



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Paul Wells
City of Birmingham
Phone: (248) 530-1901

Birmingham Fire Department Prepared for Train Emergencies

BIRMINGHAM, MI, February 20, 2023 – Following the recent incident in East Palestine, Ohio, residents may be wondering how their local government has prepared for the possibility of a train derailment. The City of Birmingham has previously experienced a train derailment and has used that experience to improve its response to future incidents.

On August 29, 1999, a CN freight train derailed carrying 97 cars, of which approximately 40 derailed within the City's almost three miles of train tracks and neighboring Bloomfield Township. Thankfully no one was hurt, nor were there any hazardous chemicals released. Since the derailment, Birmingham and its OAKWAY mutual aid partners have increased their abilities when responding to these types of emergencies. OAKWAY now consists of 11 full-time area fire departments; Southfield, Royal Oak, Madison Heights, Ferndale, Bloomfield Twp., West Bloomfield Twp., Waterford Regional, Rochester Hills, Farmington Hills, and Independence Twp.

"I am confident in the capabilities of the Birmingham Fire Department and its OAKWAY mutual aid partners to handle a train emergency," said Chief Paul Wells. "The Birmingham Fire Department and its OAKWAY hazardous materials team members are trained in the mitigation of hazardous situations that involve train and road hazardous materials tankers."

Since the 1999 train derailment, OAKWAY has more than doubled the amount of HazMat trained personnel and equipment. OAKWAY's newest piece of equipment is a hazardous materials foam trailer that is designed to extinguish liquid hazardous material fires quickly. Located at Birmingham Fire Station 1, this 660-gallon foam concentrate trailer can be quickly deployed to a train or road tanker accident to extinguish the fire. CN railway has also updated its fleet of rail cars in order to better protect against potential crashes. The CN locomotives now have automatic speed and braking capabilities to keep trains at the safe and proper speeds. The 1999 crash was determined to be caused due to excessive speeds.

"Once a chemical fire has been extinguished, the threat of the release has diminished greatly. The next step is for HazMat members to contain or stop the spill, which can sometimes be as easy as turning a valve," said Chief Wells. "Train and road tankers that carry hazardous materials are designed to survive lower speed crashes without the release of its cargo"

City of Birmingham – A Walkable Community. Visit the city's web site at www.bhamgov.org.

###



