

'The train was everywhere,' eyewitness says

BY BARB PACHOLIK, LEADER-POST, WITH FILES FROM TIM SWITZER DECEMBER 13, 2014

A piece of wayward steel, a bang and then a whole lot of mess - that's how witnesses described the chain of events following a CN train derailment that left 35 cars twisted or toppled off the tracks near this community on Friday.

"We were sitting here watching the train go past and after that we see this piece of metal come off," Brandon Ryan said.

He was part of a well-drilling crew working in the area who were on a break when they witnessed the derailment. It occurred around 9:45 a.m. along Highway 15, about three kilometres west of Raymore on CN's main line.

"After that, it (the metal) ended up underneath the wheels. All we see at first was dirt and snow everywhere," Ryan said.

"We looked over - and the train was everywhere."

Three houses front the highway parallel to the tracks, but evacuation was deemed unnecessary as there was no immediate threat. No one was injured.

Raymore is 115 kilometres north of Regina on Highway 6.

According to the RCMP and CN, one of the affected cars was carrying hazardous goods but was upright and not leaking. That car was carrying isopropanol - a colourless, flammable alcohol used in adhesive compounds, disinfectants, cleaning products and toiletries.

By Friday afternoon, trackhoes and bulldozers were on the scene as CN workers got underway with the cleanup. A hazardous goods specialist was also expected to assist.

CN spokesman Jim Feeny said other trains scheduled to travel that line will either be staged in CN yards or rerouted to its north line until the track is cleared. RCMP said motorists can expect delays on Highway 15 adjacent to the derailment.

The two-locomotive mixed freight was pulling 135 cars in all en route from Winnipeg to central Alberta. Most of the 35 that left the track were near the front of the train.

Several of the freight cars that lay sideways on the ground or in jack-knifed heaps along the track were loaded with shiny new vehicles, some poking out through the damaged cars.

Other derailed cars were carrying steel and canned goods among other items and one was carrying mineral oil, which is not considered hazardous.

Locals say a second track was installed in that area during the summer. Some reported that two trains were passing or in proximity at the time of the derailment. However, Feeny said witnesses told CN a steel plate came off the same train involved in the derailment and the second train was already a distance away. The investigation is ongoing and will also probe who is responsible for ensuring loads are secured.

Ryan said the crew with whom he was watching didn't even realize at first what had happened.

"We just thought it was braking because of the piece of metal."

Myrna Huckle has lived across from the tracks for some four decades and was astounded by the sight of all those cars askew.

"I heard the bang ... it was just a huge bang," she said, adding people who live along the tracks have grown so used to the noise of a busy rail line that she didn't think much of it at first.

"It just didn't dawn on me something like this would happen."

Huckle looked out the window and saw what at first appeared to be one car off the track, but then she and her visitor went outside for a closer look and realized it was much worse.

She said initially there were concerns about evacuation, but it quickly became apparent there were no leaks or fires.

"We were lucky because this train was going west, obviously, and when we realized what had happened and went outside there was one going east. So it could have been really disastrous," she said.