



STAFF PHOTO/BILL ROBERTS

A 120-metre stretch of CN railway line was torn up when a Canadian National freight train jumped the track at Aurora Road and Warden Avenue in Whitchurch-Stouffville Saturday.

## Cause of derailment unknown

BY JOAN RANSBERRY  
Staff Writer

Transportation officials continue to try to pin down what caused a Canadian National freight train to jump the track, derailing 19 cars at Aurora Road and Warden Avenue in Whitchurch-Stouffville Saturday night.

Two crew members escaped injury while a 120-metre stretch of CN railway line was torn up in the derailment, which happened on a main line running from Toronto and Western Canada.

Heavy equipment was expected to arrive at the scene today to haul away the tanker cars that were derailed.

Harvey Preston was notified late Saturday night all 19 cars had landed on his 17-acre farm.

"I was born on this farm," Mr. Preston, 80, said. "Never experienced anything like this before. A CN police officer turned up at the door and told me the train was off the track. Cars were lying everywhere. CN will talk to me as long as I know what questions to ask."

The train derailment posed a particular problem for 14 head of beef cattle. With the work crew busy attending the massive cleanup, Mr. Preston was forced to keep the cattle in his barn while arrangements were made to have CN string a fence around

his barn to contain the cattle.

"The cattle are used to going in and out. They (CN) said they'd put the fence up," Mr. Preston said.

Because the Prestons live so close to the accident scene, the main concern was the possibility of a chemical spill.

"My son asked about the chemicals," Mr. Preston said. "We were assured it (a benzene-type of chemical) was all right."

While CN was able to resume rail service on the track early Sunday evening, transportation officials are still trying to piece together what caused the derailment.

"We're looking at all aspects," CN spokesperson Ian Thomson said. "We're looking at the weather. It was clear and cold. Then again, this is Canada. It's often clear and cold. We're examining the equipment and the data recordings, the track and we're interviewing the crew."

Three of the damaged cars were carrying about 40 motor vehicles. All the vehicles have been written off.

The rest of the rail cars were empty, although seven tankers contained benzene residue, a flammable material.

There was no fire, no leakage and, since it was a good distance away from the urban area of Whitchurch-Stouffville, there

was no need for an area evacuation, Mr. Thomson stressed.

"But, people living in the immediate area were very, very co-operative," Mr. Thomson said.

While at the scene, Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Sue Sherban said she advised CN officials to go door to door on Warden Avenue and explain to the residents what was taking place.

The situation in Whitchurch-Stouffville could have been far worse, Mrs. Sherban said, pointing out there have been two other train derailments in neighbouring communities in the past two weeks.

Jan. 14, a train derailment in Whitby claimed two lives. The Canadian Pacific train jumped the rails at an overpass and several containers rolled down an embankment, crushing a car and killing the two women inside.

A 43-car CP freight train derailed Jan. 20 in Caledon, spilling a cargo of 30,000 water bottles and car parts. No one was injured and there was no hazardous cargo.

No one was injured at the (Warden Avenue and Aurora Road) derailment, Mrs. Sherban said. "It shows how lucky we are. It really opened my eyes, though, as to what can happen."

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