

UPDATE: EMS crews plan to remain at derailment scene throughout night

Posted: Wednesday, February 4, 2015 3:00 pm | Updated: 10:35 pm, Wed Feb 4, 2015.

TH MEDIA Telegraph Herald

UPDATE

As of 10 p.m., two railcars continued burning. Canadian Pacific also increased the scope of the derailment, saying now that 13 cars and two locomotives derailed.

UPDATE

Emergency medical responders from the Sherrill Fire Department will remain on scene, in shifts, throughout the night, according to scanner traffic.

A volunteer firefighter confirmed that plan, though he declined to give his name.

He said Canadian Pacific had arrived with additional equipment.

A spokesman for that company said just before 7 p.m. that he could not provide any updates on progress at the scene. He said a press release would be issued in about a half-hour.

As of 7:45 p.m., no update had been released.

UPDATE

A portion of a freight train carrying ethanol derailed north of Dubuque today, causing three railcars to start on fire and plunging three others into the Mississippi River.

The derailment came in a remote stretch of rural property that made it difficult for firefighters and hazardous materials crews to respond, raising concerns about water contamination and the possibility of an explosion.

Eleven cars in the Canadian Pacific train derailed, according to Dubuque Fire Chief Rick Steines. Ten of those cars were carrying ethanol.

No injuries were reported, but fire and hazardous materials crews rushed to the scene.

"Right now, there is ethanol flowing into the river," Steines said near the crash scene this afternoon. "We're not exactly sure the amount, but we can see evidence where it did get into the river."

By mid-afternoon, emergency officials said they intended to let the fires burn themselves out.

"The water supply is very limited," Steines said. "There's no vehicle access to the point right now. So, there's really no way for us to put water on the fire."

TOUGH SPOT

Efforts to fight the fire were complicated by the location of the derailment, on the stretch of tracks on the edge of the river, about halfway between Finley's Landing and North/South Waupeton Road.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources spokesman Kevin Baskins said at least three DNR officials from Manchester were sent to the scene. However, they struggled to get anywhere near the derailed train.

The lack of access prevented DNR crews from analyzing the full extent of contamination in the river, although Baskins confirmed that at least one train car appeared to be leaking ethanol toward the Mississippi River.

The DNR notified cities located downstream about the incident, including Davenport, Burlington and Keokuk, Baskins said.

ADDITIONAL RISKS

"Another part of the concern is the tanks are pressurized so there is an explosion risk," Baskins said.

In response, emergency officials established a half-mile evacuation zone around the train. No occupied structures fell within that distance, Steines confirmed.

Residents living on Creek Valley Road, located just south of the derailment scene, were forced to deal with limited road access.

Dubuque Community School District spokesman Mike Cyze said the presence of emergency vehicles forced the district to make special accommodations for students living there.

"The bus could not make it to one home on Creek Valley Road, so the district made arrangements with the parents for an alternate pick-up location," he said.

Canadian Pacific sent crews to the scene and planned to have more equipment arrive Wednesday night to assist in the response,

“Canadian Pacific has emergency response trailers and equipment strategically located across our entire network so we can deploy them to the necessary location when an emergency occurs,” said Canadian Pacific spokeswoman Salem Woodrow.

Scanner traffic indicated that equipment likely would be on scene by 7 p.m.

“We’re waiting for the railroad to show up with more equipment and resources and their haz-mat people are in route,” Steines said. “They’ll have to determine what the next step is.”

The fire chief said he did not expect the clean-up to be finished quickly.

“I think we’ll be out here for days,” Steines said.