

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 Porter and the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee,

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 and 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 them 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 sent into the hot zone to identify the front and rear of the derailment stack, estimate the number of cars, and find the train crew. Command was 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 29 cars later to be found 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 the immediate site. We also started calling for assets (air boats, tankers, pumps, road barricades and about anything you could think of).

The fire while impressive, 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 would have made it impossible to extinguish had we tried. Trying would have have created a larger clean up mess, especially if we would have used Class B foam with forever chemicals.

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 hampered efforts as it rained heavily the first couple days adding to the already full water shed, thus 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, first because it was the 4th of July weekend, second 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 (used them as fans to dissipate the fumes). 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 we were lucky we have good connections and the responding department could afford to loan us the equipment. 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 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.

Manpower, Tankers, Portable Pumps, Portable Lighting, Road Access Control are needed for many fire suppression applications. Having a better understanding of how to access these assets and work and communicate with state agencies will go a long way towards making the fire service better.

October reminded us wildfires can happen at any time in North Dakota, California reinforced it. And the outbreak near Glen Ullin showed us we have a tinder box to deal with.

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.



4:30 a.m. 45 minutes after dispatch.



Drone image around 10 A.M. the 5th about 5 hours into the incident