

Area legislators listen up on rail safety

By Tim Richard
staff writer

The Freeland rescue operation was just great. But residents near the CSX railroad in that Saginaw County village told state legislators Monday to make sure tank cars carrying hazardous chemicals don't derail in the first place.

"Once an accident has happened, the system has failed — regardless of how good the evacuation is," George Blackhurst of nearby Midland told a House panel chaired by Rep. James Kosteva, D-Canton.

"To them, it (a crash) is just one of the costs of doing business," said Wayne Ziegler, a Freeland resident who attacked CSX's safety record as the worst per mile in American railroading.

"Freeland is a 5 or 6 on a scale of 1 to 10," said Tom Horrigan, spokes-

man for Citizens Against Toxic Trains (CATT), a group formed after an April 25 derailment in Oakland County's Highland Township. "Think in terms of a Saginaw, a Detroit, a Grand Rapids," he said.

A STANDING room only crowd jammed the Titabawassee Township Hall for more than three hours to emphasize preventing the kinds of accidents that occurred July 22 when 40 were injured and 3,000 evacuated for several days.

Fourteen cars of a CSX train went off the track at 11:25 that morning, including three carrying Dow Corning hazardous chemicals.

Kosteva, whose western Wayne County district is criss-crossed by railroads, said lawmakers first want to assure "the quickest and best possible response" — labeling of tank cars, proper records of what trains

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are carrying and training of employees.

Second, the state needs to see what it can do to oversee rail safety, despite federal pre-emption of that field, Kosteva said.

To Rep. Mat Dunnakiss, R-Lake Orion, the mystery was why the rail cars broke open and burned. "The cars are built to withstand crashes," said the northern Oakland lawmaker. "That should be the focus of legislation."

Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, learned from a CSX manager that there is testing of employees for drug and alcohol use after a crash.

Dolan asked about the crash's effect on wildlife and was told by a Department of Natural Resources official that no deaths of birds or deer were attributed to the crash. Most residents near the crash site have city water, although DNR said there might be some danger to those with shallow wells.

Rep. Willis Bullard Jr., R-Highland, whose district saw an April 25 derailment, blistered CSX for having an incomplete list of chemicals aboard that so-called "death train."

Repled Al Crown, CSX Transportation's divisional manager: "A clerk's error was in not notifying the train crew by radio" that a car had been added, but there was accurate information at the CSX terminal.

SPOKESMEN FOR the Michigan State Police, Saginaw Sheriff's Department, CSX and Dow Corning heaped praise on Bill Kirchner, chief of the 24-member volunteer fire department in Titabawassee Township, a rural community of less than 5,000. Kirchner chaired the cooperative rescue effort.

"Everyone pulled together. Fantastic. No injuries to rescue workers, no property damage," said James Kelly of the Sheriff's Department.

"There was immediate response — in minutes," said Pat Holey, Kirchner's deputy. CSX and Dow Corning personnel were on the scene within a half hour and could read labels on tank cars through binoculars despite the fire. "The system worked," Holey said.

"We're working with the petroleum industry to build a center for training in Lansing by the first of the year," said Lt. Arthur Nash Jr. of the State Police fire marshal division.

"In 18 months, we've trained more than 4,000 emergency handlers," said Capt. Arlen Brower of the State Police emergency management division. But Brower said federal funding has run out and wasn't renewed for fiscal 1990.

RESIDENTS OF Freeland and nearby Midland had their agenda for legislators:

- An executive order of a 25 mph speed limit for trains carrying hazardous chemicals. The CSX Freeland train was traveling 37.
- A state fund to help communities pay for firefighting, traffic control, evacuation and cleanup when a disaster occurs. "Our budget is blown out of the water," said deputy chief Holey. "A resident report that an Ohio city hadn't been reimbursed by CSX a full year after a crash there."
- No legal limit on dollar liability, even after residents had signed agreements for compensation from the railroad, because of the possibility that ill effects might not show up immediately.
- More frequent and more stringent track inspection. "The Federal Railroad Administration doesn't have the manpower or budget to safely inspect these rails," said resident Kim Maxwell.
- "Lessen our dependence on products made with hazardous chemicals. Use the marketplace," said Alan Hunt of Citizens for Alternatives to Chemical Contamination.
- Better construction of tank cars. "The CSX cars exceeded federal standards," said Kathy Garthoff of Concerned Citizens in Freeland.

Senior Olympics marks 10th year next weekend

Nearly 1,000 senior citizens are expected to participate in the Michigan Recreation and Parks Association's 10th annual Michigan Senior Olympics, Aug. 18-20.

Men and women 55 and older are eligible to participate in 21 different categories including sanctioned and demonstration events.

Athletic competitions include archery, swimming, tennis, bowling, track and field and softball. Activities such as baking, arts and crafts and checkers are also included in the event.

Opening ceremonies begin at 6 p.m. Friday, Aug. 18 at Southfield High School. Senior citizens and

their guests can dine, dance and socialize from 6:30-10 p.m. at the Southfield Civic Center.

Events take place at several locations including the Southfield Civic Center, Plum Hollow Lanes, Inglenook Park, Lawrence Technology University and Multi-Lakes Conservation Association in Walked Lake.

Southfield Parks and Recreation hosts the event. Co-sponsors include the Coburn Clinic, Botaford Hospital and the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission.

For details call the Southfield Parks and Recreation, 354-9603 or Marge Miller, 656-1403.

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OCC sets fire training

The Oakland Fire Training Institute on the Southfield Campus of Oakland Community College is conducting the following seminars during September and October.

BASIC FIRE ACADEMY - Sept. 5 - Oct. 27, Monday - Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; registration deadline is Aug. 24.

FIRE RECORDS AND REPORTS - Saturday, Sept. 9, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., at Royal Oak Campus; registration closes Sept. 1, Tuesday, Sept. 26, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; registration closes Sept. 20.

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

NON-COMBUSTIBLE AND FIRE RESISTIVE - Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 9-10, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Oakland Technical Center, Clarkston; registration deadline is Sept. 5. Wednesday and Thursday, Oct. 11-12, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Southfield Campus; registration closes Oct. 5.

Complete details about the classes, including costs and registration information may be obtained by phoning the Institute at 552-2628 or 552-2635.

The Institute and the Southfield Campus of OCC are at 22322 Rutland Dr., off Nine Mile Road between Greenfield and Southfield roads.

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