

Town calls for improved rail safety – Fire Chief cites ‘good cooperation’ locally

If they don't know what dangerous cargo is travelling by rail through Halton Hills, municipal fire departments can not be fully equipped to deal with rail accidents. With approximately 300 train derailments in the past five years in the Greater Toronto/Hamilton area – 17 in Halton – and the summer's Lac Megantic tragedy fresh in their minds, municipal politicians want to talk rail safety with Ottawa.

In Halton Hills, led by Acton Councillor Clark Somerville, councillors endorsed three guiding principles from a new Rail Safety Working Group of FCM – the Canadian Federation of Municipalities, of which Somerville is third vice-president. The principles include: ensuring Canada's rail transportation system safety is a federal priority and clear federal responsibility, ensuring the government responds to Transportation Safety Board safety recommendations, acknowledging the Federal-Municipal partnership is essential to safety, and that railway companies provide



the necessary information on railway traffic to the Town and Fire Chief, so proper emergency preparedness measures are in place.

At last Monday's council meeting, Somerville reported Transportation Minister Lisa Raitt



was "very receptive" to railway safety concerns following a recent meeting, but "there's no statutory or mandatory requirements that ...that (cargo) informa-

tion is shared between railroads and local municipalities," Somerville said, adding cargo information is shared with the federal government.

Halton Hills Fire Chief Brent Marshall said he's "very confident with the feedback" his department gets from both CNR and the Goderich Exeter railway, which uses CN lines through Halton Hills. "We never had any difficulty getting co-operation from CN Rail and Goderich Exeter so we can prepare for incidents," Marshall said on Tuesday.

Chief Marshall said after the Lac Megantic, Quebec disaster involving a derailed and exploding train, he asked the railways for updated commodities lists and received them within days. Those lists



WHAT'S IN THAT TANKER? With the Lac Megantic trail derailment, and other more recent incidents fresh in their minds, Halton Hills politicians want a better working relationship with Ottawa over transportation of dangerous goods. – Submitted photo

include all possible dangerous goods that could travel by rail. The list of what is in each rail car is listed on the train's manifest.

Somerville said another interesting issue in the debate is one of jurisdiction: if a railroad crosses into the USA, or out of the province, it is federally regulated, adding another layer of regulations to provincial rules if the railroad operates within the province.

The bottom line is also an issue that needs debate according to Somerville who said the municipalities cost of rail accident cleanups can not be downloaded to municipal governments. "In Lac Megantic, the

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HALTON HILLS FIRE CHIEF BRENT MARSHALL

a-billion dollars worth of cleanup and rehabilitation..." Somerville said, listing several recent rail accidents.

"I think we need to have a better partnership with the railroads and need to make sure our municipalities have that (cargo) information, especially under our Emergency Plan."

Mayor Rick Bonnette echoed the call for an improved partnership, and said it was "sinful" that Lac Megantic was stuck with a huge cleanup bill when the railway in question went bankrupt.

railroad company way had \$30-million worth of insurance, and its estimated there's a half-

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