

What's shipped through, and how it can hurt you

Here's a list of some of the chemicals that come through the Texas A&M University campus by train and what they can do:

Ammonia: Causes burns to skin and eyes. Harmful if inhaled, and may burn the lungs badly enough to be fatal. Based on a spill less than 30 feet square and 6-12 mph winds, the U.S. Department of Transportation recommends evacuating a downwind area of half a mile.

Bromine: A corrosive and an oxidizer, this gas is extremely poisonous. Recommended evacuation distance is an area 2 1/2 miles long and 1 1/2 miles wide downwind.

Chlorine: Similar to bromine, this gas was the one released in the derailment in Florida April 8. Recommended evacuation distance is 2 miles long and 1 1/2 miles wide.

Ethyl Chloride: Burns skin and eyes, is harmful if inhaled, and is highly flammable. An area 1/2 mile around the site must be evacuated to assure safety from flying fragments in case of explosion.

Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG): Highly flammable. An area at least 1/2 mile around the site must be evacuated to protect people from flying fragments in case of explosion.

Liquid Hydrogen: May burn skin and eyes. This

gas is highly flammable, and the flame may be invisible.

Hydrogen Chloride: This corrosive is harmful if inhaled, and burns the skin and eyes. Recommended evacuation distance: 1 1/2 miles by 1 mile.

Hydrogen Cyanide: Highly flammable and extremely poisonous. Recommended evacuation distance: 3/4 mile by 1/2 mile.

Liquid Methane: The explosion danger of this chemical requires evacuation at least 1/2 mile in all directions.

Vinyl Chloride: This gas, contained by a car which derailed but did not leak in Bryan Jan. 5, is highly flammable, poses an explosion hazard, and a fire may produce poisonous gases. A tank car of vinyl chloride is sometimes called a "rolling time bomb."

Nitric Acid: May ignite other combustible materials. Vapors can be fatal. Recommended evacuation distance: 3/4 mile by 1/2 mile.

Phosgene: This gas was used as a weapon in World War I. It is extremely poisonous. Recommended evacuation distance: 5 miles by 3 miles.

Sulfur Dioxide: The vapors are extremely irritating and are harmful if inhaled. Recommended evacuation distance: 3/4 mile by 1/2 mile.

Derailment would mean trouble

By SCOTT D. HARING
Battalion Reporter

Nobody likes to think about train disasters. But 13 to 15 trains go right through the Texas A&M University campus every day, and on each of them could be any of 1,650 hazardous chemicals.

Right now, there's not an established evacuation plan for the campus dormitories, and a new plan concerning the evacuation of classrooms and offices is still under study by a committee.

The railroads, as a general rule, have done very well at safely handling dangerous cargoes. But there are always exceptions.

About a week ago, 28 cars of a Louisiana & Nashville train derailed four miles from Crestview, Fla. More than 4,500 people were evacuated from an 80-square-mile area around the wreck because of chlorine gas pouring from some of the cars. Tank cars carrying anhydrous ammonia, acetone and sulfur exploded and burned, and a car of poisonous carbolic acid hung off the side of a bridge over the Yellow River.

In a train derailment in Bryan Jan. 5, five cars filled with vinyl chloride went off the tracks. The derailment was on the same track that runs along Wellborn Road through the Texas A&M campus, and was about two



This derailment of five tank cars carrying vinyl chloride gas occurred Jan. 5 in Bryan, on the same tracks that run through the Texas A&M

campus. They didn't leak, but 250 people were evacuated from the area as a precaution.

Battalion photo by Lee Roy Leeper

miles north of the campus.

Bryan authorities evacuated approximately 250 people from nearby homes and businesses, but there was no chemical leak and they were allowed to return a few hours later.

A spokesman for Dow Chemical, the manufacturers of the vinyl chloride, said that if such an explosion happened, "it would be a terrific force."

According to the Texas Transportation Institute, 46 percent of all the chemicals shipped by rail in the United States in 1972 were shipped from, delivered to or passed through Texas.

Due to the constant expansion of Texas industry, especially the chemical and petroleum industries, the percentage may be even higher today. A TTI report says, "The potential of catastrophic accidents from the movement of hazardous materials in Texas is among the highest in the nation."

In the event of a hazardous chemical spill near the Texas A&M campus, what would the local authorities

do? Brazos County Civil Defense has set up a Hazardous Material Emergency Team to deal with just that situation. Jake Cangleose, county civil defense director and chairman, said that the team is made up of the chiefs of the Bryan and College Station fire departments, the towns' police chiefs and the sheriff.

If a chemical spill occurred, the fire department would be the first to take action. Charles Yeager, assistant chief of the College Station fire department, said that all College Station firemen have received hazardous chemical training.

To find out just what chemical they would be dealing with, Yeager said, both the engineer conductor carry a waybill listing the cargo of every car. In the past, however, Yeager said that railroad personnel have been reluctant to hand over the waybill to the fire department.

Yeager said that there is also a toll-free number, set up by the chemical manufacturers, that can be called. Using this group's computers, he said, information on the chemical spilled and how to deal with it can be obtained within minutes.

The fire chief is the person who determines if an evacuation is necessary and how extensive it should be. It is the responsibility of the police and sheriff to carry it out.

Thomas R. Parsons, director of security and traffic for Texas A&M, said that the standard evacuation procedure includes sirens and loudspeakers to alert the public, along with door-to-door checks to make sure that everybody has left.

If a hazardous chemical spill happened right next to Texas A&M, however, the problems would be tremendous.

Parsons said there is no evacuation plan for the campus. Howard Perry, associate vice president for student services, is the head of a committee that has been created to look into the problem.

Perry said he wrote to a number of other institutions with similar situations to Texas A&M's, but to no avail.

"We're plowing new ground," he said. The details of a plan, Perry said, depend upon the circumstances of the accident.

If the accident occurred at the dormitories would be of concern. Perry said the new plan being written would involve resident advisers in the dorms, alert students and get them to a common meeting place far away from the fumes that would be no danger. Just how long that would be, Perry said, depends on what chemical was spilled.

Right now, Parsons said, and loudspeakers would be used to alert dorm residents in case of a derailment. He also said that the city police would go through dorms making sure that everyone had been evacuated.

If a hazardous chemical spill occurred during the day, Perry said, evacuation would be a "tremendously complicated process."

Only would the dorms have been evacuated, but all the buildings on campus that officials determine were in danger would have been evacuated, too.

Perry said there would be a plan drawn up concerning evacuation of classrooms and offices, but "I don't know what it's going to be."

If an accident were to happen before this plan was drawn up, the University Police has what it calls a "ready phone list." They would use this list to call the supervisors of the buildings and tell them to evacuate the people in that building to a particular area. Parsons said that right now either he or the city Police Chief Russ McCall, depending on who was available at the time, would make the decision concerning which buildings would be evacuated, and where people from them would be

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WEDNESDAY - APRIL 18

"Root Beer Chugging Contest" noon at the academic building on the library side. A 50c entrance fee will be charged.

THURSDAY - APRIL 19

Jim Locke, the Student Legal Advisor will hold a question and answer period in the MSC Lounge at noon.

FRIDAY - APRIL 20

Faculty Reception hosted by Hassle-Free and OSA in the Off-Campus Center. 2:00-4:00 p.m.

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