

# The Bradford Era

07/05/2006

## Operations at site of train derailment shift to cleanup

By:FRAN De LANCEY/ Era Correspondent

Operations at the site of Friday's derailment of the Norfolk Southern train in Gardeau have now shifted to "clean-up mode," according to a spokesperson for the state Department of Environmental Protection.

"The four derailed tank cars that contained sodium hydroxide have all been stabilized and removed from their original wreckage positions and repositioned at a stabilized place, and the chlorine tank car was removed from the wreckage site and placed on another train car and removed from the area," Freda Tarbell, community relations coordinator at the DEP's Meadville office, said Wednesday.

Personnel from the DEP have maintained a continued presence at the wreckage site since being notified of the accident.

Though there still are pockets where the sodium hydroxide is still seeping into the Portage branch of the Sinnemahoning Creek, the volume has been reduced, which means there has been an improvement in the creek water, Tarbell said, referring to pH levels in the water taken from the creek shortly after the accident that registered about 12, a high alkaline concentration. She said, "The latest readings have returned to 7, with 6 to 6 1/2 as being normal."

DEP has said that 48,000 gallons of sodium hydroxide, or lye, spilled into the creek as a result of the accident.

Portage Creek has been severely impacted from north of Gardeau to almost Emporium, Tarbell noted.

"That is a distance of almost 15 miles of the creek where fish and other aquatic life have been wiped out."

Despite the severe impact of the chemical entering the creek, there are some positive notes, according to Tarbell.

"While the short term impact on the creek has been severe, sodium hydroxide does not have a long-term residual effect and the recent rains have helped dilute the chemical.

"The many nearby feeder streams to the Portage branch that were not affected by the spill can help repopulate the creek, but this is not an overnight process. It could take a number of years, possibly three to five, before the stream bounces back."

In conversations DEP has had with personnel of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, it has been estimated the fish kill could exceed 10,000.

Since sodium hydroxide seeped into the soil, some hazardous conditions still exist at the derailment site. As the work continues to neutralize the chemical, officials said the public should stay away from the spill zone.

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