

Ottawa quietly adopts industry-drafted rules

Hazardous cargo no longer has to be watched over around clock

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Transport Canada quietly approved new safety rules drafted by the railway industry on Boxing Day just as an emergency directive issued in the wake of last summer's Lac-Mégantic disaster was set to expire.

The federal department also reissued a new emergency directive on Jan. 1, again without public notification, covering those rail companies that are not part of the Railway Association of Canada. Transport Minister Lisa Raitt issued the emergency directive last July to address some of the most glaring safety deficiencies exposed by the derailment and explosion of an oil-laden train that claimed 47 lives in Lac-Mégantic, Que.

Since then, there have been at least five significant railway accidents in North America involving the spill or combustion of oil, including the derailment this week of a CN train in New Brunswick.

The emergency measures put in place last summer dictated at least two crew members must work trains that carry dangerous goods.

In addition, the federal directive said no locomotive attached to one or more loaded tank cars transporting dangerous materials could be left unattended on a main track.

Transport Canada declined to comment Thursday on the newly approved rules. However, the Railway Association provided a copy to The Canadian Press.

Like the emergency directive, the new rules continue to require that at least two crew work a train transporting dangerous material such as crude oil.

The rules drop the requirement that a train with hazardous cargo be continuously attended, but insist if it is left unattended that new instructions be followed to safely apply brakes and secure the cab to prevent unauthorized entry.

Kevin McKinnon, director of regulatory affairs at the Railway Association, said the new rules will prevent freight trains from rolling away or being tampered with. He said it's not realistic to have a crew member watch a train round-the-clock.