

## Gainford still unsafe for residents

### No success with controlled burn of propane gas

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Thick curls of black smoke and orange flames rose Monday evening above the small community of Gainford as CN Rail did a second controlled burn of propane tanks damaged in a derailment early Saturday.

As the tanks burned, emergency vehicles and CN crews waited nearby, and highway travellers stopped to take in the dramatic skyline.

The fire is intended to safely burn off the propane gas left in the tankers, and, according to a statement from Parkland County, is believed by officials to be "the safest and most effective way to allow citizens to return to their homes as quickly as possible."

Nine cars of liquefied propane and four cars carrying crude oil derailed in the hamlet of Gainford at about 1 a.m. Saturday, causing an explosion and fire in the hamlet about 85 kilometres west of Edmonton.

No one was injured in the blast but area residents were evacuated from their homes as officials worked to deal with the volatile situation.

There's currently no word on when the 126 registered evacuees will be able to return to their homes.

When firefighters woke Glenda Madge early Saturday morning, the Gainford resident had enough time to grab her glasses, purse and teeth before being evacuated from her home because of the nearby fiery derailment.

On Monday, Madge and her husband were able to return home for 10 minutes to feed their cats and gather a few essentials - clothes and medication - as it appeared the Gainford evacuation would stretch into this week.

"I'm tired, a little stressed, but I'm OK," said Madge, sitting in the couple's room at the Pembina River Inn in the neighbouring town of Entwistle. "It's something we all have to deal with."

Speaking at a press conference Monday morning, CN Rail spokesman Warren Chandler said a controlled burn Sunday failed to empty the propane tanks, and the cars were then left to vent overnight.

The crude oil tankers were not breached and have been moved from the site, Chandler said. He described the emergency response as "a complicated, highly technical, exercise."

"We hoped for an early return, but in the interest of safety we're not going to be able to do that," he said.

There were two CN employees on the train at the time of the derailment, a conductor and a locomotive engineer. Chandler would not say whether they have been interviewed by CN officials, and said there is no timeline for the investigation into what caused the derailment.

Chandler would also not release any specific details of the current situation at the derailment site, including possible ground or water contamination, property damage in the area, and the status of the investigation into what caused the derailment.

"We'll have the time to address those (questions) at a later date," he said. "Now is not that time."

The area remained blockaded for kilometres in every direction late Monday afternoon.

Pembina River Inn owner Len Solis said he has heard about residents trying to sneak back into the town on foot or by boat, but that authorities are patrolling the area.

"Nobody can get access from either side," he said.

County spokeswoman Jackie Ostashek said no specific timeline is currently in place for residents to return home, and Madge said she expected to be away from home at least a couple more days.

"I wish I could be home right now, but there's nothing you can do, you gotta be out of there, she said.

"They're doing the best they can."

Mayor Rod Shaigec said officials cannot let residents back into the area until it is safe.

"Certainly, there's people who are frustrated."

Those displaced by the derailment are being told to keep their receipts for food and lodging, and Chandler said their costs will be reimbursed by CN.

The derailment happened on the Trans-Continental Rail Line, which carries all rail traffic east and west. Traffic on the line is currently stopped. Chandler said the line had been inspected Thursday by CN, and the 134-car train was inspected before it left Edmonton. [jpruden@edmontonjournal.com](mailto:jpruden@edmontonjournal.com)