
CITY COUNCIL REPORT

DATE: April 13, 2015
TO: Mayor and Councilmembers
FROM: Mark Gaillard, Jerry Bills
CC: Jeff Meilbeck, Josh Copley, Jerene Watson, Leadership Team
SUBJECT: Preparedness for Railroad Related Emergencies.

This is in response to Vice-Mayor Barotz request on April 1, 2015 for information on the City's preparation and action plan in the event of a major train derailment in Flagstaff.

DISCUSSION

History

The Flagstaff Fire Department has been effective in responding to incidents with the railroad since its creation over 110 years ago. The past 30 years the Fire Department has responded to 6 large incidents involving rail cars and rail tankers carrying hazardous materials. A railroad collision in 1988 caused the evacuation of 3000 residents in the Sunnyside area of the city. Two train derailments in 1996 required much less of a response as there were no hazardous material releases associated with the incident. In 2000, a derailment caused 12,000 gallons of diesel fuel to ignite and burn. Flagstaff Fire Department was able to mitigate it with the help of our mutual aid partners and the railroad's response personnel. The most significant incident in this timeframe was in 2002 with a derailment of 14 railcars near west Route 66. Three of those cars were carrying hazardous materials and were in a precarious situation. The incident was mitigated without injuries or significant losses due to the working relationships the fire department has with our neighboring fire districts and the railroad.

Response Personnel

The Fire Department has 72 full time personnel responding in 7 apparatus 24 hours a day 365 days a year. We operate on a 3 shift system, i.e. there are 2 shifts of 24 personnel off while one is working. Hazardous materials incidents may require the department to call in off-duty personnel for larger incidents such as train derailments and larger fires. This occurs an average of 3-6 times a year. Eighteen of the department's personnel are special operations technicians who are trained in hazardous material response and mitigation. They are part of a Statewide Rapid Response Team (RRT) along with approximately 20 other organizations. These teams were originally funded and expanded by Homeland

Security and are now maintained by their home jurisdictions. These teams provide back up to each other for extended incidents and can be called upon should there be a need. Mutual Aid from other hazmat teams although available, is generally viewed as two hours away.

Typically, when an incident concerning the railroad takes place our response originates through a 911 call. This call will generate an on-duty response of our personnel including a Battalion Chief who has the authority to expand or reduce the level of department commitment to the incident based upon a scene assessment. This level can range from one on-duty fire engine to a "Full Recall" (everyone) of all off duty personnel. This includes mutual aid companies as well as statewide resources, much like we do for large wildfires in the region. When these larger "everyone" responses happen, the request brings State, County and local resources into the incident and usually opens the County/City Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at some level. This triggers the State EOC to monitor the incident to assist with any needs. Should the incident result in a multi-day response, the aforementioned group will coordinate the incident as we have done in the past on incidents like the Woody, Shultz, and Hardy fires.

Training

The Fire Department is constantly training and planning as it is the nature of our business. Our hazardous material technicians must maintain their proficiency through an annual continuing education program that includes railroad responses. The Command Staff attends regular trainings with all the partner agencies to maintain their skills. For instance, last fall the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) conducted a tabletop exercise using a railcar leaking in the middle of the City. In July 2014 the County Emergency Manager held a regional EOC activation training for all to hone their skills in EOC operations. Additionally, this time of year at the Ponderosa Fire Advisory Council meeting we review our operations plans for wildfire and command functions that pertain to hazardous materials incidents as well.

Risk Trend

Economic drivers involving oil production and pipeline capacity have resulted in a radical increase in the transportation of crude oil by rail and a resulting increase in emergencies and releases. BNSF railroad is one of several routes by which the transportation of crude oil by rail is conducted nationally. Flagstaff Fire Department and Emergency Management personnel are currently obtaining additional training to address this increasing hazard within our community. Six FFD Personnel are attending BNSF sponsored training in Pueblo, CO in July.

Conclusion

The Fire Department has and will continue to prepare, maintain, and provide for an “all hazards” response to our community needs. The Department has endured many different types of incidents over the years and has performed at the highest levels, we will continue to prepare to provide a rapid and effective response to our community and region.

RECOMMENDATION / CONCLUSION

This report is for information only.