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## Train derails in Mckean County

By KATIE WARD , The Times Herald

NORWICH TOWNSHIP, Pa. — About 16,000 gallons of caustic soda spilled into Portage Creek after 29 cars on a Norfolk Southern train derailed in the Gardeau neighborhood just before 9 a.m. Friday.

The cause of the derailment has not been determined, according to Bruce Manning, assistant Emergency Management and Hazardous Materials director for McKean County.

Fifty people who live downstream on the creek were evacuated for most of the day, though they were permitted to return to their homes in the evening. No one was injured, Mr. Manning said. He said Norfolk Southern officials advised residents to keep people and pets away from the water. Railroad officials could not be reached for comment Friday.

“The Federal Railroad Administration is in there checking it out, and the National Transportation Safety Board may be coming in,” said Mr. Manning. “We lost probably a whole tank full. Of the 29 cars, five were carrying hazardous materials. Four were caustic soda, and at least one leaked, maybe more — we’re not sure yet.”

One derailed tank contained chlorine, but was not punctured, he said. The caustic soda, otherwise known as sodium hydroxide or lye, is a liquid form of the same substance used to make drain cleaner. The water-soluble material is extremely corrosive with a pH factor of 14 and is quickly heading downstream, said Mr. Manning.

“It went from Gardeau at least to Emporium already, and probably well south of that,” he said Friday evening. “They did put an overflow dam in to try to contain some of it.”

The dam, installed a mile below the spill, will collect the caustic soda that won’t dissolve because the water is too concentrated.

“It’s going to take a long, long time and an awful lot of water to dilute it. It’s probably going to go away in a couple of weeks,” he said. “The good thing is that once it gets down to the Susquehanna, there’s so much floodwater that can help dilute it.”

“Water wells are another concern we have. We don’t know what’s going to happen yet,” he said.

He said the scene has been declared safe for investigation and cleanup, but it will take more time to repair subsequent environmental damage.

“Unless you can dam the whole thing, it’s going to cause environmental damage to wildlife and streams, and problems with the soil,” said Mr. Manning. “I’m sure there will be lots of soil removal.”

Residents along the creek in Emporium and farther south are being notified by radio of the spill, he said.

Emergency responders were on the scene from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Fire departments from Port Allegany, Austin, Emporium and Norwich responded, as well as the Elk County Hazardous Materials department, the Emporium and Bradford decontamination departments, the Pennsylvania state Fish and Boat Commission, state police, and the McKean, Elk, Cameron and Potter counties Emergency Management agencies.

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