

# **Derailment in Québec Illustrates Dangers of Transporting Hazardous Substances**



Early on July 6, a Montreal, Maine & Atlantic train carrying 72 cars of crude oil slipped downhill, derailed and exploded near the downtown of Lac-Mégantic, Québec. The resulting fires caused massive destruction and the evacuation of 2,000 people.

Five people have been confirmed dead. But because at least 40 people are still missing, that number is expected to rise.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper described the destruction in the city as 'like a war zone,' with 30 buildings completely destroyed. In addition, the Chaudière River was contaminated by an estimated 100,000 litres of oil.

A criminal investigation is under way as is an investigation by the Transportation Safety Board. Investigators say they've recovered the 'black box' and a brake detection unit, which should help determine exactly what happened.

Although the company hasn't completed its own investigation, it has said that the train was parked at a station outside the town and the accident may have been the result of the release of the locomotive's air brakes that were holding the train in place. The TSB said it'll be looking closely at the way in which the train was secured and both air brakes and hand brakes.

Incidents such as this one are exactly why companies transporting hazardous substances are required to have emergency response assistance plans or ERAPs. It's unclear whether the railway had an ERAP and whether it was activated in the wake of the derailment.

Even if the railway wasn't required to have an ERAP, it was certainly required to be prepared to respond to foreseeable emergencies, such as train derailments.

To ensure that you're adequately prepared for a wide variety of emergencies, go to the OHS Insider's Emergency Preparedness & Response Compliance Centre for:

- 8 emergency preparedness and response tips
- Information on complying with the fire preparedness requirements in the OHS

laws

- A fire safety assessment form
- A fire safety checklist for industrial workplaces.