

Percentage of rail cars carrying dangerous goods through city kept secret

CN and Toronto Fire refuse to divulge information out of security concerns even as Hamilton fire Chief Rob Simonds said Wednesday 7% of CN rail cars passing through Hamilton in 2013 contained dangerous goods.

By: [Jacques Gallant](#) Staff Reporter, Published on Fri Mar 14 2014 Toronto Star

CN and Toronto Fire are keeping secret the percentage of rail cars that passed through the city last year containing dangerous goods, as well as the list of the most hazardous commodities that were on board.

The railway company said it gave the data to senior Toronto Fire officials and the director of the Office of Emergency Management at a Dec. 12 meeting.

The company is meeting with municipalities in order to provide information on how to work together with communities in case of an emergency, said CN spokesman Jim Feeny. The meetings, which include a presentation by a CN dangerous goods officer, are a direct result of the disaster in [Lac-Mégantic, Que.](#), last July, when a train carrying crude oil derailed. The ensuing explosion killed 47 people.

Toni Vigna, the division chief of policy, project and public information for Toronto Fire, who was at the meeting with CN, said she could not recall the percentage being presented, but said she was “sure” a copy of the presentation was received.

“Even if I had a copy of the presentation in front of me, I wouldn’t release the information,” she said. “All the statistics are meant to be confidential.”

Feeny at CN said that “due to security concerns,” the railway company wants the data kept secret. When pressed, he said “the ordinary citizen is not a concern at all, but there may be interests that could use this information contrary to the public good.”

Nevertheless, Hamilton fire Chief Rob Simonds publicly revealed on Wednesday that seven out of every 100 CN [railcars that passed through Hamilton in 2013 contained dangerous goods](#).

Simonds urged railway companies to provide real-time data of what products are rolling through towns and when, to better control potential disasters.

Vocal proponents of more transparency from the railway industry, such as Toronto city Councillor Josh Matlow and Ajax Mayor Steve Parish, say the information from the railway company should be made public.

“I think the public has a right to make informed decisions about their own safety, and about the neighbourhoods in which they live,” Matlow said.

Parish, who said fire service officials from his municipality will meet with CN later this year, believes Ajax has an “obligation” to reveal the data once they are received.

“I would hope that CN would see that obligation as well,” he said. “Certainly, the public has a right to that information, and they have a right to know that their public officials are making plans for emergency preparedness on the basis of good data and knowledge.”

Three of the Toronto meeting's seven participants, including Vigna, responded to the Star's request for comment this week saying they did not recall receiving the percentage.

Feeny said a copy of the presentation would have been given to each of the seven Toronto officials, including an extra copy for fire Chief Jim Sales, who was not in attendance.

Deputy Chief Ron Jenkins, responsible for professional development, training and mechanical maintenance, said while he didn't remember hearing the percentage, Toronto Fire is well prepared to deal with a dangerous goods accident, whether it be by rail or other means. He said fire services have two hazardous material stations with staff trained to deal with dangerous goods.

Loretta Chandler, the director of the city's Office of Emergency Management, called the hour-and-a-half-long meeting with CN a "very high-level discussion" that proved to be productive, but when asked about the percentage of railcars, she said she didn't recall "that kind of detail being discussed at the meeting."

The other participants — Toronto Fire division chief Colin Booth and deputy chiefs Debbie Higgins and Mike McCoy — did not return requests for comment. Another participant, Deputy Chief Darrell Reid, is away from the office until April.

A request for comment from Chief Jim Sales was passed on to Vigna.

The Star obtained a censored copy of the CN presentation early Thursday afternoon. Nearly all of the 18 pages are the same for each municipality and touch on topics such as emergency measures, CN's safety record and the types of products that are made with the dangerous goods transported by the company.

Page 10, which is nearly blank in the copy sent to the Star, is titled "Your Community," and would normally show the percentage of CN rail cars containing dangerous goods that passed through the municipality in 2013, as well as the most common hazardous goods carried.

The Star forwarded the copy to the Toronto meeting's participants to confirm that this is what they viewed in December, but did not receive a response.

"What the percentage does is that it puts things into context," said Feeny at CN. "We're trying to give municipalities some idea of the relative scale of the products moving through, information they might find useful."

He said that on a national level, about 10 per cent of all products moved by CN each year are dangerous goods, but the number varies by community. He said CN has one to two freight trains a day through Toronto.

Canadian Pacific spokesman Ed Greenberg said that that railway company provides emergency response teams "with specific commodity flow information, covering the top 25 hazardous commodities transported through the community in rank order," but, when pressed on the issue, did not specifically say that this includes the percentage of railcars carrying such goods.

Among other municipalities in the GTA, Brampton confirmed senior city officials had a meeting with CN in November during which the percentage was presented, but a spokeswoman said there was no copy of the presentation from the meeting and no note of the percentage could be located Thursday.

Mississauga has not been in touch with CN, said its emergency management co-ordinator, Catherine Blair. CN said it has reached out to all 1,098 municipalities it serves in Canada to set up a meeting.

Beginning in April, municipalities that registered from across Canada will [receive a quarterly report from the major railway companies](#) on the nature and volume of dangerous goods that passed through their communities in the last year, according to a new Transport Canada regulation stemming from the Lac-Mégantic disaster. The reports will not be made public, under the Transport Canada regulation.

With a file from the Hamilton Spectator