

**Subject: Request for Motion: CN Rail: Toxic spill into Cheakamus River**

**Date:** Sun, 7 Aug 2005 03:34:03 +0100 (BST)

**From:** Elizabeth James <cagebc@yahoo.com>

**To:** "Clr. E. Crist" <criste@district.north-van.bc.ca>, Mayor & Council <council@dnv.org>, "James Ridge, CAO" <james\_ridge@dnv.org>

**CC:** Corrie Kost <kost@triumf.ca>, Brian Platts <bplatts@shaw.ca>, FONVCA <fonvca@fonvca.org>, Pam Bookham <bookham@shaw.ca>

6 August 2005

Dear Clr. Crist:

As you are probably aware, several CN freight cars derailed near Squamish, and spilled sodium hydroxide into the Cheakamus River. If memory serves me correctly, I believe this is the third CN derailment in the past few months.

For a time, this latest event resulted in the closure of all activities on the river, although I understand the river pH has returned to normal and the closure has been partially lifted. All nearby residents who, for the most part, depend upon private wells for their water supply, have been warned not to use that water until it has been tested and found to be safe.

Sodium hydroxide which, at certain temperatures, is in the form of a liquid, is toxic to fish, birds, other mammals, and to humans. Hundreds of fish have died - some of them large, many of them smolts. No-one yet knows what the eventual death toll will be in the bird and animal populations that will feed on the dead fish.

Many local residents have complained that they have received no advisory communications from CN Railway, although the "authorities" have gradually covered the area with warnings. This apparent communications deficit is, to my mind, totally unsatisfactory - although I do remember some of the glaring news inaccuracies that followed the Berkeley-Riverside slide.

Bearing in mind that yesterday's event was relatively small, it has already caused significant damage to the environment and to outdoor-tourism-related businesses. What might have been the effect, had all 140+ cars on that train been similarly loaded and derailed? Ships which carry hazardous materials are required to be double-hulled, does that rule apply to rail-cars? If so, why are liquids and other freight contents spilled so easily in a derailment?

If my expectations are unreasonable or impractical, I don't at all mind being 'set straight' but, surely, if we can send shuttles into space, we could at least do a better job of protecting the environment here on earth.

In view of the above, and your previous work over the years on hazardous materials transport, I am writing this note to ask whether you would be prepared to put forward a motion, with wording akin to the following:

WHEREAS , on August 6th 2005, several cars of a 140+ CN freight were derailed into the Cheakamus River near Squamish, BC - a river that feeds into the Squamish River and, eventually, into Howe Sound; and,

WHEREAS although the majority of the cars were traveling empty, those that derailed were carrying liquid sodium hydroxide - a substance that is toxic to fish, birds and to humans; and,

WHEREAS although hundreds of fish have already died, the total effect upon the environment - including local well-water supplies - and upon outdoor sports and tourism activities will not be known for some time; and,

WHEREAS local residents have complained about lack of communication from CN Rail, and about "having to phone around ourselves to see what was going on"; and,

WHEREAS CN Rail freight trains travel through the District and all North Shore communities;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT this Council ask Staff to request that a representative from CN Rail appear before Council at the earliest possible opportunity, to address Council concerns with respect to its operations - with particular reference to the extent and effectiveness of safety measures it has in place to protect residents and the environment resulting from CN storage and transport of hazardous materials; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, if approved, this Council send a copy of the approved motion to all North Shore communities, and to the councils of all affected communities along CN routes in British Columbia; and lastly,

BE IT RESOLVED THAT, the BC Provincial Ministers of Environment and Transportation be so advised, together with the Federal Transportation Safety Board.

Clr. Crist, if you are inclined to make such a motion, the actual wording of it should be at your own discretion. The above is submitted as a suggestion only, and likely needs to be tightened up.

Many thanks for considering this suggestion.

Liz James  
[604] 988-2066 [Please note that due to a recent 'move' this telephone number is not connected right now, so email is the best way to communicate your response. Liz]

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