

Freight Train Derails In New Lenox

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NEW LENOX, Ill. (STMW) – Three cars on a westbound Canadian National Railway freight train derailed in southwest suburban New Lenox at 3:30 a.m. Sunday morning, blocking Gougar and Cherry Hills Roads for several hours, authorities said.

The cars that derailed remained upright, but one hit and damaged a locomotive that was stopped on the adjacent track, said CN spokesman Patrick Waldron. The locomotive did not derail, he said.

Officials earlier Sunday morning had initially said four cars had derailed.

An investigation is underway to determine why the wheels of three cars came off the tracks at Gougar Road, Waldron said.

Michael Potocki, director of New Lenox emergency management, said track sensors may have failed, which made the trains rock back and forth as they passed each other, causing the derailment. The moving train was westbound, officials said.

“(The sensors) must have failed from the cold,” Potocki said.

No one was injured, and the trains carried nothing flammable, he said.

By late morning, the cars were back on the track. No injuries were reported, Waldron said.

Two of the derailed cars were empty and the third was carrying plastic, he said.

Potocki credited Canadian National with its quick response. The rail road hired an independent contractor that responded quickly to the scene to move the trains, he said.

The derailment affected north-south traffic in the area, with rail crossings blocked off at Gougar Road, Cherry Hill Road and briefly Nelson Road, Waldron said.

The derailment occurred near Lincoln-Way West High School.

The track is north of Laraway Road. Motorists attempting to drive on either Gougar or Cherry Hill Roads were re-routed to either U.S. 52 or Nelson Road.

Motorist Jean Robbins said it was inconvenient because she had to travel several miles out of her way.

“I didn’t know it was a train derailed until I turned onto the road,” she said.

Another motorist, Jim Raymond, said it wasn’t a big deal that he got re-routed. He normally doesn’t take that road, but Sunday morning he was picking his daughters up from their aunt’s house

While impeding traffic is a concern, it is the least concern, said New Lenox Mayor Tim Baldermann. Even though there were no injuries and spills this time, this incident raises concerns about future incidents.

“We were fortunate that this happened at 3:30 on a Sunday morning, but it easily could have been on a school day,” he said. “What about next time? I’m concerned about a derailment in a residential area or by the school. These seem to be happening more frequently. There have been quite a few incidents in the last few months.”

When CN first bought the former EJ&E tracks with plans to quadruple the number of freights, local officials tried then to get the rail company to build an overpass at one of the major

crossings, such as Gougar or Cedar Road — a \$20 million improvement, according to Baldermann.

Gougar Road is within Will County's jurisdiction, not New Lenox, the mayor said. "This just raises the concern level of our residents, and rightfully so."

He would like to see the federal government help pay for such improvements, he said.

"It all comes down to dollars and cents until someone gets killed," he said.

The Will County Emergency Management office is investigating the cause of the derailment.