



National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Railroad, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Investigations
Human Performance and Survival Factors Division
Washington, D.C. 20594

Emergency Response Group Chairman's Factual Report

November 13, 2017

A. Accident Information

Railroad: Union Pacific Railroad
Location: Graettinger, Iowa
Date: March 10, 2017
Time: 12:50 am CST¹
Number: DCA17MR007

B. Group Members

Dana Sanzo
National Transportation Safety Board

Mark Hunefeld
Palo Alto County Emergency
Management Agency

Rick Downs
On-scene group chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

¹ Times in this report are Central Standard Time.

C. Synopsis

For a summary of the accident, refer to the *Accident Summary* report, within this docket.

D. Emergency Response

About 0053, the Palo Alto County dispatch center received the first 911 call from a nearby resident to report the accident. About 0058, the Graettinger Fire Department was dispatched to 4360 300th Street for a train accident with ethanol cars burning and a grass fire. The fire chief heard the page, responded to the station, and advised firefighters that this was a full hazmat incident.² At about this time, a Union Pacific Railroad representative called the county to report the accident and report that the tank cars contain ethanol.

The fire chief's considerations prior to and on arrival were about the ethanol, the amount of radio traffic, the availability of law enforcement, the size of the accident site, the train crew's location, and moving any cars that were not derailed.

The chief was the first to arrive on-scene and could see the fire when he first turned onto 435th Avenue. At this location, he found that the train was blocking a grade crossing and road access to houses near the derailment.

² This information in this report was compiled from conversations between the on-scene group chairman and emergency responders.



Figure 1-A map of the accident area

The Graettinger fire chief requested additional mutual aid resources. At about 0118, the Emmetsberg Fire Department was dispatched. The fire chief established incident command at about 0125. He used binoculars to assess the scene from a distance and consulted the Emergency Response Guide for ethanol information. At about 0133, the Emmetsberg Fire Department arrived on scene. Deputies from the Palo Alto County Sheriff's Office closed roads near the site. A staging area was established upwind from the site on 435th Avenue.

The fire chief's focus was on moving the non-derailed cars away from the fire and getting access to the nearby residences. At about 0135, the train crew arrived at the command vehicle. The chief and the train crew discussed and created a plan to move the cars. The lead 20 cars were connected to the lead locomotive, but separated from the derailed and burning cars. Because of concerns that these cars could catch on fire, the train crew pulled these cars approximately a mile and a half away from the burning cars. Afterwards, the crew was further asked by emergency responders to pull the rear 52 unaffected cars back from the burning cars, using the DPU locomotive on the rear of the train.

The chief monitored the movement of the cars by radio. At about 0150, the cars were clear of the grade crossing, and road access was restored to the nearby houses to evacuate them.³ Firefighters went to the houses to advise them to evacuate. The evacuation was voluntary. The residents of three houses left the area, and the residents of one chose to stay. By about 0203, the evacuation was complete.

The county emergency manager, who arrived at about 0201, advised that ½ mile evacuation radius was sufficient. The county emergency manager and the chief believed that the scene was stable, they should wait for more UP resources, and allow the product to burn off.

At about 0330, a UP special agent arrived on scene. The fire department's operations were complete, and command was transferred to Union Pacific. The fire department remained on scene until about 1134 as a precaution.

- End of Report -

³ These houses were within a 1-mile radius from the accident, and the fire chief was in contact with the residents prior to moving the cars.