

# Officials warn of toxic fumes near train derailment

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**CASSELTON, N.D.** — Many residents evacuated a southeastern North Dakota town overnight after a train carrying crude oil derailed and exploded, and officials warned that acrid and hazardous smoke could blow into the area.

No one was hurt in Monday's derailment of the mile-long train that sent flames and great plumes of black smoke skyward about a mile from the small town of Casselton. The National Transportation Safety Board was preparing to investigate but the fire was such as darkness fell that investigators couldn't even get close enough to count the number of burning cars. Some burned through the night.

The Cass County Sheriff's Office called on the 2,400 people living in Casselton, about 25 miles west of Fargo, to leave their homes, citing a shift in winds.

"That's going to put the plume right over the top of Casselton," Sheriff Paul Laney said.

Early Tuesday Sheriff's Deputy Joe Crawford said about two-thirds of the town's residents had heeded the recommendation to evacuate their homes. Officials were waiting for daybreak before making new attempts to investigate the scene, Crawford said.

Terry Johnson, the manager of a grain dealer less than a mile from the derailment, said he heard at least six explosions in the two hours following the derailment.

"It shook our building and there was a huge fireball," he said.

Official estimates of the extent of the blaze varied. BNSF Railway Co. said it believed about 20 cars caught fire after its oil train left the tracks about 2:10 p.m. Monday. The sheriff's office said Monday it thought 10 cars were on fire. Officials said the cars would be allowed to burn out.

Authorities haven't yet been able to untangle exactly how the derailment happened. BNSF spokeswoman Amy McBeth said another train carrying grain derailed first, and that this knocked several cars of the oil train off adjoining tracks.

BNSF said both trains had more than 100 cars each.

The incident will likely prompt discussion about the safety of transporting oil by cross-country rail. Fears of catastrophic derailments were particularly stoked after last summer's crash in Quebec of a train carrying crude from North Dakota's Bakken oil patch. Forty-seven people died in the ensuing fire.