. As an example of safety, Gohl said he hired Dakota Divers to cut ice so it could be removed from the river. The divers had wetsuits under their coveralls in case they fell into the river to prevent hypothermia, but the divers were all tethered by ropes to prevent them from falling in.

In addition, a fully-equipped diver with SCUBA gear was standing by in a small warming house in the event one of the divers should fall into the water. That diver was there to pull him out.

Asked if anyone had fallen in, Gohl said the only casualty of the ice removal operation was his wireless telephone that fell into the river.

Gohl said CP Rail has sent him and many of his employees to specialized training to learn how to deal with hazardous materials safely and has supplied them with a lot of equipment to use in their work.

He said CP Rail had spent in the neighborhood of \$100,000 on training of his men and special equipment they need. Gohl called that "a sizable investment."

One of the training sessions last September in Louisiana concerned the cleanup of anhydrous ammonia. He said 28 of his employees are trained in HAZMAT cleanup. He said at peak times the company has about 48 people on the payroll.

He mentioned that about 20 percent of the work Earthmovers Inc. does involves hazardous materials, though not on the scale of the CP Rail derailment.

In addition to his contract with CP Rail, Gohl's company is also under contract with Burlington Northern Santa Fe. He said his company is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Asked how he got all of the contractors together for the cleanup operation, Gohl said, "I just called them." He spent a lot of time on the phone throughout the operation. He said he knows all of the contractors and their capabilities and hired them to do the work.

He said the contractors were happy about the work. He said the incident occurred in the dead of winter and it meant a lot to the companies to be able to put their laid-off employees back to work.

Haugstad called Gohl an "iron man" and a "tremendous resource for the city." He said he was impressed with Gohl's ability to coordinate the whole cleanup response while working in a "hot zone." The chief continued, "It's nice to have a man of his caliber available in our area to handle things like this. He worked very well with us."

Gohl, originally from Iowa, came to Minot with the Air Force and worked as an aircraft mechanic. After his service, he stuck around and started his own company sometime in 1986 or 1987 with a

backhoe and a dump truck.

Gohl and his wife, Jeanne, have been in the business of cleaning up messes since 1989.

The company now has seven trucks and eight backhoes among its inventory of about 48 machines.

The company has a number of contracts going, many at Minot Air Force Base. He also has cleaned up messes involving hazardous materials at several area and regional sites, including lots of diesel fuel spills, Gohl said.

Asked about the worst part in cleaning up the CP Rail site, Gohl said simply, "I got stuck doing the news interviews."

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 3/12/2002

Canadian Pacific Railway

Accepting CP Rail money could affect assistance income

By: Jill Schramm

Editorial Staff Writer

Posted at 12:00 pm

- People on assistance programs who believe they qualify for reimbursements or other payments from Canadian Pacific Railway need to ask some questions before accepting any checks. Accepting money from the railroad could affect one's assistance income.

Jack Leuchtman, supervisor of Minot's Social Security office, said his office has been proactive in getting word out to people on Supplemental Security Income and has taken a number of calls from people already.

SSI is a needs-based program that takes into consideration a person's resources when determining how much aid a person can receive. If people receive a lump sum from the railroad, that's considered a resource that could reduce the amount of SSI they receive.

That's not to say that Social Security doesn't make exceptions for special cases.

"It's very individual," Mary Mahler, Social Security spokeswoman in Chicago, said of those exceptions. "We don't want to exclude someone from something they are entitled to."

On the other hand, people should not accept money from the railroad without first determining how it will affect their SSI.

"You don't want to have been over-paid on SSI because we will ask for that money back," Mahler said.

There is nothing in Social Security rules that specifically allows for exceptions for the type of reimbursements people have been experiencing because of the aftermath of the anhydrous ammonia spill, Leuchtman said.

"Things like this are rare. There's not a lot of precedent to go by," he said.

However, if people have experienced expenses or hardships because of the derailment, they should contact the local office.

"We will work with them on it," Leuchtman said.

Most people on SSI who have inquired about their status had questions about accepting a \$250 lump sum settlement that CP Rail has offered, he said. In each of these cases, the person would have lost assistance money by accepting the settlement.

Accepting the settlement won't result in a cut in people's total income. But it will subtract the \$250 from the next \$250 the people are scheduled to receive from SSI. If people put the \$250 in savings, it wouldn't affect the money amount of future SSI payments unless the person's total resources then exceeded \$2,000.

People on SSI should also be on government medical assistance, which would cover any medical bills incurred because of the derailment.

People receiving Social Security retirement or disability benefits can accept any CP Rail money without a cut in their government checks.

People with questions can call the Social Security office at 852-0604.

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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 3/19/2002

Anhydrous spill

Expert says more communication is needed

By: Ken Crites

Editorial Staff Writer

Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Communications, communications, communications.

That's the buzzword these days in emergency management circles in Minot and also in a third-party critique of how well the anhydrous ammonia disaster west of Minot Jan. 18 was handled.

Thirty-one cars of a 112-car train derailed near Tierrecita Vallejo, a housing area just west of Minot. There were 15 tanker car loads of anhydrous ammonia in the train. Eight of those ruptured and spilled their entire contents.

Two others tankers lost part of their loads. The result was a thick toxic cloud of anhydrous ammonia that spread over the valley in the early morning hours.

As the derailment cleanup was winding down, it was announced that local officials had decided to commission a third-party expert to take a look at the disaster and evaluate their response to it.

The critique was conducted by the Emergency Response Management Consulting firm of Edmonton, Alberta. Paul Riopel, president of the company, conducted a couple of days of interviews with emergency management people involved in the response to the disaster.

A considerable portion of Riopel's 21-page report, released Monday, dealt with communications

and the need to improve them.

But, that part of the report was not news to local officials.

Even before Riopel's report was released, the local emergency response people began meeting to talk about the need for better communications.

Minot Fire Chief Harold Haugstad said at the latest meeting last Friday, "We're not here to see where we've been, we're here to look forward to how we can improve communications." A similar meeting involving the media was conducted on Feb. 1.

Haugstad said Riopel's report was not earthshaking news. "We know what we have to do and we are doing it. The report gives us some good idea, though."

Local officials say they are in the market for a number of improved technologies to handle public notification and also internal communications. They are looking for systems that work and back up systems for them to notify residents more quickly about what's going on in the event of a disaster.

There were a number of problems encountered in trying to notify the public about what was happening. Some of them involved communications between Minot Central Dispatch and the community's three primary alerting systems – radio and TV stations and sirens.

Riopel said that Police Chief Dan Draovitch made the decision to sound the outdoor siren system only once. His decision was based on the reasoning that sounding the sirens may have been counter-productive in that people may have gone outdoors to find out what was happening. That is exactly what responders did not want people to do.

Draovitch and others said the siren system is designed for warm-weather warnings because the sirens don't work well when cold. The chief said the system is also old and should be upgraded or replaced.

Also on the subject of communications it was noted that the 911 system was overwhelmed. Riopel recommends that a system should be established to ensure the 911 system remains viable. He suggested a second line of call takers, such as the police department's tactical team to take the pressure off the 911 call center.

The call center was involved in the cloud of ammonia that drifted in various directions over the city. Draovitch said the center came very close to be closed, but a shift in the wind allowed operators to stay at their posts.

Riopel suggests that the center be sealed in the event of another similar event and that an assured supply of breathable air be available for the 911 staff.

During a meeting last Friday, it was announced that emergency responders are looking at all aspects of communications, including a 911 system that can call 1,000 residents at a time to notify them of what is going on.

Another promising idea is to have the National Weather Service office in Bismarck relay emergency information via weather radios such as some residents possess now to warn of impending severe weather.

The links between Minot Central Dispatch and the radio and TV stations have been fixed and are working properly now, those attending the meeting were told. Those systems will receive frequent testing to ensure they are always working properly.

The shift commander on duty that night, Lt. Kurt Smith, had to call representatives of the radio and TV stations on the phone to alert them to the disaster because the alerting systems did not work or people were not available at the stations at that hour.

The emergency response agency representatives said that in addition to beefing up communications, they will also engage in a public education program to tell people how to respond to particular disasters. The response to the ammonia cloud was to shelter in place.

In a paragraph entitled "General Findings," Riopel said the overall assessment of emergency services is that the response was handled well.

Riopel's report will be discussed during a public town hall meeting scheduled for Wednesday at 7 p.m. in room 201 of the Minot Municipal Auditorium.

[MINOT]

Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 3/21/2002

Lessons learned

Residents concerned with trains' speed limits through town

By: Tom Rafferty
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - The speed of trains traveling through Minot was the main topic of discussion at the first meeting of the Railroad Hazardous Materials Study Committee Wednesday.

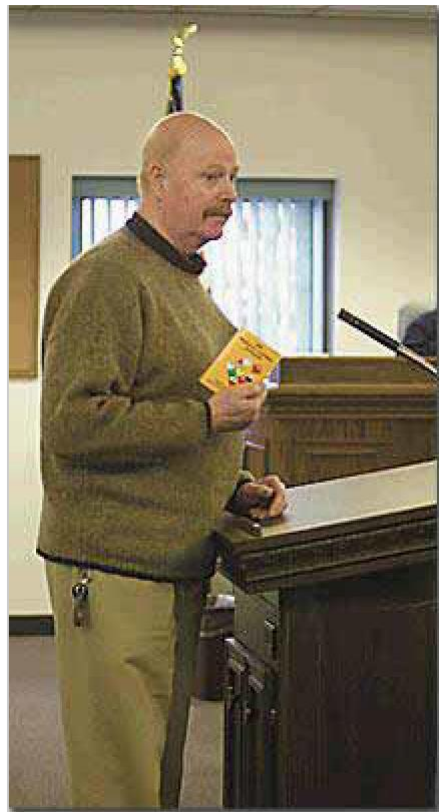
The committee was formed last month to study how hazardous materials are shipped through town on trains and what can be done to make train traffic safer.

Members of the committee are Minot City Council members Neil Leigh, Chuck Barney, Ron Garcia, Jim Hatlelid and Curt Zimbelman.

According to John Lewis, who represented Canadian Pacific Railway at the meeting, the maximum speed limit for CP Rail trains traveling through Minot is 25 miles per hour.

John Davidson, a representative of Burlington-Northern Sante Fe Railroad, said the maximum speed limit for BNSF trains traveling through Minot is 35 mph.

Lewis said the two companies have different speed limits because of the differences in the tracks, which include the number of crossings and curvature of the track. Lewis said BNSF's track through Minot is more of a



Beth Keeney/Staff Photographer

John Lewis of Canadian Pacific Railroad holds a book describing cleanup procedures for various chemicals carried by the railroad.

straight line than CP Rail's track.

Marie Schmitcke, a resident of northeast Minot, said all of the trains should have the same speed limit.

"If they are a train and are going through town and one has to go through at 25 mph, then the other should have to also," she said.

Tom Lundeen, a resident of the Tierrecita Vallejo subdivision where a CP Rail derailed in January, said he thinks 40 mph is too fast for trains to be traveling by his neighborhood, as was the case with the derailed train that caused several tankers full of anhydrous ammonia to escape into the air. Since the derailment, the speed limit has been 10 mph.

"They're going to have to slow down," Lundeen said.

Lewis said trains will eventually go back to the 40 mph limit through Tierrecita Vallejo.

City Council member Stephan Podrygula said he understands people's concerns about train speeds, but hopes the committee doesn't get too focused on speed. Podrygula said he wants to know all of the factors involved in train accidents before drawing any conclusions.

Requiring trains to go slower through town may actually create more derailments, according to Lewis. He said speeds between 15-25 mph can cause a condition that can lead to derailments.

"There is a terminology called harmonic rock. If you get into a certain speed with opposing joints on the rail, the cars will start to rock. When they start rocking, to a certain degree you'll get what they call wheel lift. Wheel lift causes derailments," Lewis said. "If you want 15 mph through town, you will have a lot of derailments.

Leigh, chairman of the committee, said he wants BNSF to stop switching and storing rail cars in an area in southeast Minot.

Leigh said the storing and switching of trains in Minot could cause additional problems if there is a derailment because there are often several cars stored there containing a number of chemicals.

The City Council approved a resolution last month to ask BNSF to stop switching and storing cars in southeast Minot and move the operation to Gavin Yard, which is a few miles east of town.

Ward County Emergency Manager Thom Mellum said he is going to prepare a similar resolution to present to the Ward County Commission.

Lewis said some people are painting a black picture of the railroads since the derailment, but railroads put safety first and are willing to work with area residents to address their concerns.

"You are concerned with safety, we are concerned with safety. We want to work through this together to have a good neighbor relationship," Lewis said.

Barney told Lewis he realizes the derailment was an accident, but people living in and around Minot want some say in railroad safety.

"I think that it was an accident and we appreciate your concern over safety, but the City Council, residents of Minot, the residents of Tierrecita Vallejo and the residents of Burlington don't wish to leave the safety standards up to the people running the railroads anymore," Barney said.

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Selected Stories from The Minot Daily News 3/21/2002

Improving procedures

Officials speak about derailment and other emergency issues

By: Tom Rafferty
Editorial Staff Writer
Posted at 12:00 pm

MINOT - Minot Fire Chief Harold Haugstad said nothing goes as planned in any major disaster, including the train derailment that happened two months ago on the west edge of Minot.

Haugstad and other emergency officials spoke at a town hall meeting at the Minot Municipal Auditorium Wednesday where they discussed how emergency procedures can be improved following the train derailment that resulted in the world's largest accidental release of anhydrous ammonia, according to Haugstad.

He gave the crowd an overview of a report conducted by the Emergency Response Management Consulting Firm of Edmonton, Alberta, and answered questions people had about the derailment and what is being done to improve disaster response.

Haugstad said the city's emergency response teams learned a lot of lessons after the derailment.

According to the report, the largest problem that people came across when dealing with the disaster was trying to find some kind of information while they were trapped in their homes.

Minot Police Chief Dan Draovitch said emergency officials have corrected the problems that occurred while trying to get in contact with TV and radio stations through the Emergency Broadcast System.

"If another disaster were to happen tonight we would be able to get the television and radio stations on the air quickly," Draovitch said.

Minot resident Bob Miller suggested that the city should be able to put a message on TV and radio stations without having to contact people working at the stations.

"It seems to me that the more people you can remove from the process, the quicker it will be," Miller said.

Draovitch said officials have considered Miller's idea, as well as other ways to get information out to the public more efficiently.

A number of the questions people asked at the meeting pertained to chemicals trains carry and what emergency responders are trained to do.

Audience member Mike Severson asked emergency and law enforcement officials if the city is



Beth Keeney/Staff Photographer

Harold Haugstad, Chief of the Minot Fire Department, speaks at a town hall meeting Wednesday night at the Minot Municipal Auditorium. To his right are Bruce Christianson acting as moderator, Bob Wetzler, Chief of the Minot Rural Fire Department, and Thom Mellum, Ward County Emergency Manager.

notified of the type and quantity of chemicals that are traveling through town on trains.

Haugstad said there are anywhere from 40 to 60 trains traveling through town each day and knowing precisely what is on each one of them would be an "awesome task."

However, Haugstad said the city is aware of all the different types of chemicals that are carried on trains and there are emergency response manuals that give procedures on how to handle certain chemical spills.

Janette Clear asked the panel if more hazardous material suits need to be purchased so that rescue workers can go into a chemical cloud to save people.

Bob Wetzler, chief of the Minot Rural Fire Department, said most of his staff is not trained to wear the suits that would have been required to go into the toxic ammonia cloud. Wetzler said rural firefighters are trained in what is called the "awareness level" when dealing with chemicals. Wetzler said it is a possibility that his department could receive more training to be able to wear the suits, but most of his staff are volunteers and it is difficult to find the time for extra training.

Haugstad said many of his men are trained for the special suits, but even with special suits, emergency workers would have had only about 15 to 20 minutes of oxygen to go into houses and rescue people. Haugstad said even if everyone had suits to protect them from the ammonia cloud, they would not have been able to see through the cloud.

Haugstad said most fire departments around the state are not equipped to make extended rescues into areas where major chemical spills have occurred.

"I asked most major fire departments around the state and they are not designed to make long term entries," Haugstad said.

Emergency officials throughout the Minot area have been getting together to address many of the issues that the community has after the January derailment.

Haugstad said it will take time to sort through all of the options, but it is important to find better ways to handle disasters.

"We want to prepare the community to handle the next disaster more efficiently," Haugstad said.

"We would be fool hearted to think there won't be another disaster."

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