



Another train derails in Wisconsin this week



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Canadian Pacific tells our sister station WKOW that there was another derailment Wednesday around 1 p.m. Five freight cars went off of the track at a rail yard near Watertown, Wis. The cars did not tip over, nor were they carrying any hazardous materials inside. Officials say it was repaired in less than an hour.

Also on Wednesday, Canadian-Pacific Railway (CP) says a broken rail from a defective track is to blame for a train carrying crude oil derailed in Watertown, Wis. on Sunday around 2 p.m., according to Jeremy Berry a spokesperson for CP.

"After a thorough investigation in close consultation with FRA (Federal Railroad Administration), we have learned that the cause of Sunday's incident in Watertown was a broken rail," Berry said.

"This track defect was not visible to the naked eye," he added.

According to Berry, CP's track inspection process involves the use of rail flaw detector cars that use ultrasonic technology to detect defects that the eye cannot see.

Federal investigators say they are carrying out their own investigation, separate from CP's. Investigators tell Action 2 News that they have not yet determined the cause.

That derailment caused about 500 gallons of crude oil to leak into the soil, prompting the evacuation of 35 homes nearby.

At around 6:30 p.m. on Monday, officials told area residents it was now safe to return to their homes.

Questions remain as to whether Wisconsin's rejection of federal funds for railway improvements would have prevented the accident.

Officials from Canadian Pacific, and with the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau say the location of the derailment was on a stretch of track scheduled to receive \$800 million in federal money for upgrades as part of a high speed railway project, that the Wisconsin officials canceled. According to officials, Gov. Walker indicated he was not going to accept the money before he was first elected, and so Governor Doyle halted the project.

The federal high speed rail project would have paid for track upgrades for both freight and high speed passenger service. The Walker administration put the breaks on that project back in 2010, saying it was unnecessary and would be too costly for the state to maintain. The project could have been completed as early 2013.

At this point, the railway company says the condition of the tracks were at fault for this derailment. However, other factors may have played a role, which will be addressed when the FRA releases its findings. The track was last inspected on Nov. 6, according to officials who said there were no problems detected with the track at that time.

As for environmental concerns, CP says they are monitoring the situation.

"This is science-based and the result of ongoing air monitoring. Through this process, these monitors have not detected any level of volatile organic compounds in residential neighborhoods. That air monitoring will continue as a precaution as recovery operations continue," Berry said in a written statement.

12 of the 13 railcars have been removed to a staging area adjacent to the derailment site. Over the next week, they will be moved roughly a third of a mile to the west, away from area residential neighborhoods, and all product from those cars will be transferred to empty railcars being brought in from other areas of the country. The cars will then be either dismantled and recycled or hauled away to shops for repair, according to Berry.

The 13th railcar that leaked some product was cleaned and purged on Tuesday. On Monday afternoon, new track was installed to replace the damaged track.

CP has now established a soil remediation plan.

“We are working with EPA, DNR, and the Department of Health to implement that plan. When complete, all contaminated soil will be cleaned or replaced, with all contaminants disposed of in an environmentally safe fashion,” he said.

“Once it’s safe to do so, we will begin implementing that plan, which will involve hauling away contaminated soil,” Berry added.

Berry said safety is the top priority for CP and it’s taking the incident extremely seriously.

Senator Tammy Baldwin says the Alma and Watertown train derailments demonstrate the need for rail safety reform. Baldwin says she hopes these incidents will motivate other lawmakers to consider her additions to existing legislation that is currently being finalized by members of the House and Senate.

Baldwin says first responders need more training.

WKOW-TV (<http://bit.ly/1PqRqG3>) reports Baldwin said one of the rail safety reforms she’s been fighting for is letting first responders know what a train is carrying in case it does derail.

She said Americans “deserve to know in advance what sort of hazardous materials might be traveling through their communities by rail.”



WKOW Photo

Another derailment occurred in Western Wisconsin Saturday.

Local, county, regional, state, and federal officials responded to a BNSF Railway train derailment Saturday in western Wisconsin which caused more than 18,000 gallons of ethanol to leak into the Mississippi River.

Around 8:50 a.m., approximately 32 rail cars out of 112 cars went off of the train tracks. Five of the 32 cars, leaked denatured alcohol, also known as ethanol, according to the Buffalo County Sheriff's Office.

The derailment occurred near Wis. Hwy 35 and County Road I, near Alma, Wis. — located south of the Twin Cities, but north of La Crosse.

BNSF Railway's tracks at the site of the train derailment were returned to service early morning Tuesday, Nov. 10.

Police say they evacuated those near the derailment site as a precaution and shutdown Wis. Hwys 35 and 37 for more than five hours Saturday.

Although the evacuation order has been lifted, police advise using caution if traveling through the area due to the amount of recovery vehicles working in the area over the next several days.

Human exposure to ethanol during spill situations can occur by inhalation, contact with the skin, or ingestion if ethanol reaches water supplies, according to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. (<http://www.mass.gov/eopss/docs/dfs/emergencyresponse/special-ops/ethanol-spill-impacts-and-response-7-11.pdf>)

Ironically, Ethanol is a gasoline additive that is supposed to be better for the environment. Although recent studies (<http://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.cfm?id=27&t=10>) show that vehicles actually obtain better fuel efficiency without adding ethanol. Critics of Ethanol have also said the additive is responsible for driving up the cost of gas prices. Ethanol is also used in perfumes and medicines.

The following agencies responded to Saturday's incident: The U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Office, Wisconsin State Patrol, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, La Crosse Regional Hazmat Response Team, Buffalo and Trempealeau County Emergency Management, Buffalo County Sheriff's office, Alma Police, Fire and Ambulance, Nelson and Tri-Community Fire.

BNSF says the cause of the derailment remains under investigation and that so far a lab analysis from the water samples taken Saturday and Sunday indicate that levels are below that which could be harmful to aquatic life.

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