

CP train carrying coal derails in Burnaby, no injuries (updated)

Heavy rains may have affected ground near the tracks

BY TIFFANY CRAWFORD, VANCOUVER SUN JANUARY 11, 2014 2:27 PM

METRO VANCOUVER -- RCMP say heavy rain may be to be blamed for a Canadian Pacific Railway train derailment in Burnaby that spilled three car loads of coal into the environment Saturday morning.

Seven cars from a 152-car train carrying coal went off the Canadian National Railway tracks at around 11 a.m. near Government and Cariboo Roads north of Burnaby Lake. Four cars remained upright, while three tipped over spilling coal.

Staff Sgt. Wayne Baier with Burnaby RCMP said some of the coal has leached into a nearby creek. Officials from Transport Canada and the Ministry of Environment are investigating.

Two crew members were on board but there were no injuries.

Baier said while it is too early to determine the exact cause, officers believe the heavy rain may be to be blamed. Baier said the ground under the tracks may have been washed out by the high amount of rainfall the area received overnight.

Environment Canada had forecast 50 millimetres of rain overnight in Metro Vancouver, prompting a rainfall warning on Friday.

CN spokeswoman Emily Hamer confirmed that some of the coal had spilled into a waterway. She said CN and CP crews were on site to assess the environmental impact and develop a response plan.

Cariboo Road is closed to traffic while officials investigate.

Rail safety has been in the spotlight over the last year after a train containing crude oil derailed and exploded in Lac-Megantic, Que., in July, killing 47 people.

On Tuesday, 17 cars, five of which were carrying crude oil, derailed near Wapske, New Brunswick.

Within two hours of Saturday's incident, local environmental group Voters Taking Action on Climate Change sent out a statement denouncing plans to expand coal export at Neptune Terminals. The group says if approved, Neptune will triple its coal exports.

The group claims the port authority rushed through its decision on the Neptune expansion despite growing opposition and demands for public hearings and a health impact assessment.

The group's director Kevin Washbrook said the incident in Burnaby highlights a fundamental flaw in decision making around expanded coal exports in Metro Vancouver.

“The port authority has absolute power to approve expanded coal exports from publicly owned Port lands, and it refuses to acknowledge that those decisions have an impact on surrounding communities,” he said, in the statement. “Whether it’s the health impacts from increased exposure to diesel exhaust or coal dust or train derailments themselves, increased coal exports come at a cost to our neighbourhoods.”