

CN says oil cars leave tracks at Conklin

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CN officials are saying a Feb. 15 train derailment, that saw four cars containing crude oil leave the track near Conklin was cleared up within six hours.

Eight days after the derailment at the Windell Yard rail siding, CN officials responded to Lac La Biche POST requests for information on the incident. "On Sunday February 15, at approximately 10:40 local time a CN train derailed 4 cars upright on a siding at Windell yard," said CN's Manager of government and stakeholder relations Brent Kossey. "There were no injuries or leaks."

Locals say no contact

His response on February 23 also said in incident was attended by area crews.

"CN Police and local emergency services were advised," he said.

When contacted, however, officials in the Conklin community, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and Lac La Biche County had no knowledge of the derailment until the POST contacted them.

"Our urban Regional Emergency Coordinator and the rural one were contacted and neither have any record of it," said Wood Buffalo spokesperson Brendan Proce, who recommended that the next largest municipal emergency services department, the one in Lac La Biche County, might have been called.

"Not us. We were not involved," said LLB Regional Fire Chief John Kokotilo, explaining that he only knows bits and pieces of the story through community chatter. "I have no real idea of what went on there."

He said CN does have their own response plan for incidents like this one, but the municipality is not privy to that plan.

A similar response came from Jeffrey O'Donnell, the CAO of Conklin's Resource Development Advisory Committee. "This is the first I'm hearing of it," he said, when contacted last Friday by the POST.

A follow up request to Kossey, responded to on Feb. 25, provided more details, and dispelled some witness reports, including one claim that there was a fire on the train's engine.

"CN operating officers responded to the there was no fire at the scene and there were no reports of injuries or community impacts," said Kossey, explaining that CN's "structured emergency response plan" was initiated to deal with the incident.

A response from CN about what the plan includes was not received by POST press time. A request for comment on what the rail company's policy is for informing the public about derailments was also not received by press deadline.

The derailment of the southbound train, which Kossey said was carrying cars of crude oil and sulphur took place in a railway siding, but CN officials haven't said how long the train was or how fast it was going.

Kossey did say that there was no damage to the tracks, and that the incident is under investigation.

Two in one day

The Conklin derailment happened within hours of a 29-car derailment in northern Ontario. In that instance, reports show that the cars, containing crude oil left the track and caught fire. No one was injured in place at a remote location about 80 kilometres south of Timmins.

A July 2013 derailment of a Montreal, Maine and Atlantic (MMA) Railway train carrying crude oil in Lac Megantic caused an explosion that killed 47 people.

The CN derailment at Conklin came at the same time Lac La Biche County officials are planning further discussions with the rail company which

through the middle of the hamlet of Lac La Biche.

Meeting planned

Lac La Biche Mayor Omer Moghrabi said he was recently invited to a meeting with a chief CN administrator and Alberta Premier Jim Prentice. The meeting, however, was cancelled when CN workers threatened strike action two weeks ago. Now that an agreement has been reached, Moghrabi expects the meeting to be rescheduled.

In the wake of the recent derailment, and the continuing issues with downtown pedestrian and vehicle railway crossings, Moghrabi hopes the meeting will be good news.

"I am looking forward to meeting with CN to discuss some of our options for the county," said the mayor.