

CN train carrying crude oil derailed, on fire near Plaster Rock

Witness saw 'big cloud of orange smoke'

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Emergency crews have blocked off roads leading to the scene of a train derailment in northwestern New Brunswick. (wagmtv.com)

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UPDATED

- CN Rail says 16 cars derailed, 8 carrying dangerous goods and one locomotive
- First responders unable to approach the fire amid safety concerns
- Hazardous material responders expected to arrive overnight
- No injuries reported

A CN freight train carrying dangerous goods has derailed and caught fire in northwest New Brunswick, not far from the U.S. border.

Jim Feeny, director of public and government affairs for CN Rail, said 16 cars are believed to have derailed, including four carrying propane and four carrying crude oil.

The train derailment happened just after 7 p.m. AT about five kilometres outside of Plaster Rock in Wapske, N.B. Feeny said the train was coming from central Canada and heading to Moncton.

"There is a fire burning in the area, but we have not confirmed if those cars are actually involved in the fire," he said. "The reason we haven't been able to confirm is because of the fire, and the caution being expressed by first responders. They can't approach too closely at this point."

The derailed cars include one at the front, and 15 at the back. The 15 include the hazardous goods and a locomotive.

A large red glow could be seen a significant distance away as the fire burned. First responders were forced to stay a safe distance back. A two-kilometre radius around the fire has been evacuated. Feeny said that includes 45 households.

There's no time frame for when crews will be able to move in. CN hazardous material experts were flying in from Moncton, Montreal and Toronto overnight. Feeny said senior managers were also en route to direct the operation.

He said the safety of the public is the top priority.

Feeny said it's too early to determine what caused the derailment.

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He said none of the train's crew was injured. There's been no word of other injuries at this time.

Meanwhile, RCMP Cpl. Marty Van Dijk said emergency crews are working with the train's conductor to identify the cars and determine whether they contain hazardous materials.

Van Dijk said a hazardous materials team is en route.

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada is also deploying a team to the site to gather information and assess the situation.

There were 122 cars on the train.

'I saw a great big cloud of orange smoke'

J.D. Saddler and his girlfriend were at her grandmother's house, next to the train tracks in Plaster Rock.

"After we left her house, we were driving across the river over to Wapske and that's where the train derailed. And as we were driving to Wapske, I saw a great big cloud of orange smoke and the flames were really high in the air, the smoke was really high in the air," he said.

A CN Rail train burns in the distance after derailing near Plaster Rock, N.B. (Courtesy of Andrew Jenkins)

Saddler said they went home. About an hour later, he drove back and the route was blocked off. People were being removed from the area.

"I think probably a lot of people are scrambling right now," he said. Saddler's father owns a sawmill located not far from where the train derailed happened.

"We were a little concerned because our place of business is located half a mile from where the [derailment] happened but our place wasn't affected," he said.

"There's about 10 or 12 homes along the road where the train derailed."

A woman who lives in nearby Wapske said she was asked to evacuate her home, located about two kilometres away. She said she can't see any fire from her house. She said there are about eight homes located near the site.

An evacuation centre is open at the Tobique Plex in Plaster Rock.

The Canadian Red Cross has dispatched supplies and a team of eight disaster volunteers to assist local authorities at the evacuation centre.

This is a precautionary step as the area outside of Plaster Rock where the derailment occurred is sparsely populated so the number of people impacted by evacuation is small and most of them will likely choose to stay temporarily with family or friends elsewhere in the community," said Bill Lawlor, Canadian Red Cross director of disaster management for New Brunswick.

"However, should any residents require a place to stay including through the night, or should circumstances change unexpectedly, our team is bringing cots, blankets and other essentials to properly manage a shelter."

Not the first CN derailment in Plaster Rock

A [CBC investigation](#) into rail safety revealed that CN Rail did not report to authorities more than 1,800 derailments and accidents, including 44 on key rail arteries.

One of those derailments occurred in Plaster Rock, which was one of two incidents that prompted the TSB to seek a summons ordering CN to turn over all accident records.