

Grover Beach Police Department
MEMORANDUM

Date: September 9, 2015
To: Bob Perrault, City Manager
From: John Peters, Chief of Police
Subject: Rail Safety Concerns

With the recent discussion of oil trains and rail safety occurring in our area I want to share with you the concerns I have as the Police Chief for the City. My concerns focus on four specific areas; Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery.

When discussing Prevention, for the most part we are pretty much at the mercy of the railroad companies. It is their responsibility to maintain safe operations through-out their rail system including the upkeep of the transport cars. If the companies fail to inspect or fix worn out tracks then we could see concerns about derailments. If the rail companies fail to maintain proper transport cars then we could see a release of material, whether toxic or not, when a derailment happens.

The area of Prevention that we could assist with is the education and enforcement of trespassing on railroad lines, stopping of vehicles on railroad lines and pedestrians crossing the railroad lines at the roadway crossings. This type of prevention will have a fiscal impact on training and educating officers for the enforcement operations as well as the educational materials for the public to help gain compliance. Currently our department does not fund such programs, however, this year we are partnering with BNSF to host a railroad safety class for first responders. This is the only training currently available to us.

In the area of Preparedness I can say that we can use some help here. Our officers have had little training involving railroad derailments and preparedness for such an incident. We need to have more opportunities to run simulated Emergency Operation Center responses. We need to have additional training on how to respond to toxic chemical releases. We need to practice our emergency evacuation routes and we need to equip our officers with modern chemical masks that will protect them if they find themselves in the path of a chemical cloud. Without exercising a rail disaster we are ill-prepared to respond to such. In order to beef up our Preparedness, we need additional funding to equip and train the officers and dispatchers regarding their duties during such emergencies. Currently we do not have a budget for either the training or equipment.

Currently our Response to a train derailment will consist of assisting the fire department with their response. We will be responsible for dispatching the emergency services, requesting assistance from other jurisdictions, setting up traffic and crowd control and initiating an evacuation if called for. If the train is a commuter, such as an Amtrak, then we will also be engaged in rescue operations and scene security. With limited equipment and personnel, we will be taxed beyond our capabilities in the field. An emergency operations center will be established

and a field command post as well, but those will take some time to get up and running. Our response can be inhibited if the officers do not have the proper personal protection equipment and training for such an incident.

Finally, my last concern is the Recovery. The recovery process will be based on the extent of the emergency. If we have a simple derailment with little to no injuries then we will have a couple days of additional staffing to protect the scene while the investigation is conducted. This staffing could be filled by mutual aid requests as well. If the derailment is a large scale disaster, our recovery as a department and a city may take quite some time. If it is a long term recovery, the extensive hours that staff will need to work, the type of equipment replacement that will need to occur and the length of the operation period will all play key roles to our success as an organization.

In conclusion, as it stands right now, our staff training and equipment preparedness needs improvement. If there were an increase of trains traveling through town, the same concerns are present. More trains means more chances of something happening, but even without the expansion we still need to do more for preparation. I believe the railroad companies involved do bear some of the responsibility to prepare emergency services in the areas in which they travel through, but to what extent still needs to be discussed.