

CN train derailments concern City Hall

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The latest train derailment and explosion in Alberta raised some alarms for North Battleford councillors Monday.

Councillors at that evening's municipal services committee meeting made clear they wanted to see no similar occurrence in North Battleford, a city that sees heavy train traffic on tracks adjacent to the downtown core area.

The weekend explosion in Alberta, which prompted evacuations in the community of Gainford, saw 13 cars go off the track. Nine of the cars carried liquefied petroleum gas and four carried crude oil.

That incident happened just weeks after a minor train derailment in North Battleford earlier this month in which three CN tanker cars went off the tracks. No spillage occurred there, however.

The CN issue was raised by Mayor Ian Hamilton during Fire Chief Albert Headrick's monthly fire report to the committee.

"Considering the latest event that made the news with respect to CN, I'm just wondering if we've had any dialogue, correspondence, people coming to understandings with respect to how they're operating in our city limits," said Hamilton.

Headrick said he had a meeting with the CN dangerous goods officer for the area and also the general manager. They had mentioned they had put significant money into the track.

The fire chief said he could not speak on the Alberta situation. But he did say there was a certain amount of crude oil that is stored on the yard for a period of time.

"Does that raise a concern? Well, it raises a concern if we have an incident and they catch fire. Would we have the capacity to deal with it? It depends on the severity. It's an unknown question."

Headrick expressed concern about how long crude oil would stay in the yard without being rolled out. "That's a question we have to pose," Headrick said. He indicated he wanted to see a written answer from CN on that issue.

The topic prompted numerous questions from councillors. Councillor Trent Houk expressed concern about whether there were regulations in place to regulate the speed of trains coming into the city, noting some trains were coming in at a fast clip.

"Add it up with these cars, there could be an ugly incident," said Houk.

Headrick, however, said speeds are regulated coming into the yard and trains cannot go more than 15 km/h in the yard. The speed restriction comes into effect a mile outside the city.

Hamilton asked the Chief if he was satisfied the city is well-protected if a situation occurs.

While he expressed confidence in the switching and the training practices at CN, Headrick did say, "accidents can happen. It's human error. We had that not too long ago. It can occur. The thing is we have to have emergency plans in place to deal with the severity of the incident."

He added that it was hypothetical to say what kind of incident it would be, but said, "we have to be prepared, we have to practice" and pointed to training done during mock disasters and other exercises.

"As long as we continue doing that I feel assured, and the public should be assured, that we have a good emergency services and a good emergency plan here and EOC, and personnel that are properly trained in order to mitigate and also to deal with the incidents."