

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Date 1/31/2025.

Testimony on Senate Bill 2340

Submitted by: Ken Wangen, Fire Chief Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue,

Chairman Patten and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Good Morning. For the record my name is Ken Wangen, I am the Fire Chief for Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue. I want to thank you for considering Senate Bill 2340.

July 5th, 2024, 3:43 A.M. Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue was paged out for a Vehicle/Locomotive/Train Fire involving unknown hazmat. The First Trucks left at 3:48 thinking we were dealing with a small-scale fire, we responded with 2 trucks (1 pumper 1 pumper/tanker). Upon leaving city limits and seeing a large orange glow to the southeast an all call was issue. At 4:15 A.M. first units arrived on scene advising that we had a multicar derailment with a large fire and hazmat release. We immediately went into defense mode and notified the population of Bordulac and the endangered farms around the area giving the option of evacuation or shelter in place (2 homes choose to evacuate). The area was then secured off as best we could. Recon teams were set to identify the front and rear of the derailment stack, estimate the number of cars, and find the train crew. Command was in in contact with CPKC's Hazmat Response Division, Devils Lake Fire, Jamestown Fire and Grand Forks for advice and information exchange. Recon returned the stack consisted of cars containing Methanol (6) cars, Anhydrous (11) cars and Medical Grade Plastic pellets (12) cars) the train crew was safe and uninjured. Unified command was established, and we continued monitoring, setting a staging zone and securing immediate site.

The fire while impressive and looked like nightmare because of the billowing black smoke, it wasn't. The fire was advantageous as it burned off the Methanol and Anhydrous Ammonia, unfortunately the plastic beads acted very much like an oil fire and made it impossible to extinguish had we tried to and would have created a larger clean up mess.

Issues we encountered:

Weather: The Hazmat and control of release was not a big issue for this incident. What was an issue? the wind or more precisely the lack of it. We had no wind to help dissipate the plume or fumes. Rain caused it and it rained heavily the first couple days adding to the already full water shed creating a muddy and wet hot zone. The nightly temperature inversion with no wind made working at night impossible, this alone extended the response multiple days.

Personnel for extended or multiple operational cycles: Having a rotating stream of personnel to maintain coverage was an issue, #1 because it was the 4th of July weekend, #2 prior experience indicated it was going to be a long incident. We called in firefighters from New Rockford, Sykeston, Harvey, Pingree, Kensal, Jamestown Rural and Devils Lake. We ran out of local and regional personnel by day 8 and had to bring in contract firefighters to continue to provide coverage for the site. Thankfully the release mitigation of the cars at that point was more of a maintenance issue, and the contract firefighters in the hot zone were reassigned.

Equipment needs: We called for equipment from the Harvey, New Rockford, Rugby, Kensal, Pingree, Jamestown Rural Fire Departments, Cass County and the Devils Lake Search and Rescue Airboats provide for direct hazmat control. The Stutsman County Sheriff Drone Team provided for overview and planning operations. When you look at the distance we needed to go to find certain pieces of equipment it is a very large footprint. Even then some of the equipment such as the tankers were not suitable for the layout of the Hot Zone or refill point. Some of the Fire Departments nearer Carrington don't even have tankers, let alone firefighters that could commit hours/days.

Controlling access to the sight. As you can imagine the Carrington Volunteer Fire Department could not spare personnel to provide access control. At the time of the incident we had 1 sheriff in Foster County, Wells County was also down on deputies, thankfully Stutsman County Sheriff and the North Dakota Highway Patrol were able to provide some personnel, CPKC rail police were onsite and brought in contracted security of the staging and rail owned properties but that did not stop people from accessing to close to the site (this was how the internet and

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viral news pictures got out). Access to road barricades and things of that nature was a big struggle. Our county road super and shared Emergency Manager called though out the region depleting the local supply. Because of this we would often have to chase down people that tried to drive through the sight, passing Firetrucks, Side Boom Dozers, Backhoes, and rock trucks along the way.

In reflection: The scary part is none of these issues faced are a solely related to a train derailments or Hazmat, well the Devils Lake Region Search and Rescue and Cass County airboats were.

Manpower, Tankers, Portable Pumps, Portable Lighting, Road Access Control are needed for many fire suppression applications. October reminded us wildfires can happen at any time in North Dakota, California is currently reinforcing it. I bet a lot of the issues seen over the days and weeks of the western North Dakota fires were probably the same issues my department had, I also have no doubt they also seen issues we did not. For that reason, I believe a study addressing NDFS, DES, NDFA, NDFM communications, fire department needs/readiness and funding is warranted. I urge a do pass on SB 2340. I stand for any questions.

Ken Wangen



First Picture about 4:30 a.m. 45 minutes after dispatch.



Drone image around 10 A.M. the 5th