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Chair: Mr. Peter Schiefke



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• (1605)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 144 of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Before we begin the meeting, I want to remind all in-person participants to read the best practices guidelines and cards on the table. These measures are in place to protect the health and safety of all participants.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, November 7, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of community safety and emergency preparedness and the transport of dangerous goods by rail.

Appearing before us today, colleagues, we have, from the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, fire chief Chris Case and executive director Tina Saryeddine. Welcome to both of you.

From the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada, we have Mr. Bob Masterson, president and chief executive officer, who is joining us by video conference. Welcome to you, sir. It's good to see you again.

From the Ville de Saint-Basile-le-Grand, we have Mr. Yves Lessard, mayor. Welcome to you.

That is it, I believe. Is that all, Madam Clerk?

[Translation]

Welcome to all of you.

[English]

Before we begin, I will turn over the floor to Mr. Bachrach to resume discussion on the motion put forward at the last meeting.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

It's good to see everyone again this evening.

At the end of our last meeting, we left off with a motion that I had put forward regarding the disclosure of some documents related to emergency response assistance plans and key route risk assessments. While these assessments and plans are required by Transport Canada, both are written and compiled by the shippers of dangerous goods and by the railway companies.

The scope of this study that we've undertaken is about whether communities have adequate capacity to protect their safety and whether the emergency response plans that are in place—and which are required by Transport Canada—are up to the task of saving human lives and preventing the destruction of our communities in cases of rail disasters.

I don't think we can get very far in this study without seeing the contents of the existing response plans and the risk assessments, without better understanding what those risks are, and without understanding the level of detail and the scrutiny that Transport Canada requires of the companies that operate in this space.

I have had some conversations off-line with members of the government, who have expressed concerns about the sensitivity of some of the information contained in those response plans, and by no means do I want to put our communities or the country at any level of additional risk through the disclosure of documents. I want to make that very clear. If there's information in those response plans that could jeopardize or expose our communities to additional risk, that's certainly not my intention. However, we have the ability, as a committee, to seek documents, to hold them in confidence and to use their contents to inform our work and the scope of our inquiry. That's very much the intention of my motion.

I did craft the motion on the fly at the last meeting. Sometimes, if you sleep on it for a few nights, you come up with some other ideas about how it might better serve its purpose. I know I can't amend my own motion, but I'd like to offer a revised version that, perhaps, addresses some of the concerns we've heard from the government.

The new motion text that I would be comfortable with would read:

That Transport Canada provide to the committee by January 15, 2025, the [unredacted] emergency response assistance plans and key route risk assessments applicable to the following rail routes: Prince George-Prince Rupert, Fraser Canyon, Montreal-Sorel, Toronto-Windsor; that the documents in question be provided in both official languages and considered at an in camera meeting of the committee to take place before February 15, 2025; and that the documents be kept confidential by the committee and committee members.

It's been expressed to me by some of my colleagues that I don't know what's in these plans, that what's in them isn't actually what I want to see in the first place and that I should just keep my nose out of it. That may very well be the case. I think the best way to find out is by seeing the documents. Maybe these documents aren't relevant to our line of inquiry, but they remain some of the key plans that protect our communities.

I did take the chance, over the past couple of days since our last meeting, to go on Transport Canada's website to learn more about emergency response assistance plans specifically. The website lays out in great detail what is required of those plans. I'll just read, for the committee's edification, a few of the requirements. It includes creating the potential incident analysis, or PIA. Companies' PIAs, potential incident analyses, "must include, at a minimum, the following four scenarios":

Scenario 1: An anticipated release of dangerous goods

For example, a...tanker containing hydrochloric acid involved in a rollover...with no apparent loss of contents.

Scenario 2: The release of less [than] 1% of the dangerous goods in a means of containment

For example, a full DOT105J500W rail car inspected in a rail yard is giving off an odour of chlorine at the protective housing.

Scenario 3: The release of more than 50% of the dangerous goods in a means of containment

For example, multiple intermediate bulk containers...were punctured and are leaking in a road trailer that has been involved in a motor vehicle collision.

Again, that doesn't pertain specifically to rail. These ERAPs apply across the entire dangerous goods environment. The ones that we're looking for pertain specifically to rail transport.

It goes on:

- (1610)

Scenario 4: The exposure to fire of a means of containment that contains dangerous goods

I think that one in particular is of interest when we're talking about protecting our communities from industrial fires related to dangerous goods shipped by rail.

For "What to include for each scenario", the companies that ship these products are required to explain the following:

the possible consequences of the release or anticipated release

the measures, organized by tier, to be taken in response to the release or anticipated release for each scenario

the persons responsible for taking the measures

In addition to persons who will respond on [their] behalf, [they may] include persons responsible for taking measures not identified in the ERAP. For example, [companies] may identify municipal first responders in [the] PIA.

Going on to "ERAP response equipment", they have to list the availability of equipment and the type and amount of equipment that will be brought to bear in a dangerous goods emergency.

For "Availability of equipment", the company must show whether it owns and maintains the equipment itself. It must "have identified suppliers where response equipment can be procured and delivered to the site".

It says:

Plan for the worst

Certain incident scenarios may require more equipment than could be expected or planned for. If you own, maintain and replenish the equipment yourself, mention alternative third parties in the ERAP, such as other responders or suppliers that could provide additional equipment.

It goes on and on, Mr. Chair. I don't want to belabour this point, but if you go further on, it talks about "Fire response knowledge

and skills". Companies are required to lay out the knowledge and skills of their teams.

It also requires them to list the locations of those teams. There are response times that are required. They have to list whether they plan to deploy personnel by air to meet response times. There are all sorts of criteria around the deployment of teams by air.

This is a serious consideration for the communities I represent, because, to my knowledge, the nearest team is up to four hours away from the communities they would be responding to. These are the specialized haz-mat teams that would be required. That leaves the local volunteer fire department as the front line of defence.

When it comes to municipal fire departments and other first responders, there's a whole section of these ERAPs that talks about third party responders. The companies are required to list which responders they have agreements with and what capacity those responders have. This is a comprehensive emergency response plan.

I had a conversation with a local fire chief yesterday, and he described a scenario involving a road accident in which a tank truck had crashed and there was a release of a dangerous good. His department responded very valiantly and were able to mitigate the situation and to stop the release of the dangerous goods. With the emergency response assistance plan, you end up in a situation in which you have the transportation company and you have the shipper of the dangerous goods, and, in some cases, they end up fighting over liability for the situation. It took two days before the responsible party was able to visit the scene and carry out its obligations.

These are the things that we need to find out as a committee. It's whether these emergency response assistance plans are adequate, whether they're sufficient to protect our communities and whether the resources that are included in these plans are close enough to get there quickly.

We heard what I think was fairly alarming testimony from Transport Canada at our last meeting, about some of these high-consequence scenarios. They read into the record the very short amount of time that first responders have to evacuate people in the case of a serious haz-mat event in a rail yard. It's nine minutes and an evacuation radius of 1.7 kilometres.

When we're talking about specialized teams that are up to four hours away by road and have to get there in inclement winter weather, I think there are some very serious questions that people in our communities should be asking about whether these plans are sufficient. It may be that when we see the plans, they're much more detailed and much more effective than we think they are or than I think they are, in which case, I would find that very comforting.

I think the only way to know that is to see the plans.

● (1615)

We want to protect any sensitive information that might be in the plans, and that's the reason for the amended version of the motion. I believe that it achieves that by bringing it to an in camera meeting of the committee and holding it in confidence. If we look at this information and decide that it is in the public interest for it to be released publicly, we can choose to do that either in whole or in part.

Our responsibility as a committee on behalf of Canadians and on behalf of the communities we represent is to ensure that we get to the bottom of this question about whether the government is carrying out its fundamental responsibility to keep them safe and to regulate a sector that carries dangerous goods through the hearts of our towns and our villages.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair. I hope my colleagues will agree to dispense with this in short order so that we can hear from our excellent witnesses who are here today. I certainly want to hear from them.

I know I went on at some length—I see Mr. Badawey laughing—but this is really serious stuff, and I think we need to see the documents.

Thank you.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach.

I have Mr. Badawey on the list. He is followed by Mr. Rogers and then by Mr. Vis.

Mr. Badawey, the floor is yours.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thought it was comical, Taylor, because you wanted to dispense with this quickly, and you just...but I understand your passion on it, and I appreciate that.

I do want to say a few things.

There is no question that we support, in principle, the direction that Mr. Bachrach has taken here. I have concerns with respect to this information getting out to the public. I think those concerns have to do with the sensitivity vis-à-vis the risk of some of the materials that are being carried, whether it be on a train or a ship, and the availability of that information, adding to the possibility of things happening that we don't want to happen based on what those railcars or ships are carrying. Especially in today's climate, at times, it's something that can be a double-edged sword. I think all of you recognize what I'm saying with respect to that.

For the most part, looking at our CERTs, our community emergency response teams, as a former mayor, I was appreciative of the process. That process isn't up to the mayor to facilitate. It's up to the emergency response team, usually headed by the fire chief in smaller municipalities. In bigger municipalities, it could be someone more dedicated to that position alone. We do have a fire chief here today, and I'm looking forward to hearing his comments with respect to that in particular, as they relate the “how” to the “what”.

How would you respond to the “what”, which is any individual situation that may arise in your jurisdiction?

We look at ERAP, the emergency response assistance plan. I would assume that all the particulars of ERAP, which is what the member is asking for, are already well known by fire chiefs across the nation. In fact, it's what they put in place when they put together their emergency preparedness plans, as well as the response to those plans when the mayor declares a state of emergency within their jurisdiction. Once that happens, the chief brings the team together. That will include all the emergency responders, whether they be fire, ambulance or police. The list goes on with respect to those who look after infrastructure and every aspect of what an emergency would otherwise attach to.

Of course, the emergency responder who is leading that team will then put into place the protocols they would have contained within their emergency plan. This is usually in a big red, blue, white or black book that they put in place based on what they've been taught, trained on and are ready to put in place according to that declaration of an emergency.

Going to the motion at hand—and I'll put my parliamentary secretary of transport hat on—the concern that I have is the time. We're talking about documents that can equal up to about 30,000 pages and have to be translated as well. Frankly, that's not going to happen before January 15. That's just the reality of it.

At the same time, I want the member, as well as this committee, to get the information that they want to look at. It gives us time, as well, to post that and then to ask the people who really count, the people who would be heading off these CERTs and these emergency teams, and to get their opinions on what the member is looking for with respect to what's in those documents.

Mr. Chair, I would ask for an amendment to the motion that would remove the deadline, so that we can provide reasonable time for the document collection and translation. We don't even know at this point how many pages the documents may be, but we're estimating a minimum of 30,000 pages. It's going to make for some good nighttime reading for all the members, and I'm sure you're all going to read all 30,000 pages. Otherwise, there's no sense in getting those documents ready for committee.

Therefore, what I would like the motion to read, and I can forward this to the clerk, is that Transport Canada provide them to the committee by February 15, 2025, so it's:

that the documents in question be provided in both official languages and considered at an in camera meeting of the committee to take place before February 15, 2025, and that these documents be kept confidential by the committee and members.

● (1625)

I feel, therefore, that we can have the documents presented to us in both official languages. Of course, from there, it will give some time for the committee to read the 30,000-plus pages that you're asking for.

I'll say in conclusion, Mr. Chair, that I was one of the people Mr. Bachrach was referring to in terms of asking him to allow this, but it was more to ask him to sit down with Transport Canada first to get a bit more granular on the pages that are required in terms of the information, so we're not asking the committee to read through 30,000 pages, of which only maybe 3,000 are relevant to what Mr. Bachrach's looking for. It makes it easier on members of the committee; however, I wasn't afforded that.

Again, we're going to need a bit of time to get our team to put together those 30,000 pages and, of course, the process for members of the committee to digest those 30,000 pages and then make reasonable responses to them. Then, of course, we need to allow the analysts to get our responses to that and add them into the final report and, of course, look for the recommendations that will come out of the committee based on that report.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Badawey.

I'll go to Mr. Rogers now.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Mr. Chair, just for clarification, when Mr. Bachrach read the motion, I thought I heard him say “unredacted copies”, but I don't see it in the written form here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

I'm just going to confer with the clerk.

The clerk has just confirmed that it doesn't have to say “unredacted”. It's just assumed that it's unredacted, and we're okay with that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Rogers.

I'll now go to Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think there's more consensus than disagreement around the table today, from what I'm hearing, which is positive. In respect to Mr. Badawey's comments about 30,000 pages, indeed, the way I interpret these documents is that they're plans of action.

It would be very hard for me to understand how some of the transportation companies in our country are operationalizing 30,000-page documents. Mr. Badawey mentioned that perhaps there are certain portions of the plans that are more relevant to our line of questioning from the last meeting.

I simply ask if he could provide those details to us now, because I'm assuming he, as the parliamentary secretary for transportation, has looked into this since our last meeting, in that he referenced it. I would like further comments on that, so that, specifically, when we get the 30,000 pages of documents, we're going to know where to go to find those operationalization plans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis.

I'm supposed to go to Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*Translation*]

However, before I do that, let me ask Mr. Badawey to answer the question.

[*English*]

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you.

I'd be here for three days to go through every plan and every assessment, but I'll say this. Basically, I'll say that the brunt and the majority of the.... I'd consider 30,000, by the way, Mr. Vis, to be a minimum; it could be up to 90,000.

It's not so much the emergency assistance plans. It's more the key root risk assessments, and there are many of them, so you're going to have a lot of key root risk assessments to go through, which then drives toward the plans.

It's like anything else. When the motion asks for the emergency response assistance plans and the key root risk assessments, it adds up. It's more the risk assessments that would be relevant to the number of pages that you're going to be receiving and, of course, reading through.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank my colleague Mr. Bachrach for his motion.

To begin, I'd just like to reiterate the importance of our study on rail safety and the transportation of dangerous goods. In this context, I think that our constituents expect us to do a serious job and not limit ourselves to the surface of things.

Getting these emergency response plans would allow us to see what the government and railway companies are doing. It would also allow us to see how things work, concretely. Finally, it would allow us to better understand their work and the risks on the ground.

Let's say I have an opportunity to get emergency response plans for my riding, I shouldn't pass them up. As a member of Parliament, I have a responsibility to seize this opportunity because it's important for me to defend the interests of my constituents, as it is for everyone here. In theory, I don't mind having that data available to municipal fire chiefs, but I think it's also a team effort. In my opinion, it's the committee's job to gather all the necessary information.

With respect to Mr. Badawey's amendment, I'd like to say that I'm completely open to the idea of the committee receiving documents. Afterwards, we'll be able to make more specific requests. However, I think it's important that those documents be presented to the committee and that we have an opportunity to review them. This wouldn't pose a security risk, since it would be presented in confidence.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barsalou Duval.

[English]

I have no one else on the speakers list, but, Mr. Lawrence, I think you wanted to also add some thoughts.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Hopefully, then, we can head to a vote.

I don't think anyone around this table is being unreasonable. I understand the government's apprehension with respect to certain parts of it that may be sensitive documents. At the end of the day, I trust my colleagues, and I also believe that Parliament is supreme, even above government agencies. It's our job—in fact, it's our duty and obligation—to provide that oversight.

As I said, I trust our colleagues. We'll keep this information confidential unless we agree otherwise. While I fully understand some of the government's challenges here, I believe that ultimately the oversight obligation of Parliament is supreme.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lawrence.

Yes, Mr. Bachrach, I was going to go to a vote on Mr. Badawey's amendment.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I just want to clarify whether my original motion from last meeting was on the floor when we began this meeting. Can I make a new motion? Do we consider that my new version of the motion has been duly moved?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm happy to be the amender, Mr. Chair, if that eases things.

The Chair: I think the easiest thing is that, because we adjourned the last meeting, you reintroduce it. You might be able to.... Well, no, because you didn't distribute it in advance. Why don't you read out what you sent out to everybody? Then we can—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Perhaps you could ask for unanimous consent for me to withdraw my old motion. Then I will move the new motion.

I'll move the new motion, trying to incorporate Mr. Badawey's amendment.

We're going to get to these witnesses, Vance. Don't worry.

The Chair: We don't need unanimous consent to take back what you had presented.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay. I withdraw my former motion.

(Motion withdrawn)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I would like to move the following, Mr. Chair:

That Transport Canada provide to the committee the emergency response assistance plans and key route risk assessments applicable to the following rail routes: Prince George-Prince Rupert, Fraser Canyon, Montreal-Sorrel and Toronto-Windsor; that the documents in question be provided in both official languages and considered at an in camera meeting of the committee to take place before February 15, 2025; and that the documents be kept confidential by the committee and its members.

● (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Far be it for me to add fuel to the flame, if you will, but are we not interested in also receiving the information for Montreal-Toronto,

which also represents literally probably the most.... Oh, is it Montreal-Sorrel? It would be Windsor-Montreal, because Toronto goes west to Windsor, and then we have this gap between Toronto and Montreal.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Yes, that's what I meant, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Is that in line with what you [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]?

Mr. Vance Badawey: Okay, but if we're going to go to that, then I'm going to throw in Hamilton-Niagara as well, so I'll add three more nights of reading for everybody on the committee.

Is that okay, Taylor?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: That's okay with me, yes.

An hon. member: We move that Taylor work hard.

A voice: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You want to now go with Hamilton-Niagara, and it would [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] Niagara-Hamilton.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Do you want to ask for unanimous consent?

The Chair: Do we have unanimous consent, colleagues?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues.

Colleagues, now that we have dispensed with Mr. Bachrach's motion, I have some housekeeping.

I'd like to formally ask for support for the budget for tomorrow's meeting with the CEOs.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we can get to the business at hand with our witnesses.

What we will do first is turn the floor over to you, Chief, for your opening remarks. You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Chris Case (Fire Chief, Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon.

My name is Chief Chris Case. I'm the fire chief for Chatham-Kent, Ontario, and the co-chair of the dangerous goods committee for the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, the national association representing the country's 3,200 fire departments.

I'm joined by the CAFC's executive director, Dr. Tina Saryedine. We appreciate the invitation to discuss the transportation of dangerous goods by rail.

Last year, on the 10th anniversary of the tragedy of Lac-Mégantic, the association, in collaboration with Transport Canada, ran a summary of the status of the recommendations made after Canada's largest rail tragedy. We have provided the clerk with a copy of our article.

I will highlight some of the actions taken, and then I'll discuss some of the remaining vulnerabilities, as well as our recommendations for a national fire administration and the renewal of emergency preparedness equipment.

Before I begin, however, the CAFC would like to express continued solidarity with the people of Lac-Mégantic—the deceased and the 1,000 firefighters who came to assist—and every community that has ever experienced a tragedy of such proportions. They are not forgotten, and they inspire us to do better.

In this regard, after Lac-Mégantic, the Transportation Safety Board made five recommendations. As of 2023, three have been met and two remain in progress. These relate to regulatory oversight and safety management.

The government banned one-person crews on trains hauling hazardous cargo and set new standards to make tank cars carrying flammable liquids sturdier. It established stricter accident liability rules. It imposed lower speed limits in rural and urban areas and gave Transport Canada stronger enforcement powers.

The CAFC was involved in developing the Canadian emergency response to flammable liquid incidents in transportation training program, which is freely available. Rail companies have developed products like AskRail, which are important to first responders.

Transport Canada boosted the number of rail safety inspectors to 155 in 2022, from 107 in 2013. It also quadrupled the tally of inspectors of dangerous goods to 188 from 30. It introduced directive 36 to ensure that the authorities with jurisdiction have access to information about dangerous goods passing through their communities.

CANUTEC also does important work, and we commend it.

The lessons of Lac-Mégantic have not gone unactioned. However, it's one thing to assess the issues of the past and another to be proactive for the future. As the TSB correctly concluded, the tragedy at Lac-Mégantic was the result not of one person, one issue or one organization, but of their confluence. Today, we face the confluence of many new challenges.

Last week, close to 50 of my fire chief colleagues were here in Ottawa. They didn't come to talk about rail safety necessarily, but they could have. They talked about fire and life safety issues in building codes, explosives, wildfires, climate change, electric vehicles and rapid housing construction as examples of why Canada needs a national fire administration. Not only is each of these issues rife with risk, but their convergence could be a disaster of tragic proportions in the blind spot of policy-makers.

The transportation of dangerous goods by rail is no exception. Can another rail tragedy involving dangerous goods happen today, and how can we prevent it? We need both national coordination and local capacity building.

Consider that in my region of Chatham-Kent, the nearest haz-mat team is 90 minutes away, in Windsor. Emergency response plans may be in place, but I have yet to see one. In other cities and towns—up to 56% of them—equipment needs to be updated. This is why we are asking the federal government to restimulate investment in fire and emergency equipment through a cost-matching program with other levels of government. It is not the federal government's job to buy our equipment, but it is its job to keep Canada thriving and prepared.

At the national level, new risks need to be coordinated to avert the disasters of tomorrow. They can't be studied in silos by committees or departments. They can't be solely in Ottawa or in isolation. They need a holistic, national and systematic approach to and oversight of fire and life safety issues in coordination with fire service experts.

This is what a national fire administration could provide you. This is what other countries do. It's what's needed here, and it's not about jurisdiction or money. It's about linking subject matter expertise with policy coordination proactively, not in retrospect. This is our most important recommendation to you.

Thank you for considering this; thank you for your time, and thank you for your attention.

We look forward to your questions.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Case.

We'll now go to Mr. Masterson, who's joining us by video conference.

Mr. Masterson, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Bob Masterson (President and Chief Executive Officer, Chemistry Industry Association of Canada): Thank you, Chair. It's a pleasure to be with the committee today on behalf of CIAC.

Our chemistry and plastics industry is your third-largest manufacturing sector in Canada and the second-largest rail shipper. About 80% of all that we make in Canada is shipped by rail, and we take our responsibilities for the safe production, safe handling and safe transportation of our products very seriously.

What I want to share with you is that we don't just meet regulatory requirements; we go well beyond those. We can talk about some of our responses to some of the questions you had earlier, as you see fit.

Forty years ago this month, in fact, and in response to the Mississauga train derailment and other incidents, our association founded the Responsible Care initiative, not only to improve our safety performance, but, most importantly, to improve trust with the communities we operate in and the communities we move our products through. Today, participation in Responsible Care is a condition of membership in our association. There are many commitments to transportation safety in Responsible Care, and those are audited within our member companies every three years. That includes transportation emergency management.

Let me just share two aspects of Responsible Care that relate most closely to the transportation of dangerous goods.

First, very clearly, we are committed to the public right to know and understand the risks and benefits of the products that travel through their communities, whether it's by rail, road, ship or pipeline. In partnership with the Railway Association of Canada, we operate TRANSCAER, the transportation community awareness emergency response initiative. TRANSCAER members work with municipal officials, emergency responders—whether they're staff or volunteers—and residents along the transportation routes. We work to assist them in developing and evaluating their own community emergency response plans.

A highlight or a drawing card, if you will, of these outreach sessions and education sessions that we try to do is our safety train. This is a converted rail car that's a classroom on wheels. It travels across Canada from spring through fall, to a wide number of communities, to act as a focal point to bring the shippers, the railways, the emergency response contractors, the first responders and elected officials together to build relationships and talk about these goods and how to manage them safely. It provides hands-on training to first responders and the community; it raises awareness of the products going through and the risks, and it supports the first responders in being prepared to respond to emergencies involving our members' goods.

Most importantly, though, and we hear this all the time, is that the main benefit of TRANSCAER is building trust and relationships between the first responders in the communities and the industry, whether that's the shippers, the railways or the emergency contractors, so that when those people do arrive on site, everybody knows what everybody's job is. They're trusted, and they know that the information they're being provided with is appropriate and accurate.

In recent years, as was just discussed by the chief, a lot of attention has been focused on the movement of dangerous goods. There have been a lot of changes to the regulatory environment, and we've been very pleased to see many other organizations join us and the Railway Association of Canada in these TRANSCAER outreach efforts, committing themselves to engagement and training with first responders. That includes groups like Emergency Response Assistance Canada, or ERAC, the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, the Canadian Emergency Response Contractors' Al-

liance, the Canadian Fuels Association, Responsible Distribution Canada and others.

Second, our members are obligated to ensure—and this comes up a bit in the questions you were asking—that they use only certified professionals with adequately trained personnel who have the equipment and training to handle the specific commodities that our members are shipping.

One member of emergency response personnel is not the same as another. What is their training? How well equipped are they? Do they have the right equipment to respond to the emergencies involving our members' products?

This is done through another initiative, called the transportation emergency assistance program, or TEAP. We're actually on TEAP version three, and we refer to it as TEAP III. Through TEAP and our partners, we've established and we maintain a national emergency response network that's capable of safely and efficiently mitigating the impacts of a chemical transportation incident anywhere in the country. There are standards that must be met and regularly reconfirmed. These are registered emergency response contractors. There's a registration process to ensure that those people are adequately and appropriately trained to respond to these emergencies.

We do work with many others, including the Railway Association, the two class 1 railways and others on that process.

I'm very proud of the work we do on transportation safety. Our members experience far fewer and far less severe incidents than in the past. Nevertheless, transportation safety, including and especially that of dangerous goods, requires constant vigilance and a constant commitment to continual improvement. We definitely commend this committee and its attention to this activity.

● (1645)

Probably there's nowhere in public policy in Canada where we have seen more change and more reform than in the transportation of dangerous goods over the last 10 to 12 years, and that's okay. That's appropriate. The spirit with which Transport Canada, the Government of Canada and all the stakeholders come together to advance that is probably not seen in any other area of public policy that we work with. Even participating in this discussion and seeing how you interact as a committee is quite unique, so never forget that all the stakeholders involved are committed to this.

The voluntary work we do through responsible care is not a substitute for regulation. You will never hear us say that. It is a demonstration that a committed industry can establish and demand performance standards well beyond regulation that meet Canadians' expectations for our industry.

Thank you for the opportunity. I look forward to your questions, especially related to the many improvements in rail safety and those around improvements to community awareness in this area.

Thank you very much for the time.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Masterson.

As we are discussing transport by rail, I have my own rail signals here. I forgot to point out at the beginning of the meeting that yellow is for 30 seconds left. Red means don't force me to cut you off. I don't want to do it, but I will have to in order to keep us on time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Masterson.

[*Translation*]

We'll now go to Mayor Yves Lessard.

Mr. Mayor, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Mayor, Ville de Saint-Basile-le-Grand): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I'd like to thank and congratulate members of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities for beginning this consultation. I also realize that having heard Messrs. Masterson and Case allows me to put myself in the middle, since one manufactures hazardous products, while the other intervenes when incidents or accidents occur.

I'll address three points: the safety of our community, emergency preparedness and the importance of paying particular attention to rural communities. However, I would first like to provide some context.

Saint-Basile-le-Grand is a semi-urban city with a population of 17,500, where 78% of the land is agricultural and protected. Every day, several trains carrying goods pass through the heart of our town and our entire territory without stopping. More than 500 cities and towns in Quebec experience the same situation.

The main sources of danger in our region are a lack of preventive information on dangerous goods transported by rail, as well fear of a train derailment in an urban area. I think you have the list, but some of the dangers facing our municipality are the speed of freight trains passing through; the number of cars per train; signal errors, such as gates lowered without the presence of a train; trains stopped on the railway track, dividing the city in half; and the transfer of hazardous materials unknown to the municipality, which is responsible for responding to an accident or incident.

In the last two or three years, things have gotten worse. There's now more vibration caused by the trains, day and night. There's also the noise caused by rattling, which is extremely disturbing. Even in winter, when the windows are closed, that noise is noticeable.

Today, there are often more than 200 cars per convoy, without our knowing about the hazardous materials they carry, while towns are responsible for taking emergency action when rail activity causes an accident caused on their territory.

In addition to potential long-term damage to the foundations and structures of houses and public buildings, Saint-Basile-le-Grand's territory is literally divided by railroads. The passage of a long train

can quickly create compartmentalization and considerably increase vehicular congestion, completely blocking the way in and out of the southern part of the city in the event of a medical emergency or fire. So it becomes impossible to get out of the city.

We also fear a worst-case scenario: a derailment exposing our populations to toxic or flammable materials. The presence of a railway in the heart of a city like Saint-Basile-le-Grand creates considerable problems, both in terms of the safety and well-being of citizens, as well as the fluidity of car and pedestrian traffic.

In recent years, there has been a consensus on the need for railways to try to eliminate hazards at their source. That's what the Union des municipalités du Québec wants. We must admit that it's not easy, but there surely are solutions. To do that, we must now acknowledge the reality we face every day and that we have to adapt to: rail is the best means of mass transportation for people. Public transit is also one of the best ways to combat greenhouse gas emissions.

Furthermore, there's an incompatibility between passenger trains and freight trains. To answer your main question, I'd also say that we must necessarily consider exclusive rail lines in certain locations for each use, which is to say for the transportation of goods and people.

• (1650)

In conclusion, there's no longer any obligation for freight trains to pass through cities. There was a time when agricultural trade made it necessary to stop trains in almost every municipality. Those days are now gone. Why not broaden the range of possibilities that could make the transportation of goods safer and thereby eliminate dangers at the source? We'll be able to make suggestions in response to your questions.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor.

[*English*]

We'll begin today with Mr. Muys.

Mr. Muys, the floor is yours. You have six minutes, please.

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses who have taken the time to be here.

I'll start with my questions for Mr. Masterson.

Back some years ago, in my private sector life before politics, I worked at a company that was actually part of Responsible Care, so I have some familiarity with that. Of course, like all industries and industry organizations, there are multiple acronyms, so you've enlightened us on a few new ones today.

Maybe you can talk a little more about TRANSCAER. When you started that, what were the goals? Did you benchmark where things were in 1985 and where you were headed?

• (1655)

Mr. Bob Masterson: It's tough to think back to then; it has been a long time. What I can talk more about is where we are and where we're going.

What's the goal? The goal of Responsible Care writ large was to build trust. There's that expression, "Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care." We want to be able to demonstrate to the communities we operate in and the communities we move our products through that we do care, that we know what the right thing to do is, that we want input on that and that we can do it. Again, that includes with transportation.

There's no question that communities are under-resourced. It's not always a top-of-mind priority with all the pressures on communities. We have a duty to help them be as prepared as they can.

One of the things that's been most interesting in recent years is the amount of increased attention being paid specifically to communities that rely on volunteer first responders. One of the newest things we've done—Responsible Care is very evolutionary, and TRANSCAER is as well—in recent years, with the assistance of the Government of Canada, is integrate a virtual reality approach into TRANSCAER. You can put on these goggles, do the walk-through and go through all the training modules as if you were physically with this train car.

In most instances where we have a TRANSCAER event in a larger community—maybe it's Sarnia; maybe it's London, Ontario; or maybe it's Medicine Hat, Alberta—you're talking about bringing the first responders together for two or three days. They'll do simulated rollovers. They'll talk to the shippers and the railways. There's a lot of activity taking place, and someone who's got a full-time job and is a volunteer firefighter can't dedicate that time.

We're trying to be responsive to the realities of today's world and make sure those communities are also getting served by these programs. That would be one example.

Mr. Dan Muys: Are there some metrics or numbers you could point to in terms of the success of the program, just so we can quantify—

Mr. Bob Masterson: I can certainly get the numbers in terms of how many communities we serve and how many first responders would participate in a year. Those would have to come after this meeting.

Mr. Dan Muys: If you could table that with the committee, that would be instructive.

In terms of an industry-led initiative and a proactive initiative—I know that, of course, with the alliance with the Railway Association, this, of course, is North American—are there other jurisdictions in the world that have good examples we should be looking to of how they manage dangerous goods on the rails?

Mr. Bob Masterson: There's really no comparison to the U.S. and Canada in terms of the reliance on the economy of rail and how much it's integrated. Certainly in Europe, you have more movement

by barge, etc. It's there that we need to focus, and it's also the integrated nature of our economy and the integrated nature of the rail system to make sure that what we're doing in Canada doesn't create a sticky border for the movement of goods, because that's not in anybody's interest. We can align, and we can drive improvements in areas that are unique to Canada.

Nothing in particular comes to mind, but I would say, again, Canada is a leader. The range of reforms the fire chief talked about after Lac-Mégantic and the commitment by governments—all governments—and by all stakeholders in the transportation value chain to prevent that from ever happening again are very serious.

We have taken the best of what's coming out of the United States in terms of new tank car standards and other things. Look at ERAPs as one example—and we can talk more about those. One of the key calls for action for the United States after the East Palestine incident was why they don't have ERAPs like Canada does.

There are some good things up here. The work is, "And what's next?" and not, "We don't have anything; it's not functioning, and it's not good." It's, "Where are we, and where's the best place we can make more improvements with best efforts going forward?"

Mr. Dan Muys: Thank you. That's helpful.

In the remaining time—and I'll probably have to pick it up in the next round—I want to ask a question to Chief Case. You talked about a national fire administration. Is that like FEMA? Is that what you're envisioning, or what is the comparison?

• (1700)

Dr. Tina Saryeddine (Executive Director, Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs): FEMA is a much larger infrastructure. What the fire chiefs are proposing is something that's turnkey, that's accessible and that can be done rapidly. It's about linking and coordinating fire service expertise with federal policy priorities. For example, if we're introducing rapid new housing, we're doing so without having fire and life safety issues in a blind spot. The fire administration in the United States is the nucleus. It's inside of FEMA. What we're seeing here is that we need a similar coordination body.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Muys.

Next we go to Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Iacono, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are going to be addressed to Mr. Case and Mr. Masterson, if you can give me short answers.

Many communities in Canada are crossed by rail lines carrying goods of all kinds, including dangerous goods. In 2023, 1,235 rail transportation events, including 914 accidents, were reported to the Transportation Safety Board of Canada. Of these, 87 accidents involved dangerous goods, and six resulted in a product release.

After Lac-Mégantic, are communities today that are crossed by rail lines aware of the types of goods transported, and, if so, are they informed before or after trains pass through?

Mr. Bob Masterson: First, yes. One key measure, after Lac-Mégantic, was so-called “protective directive 36”. The railways must provide the registered municipalities with information on the dangerous goods that go through those communities, and they must do that twice annually.

Do they know that for every shipment? No, not necessarily beforehand, but I'm coming back to that—the chief also mentioned this earlier—and that's the first piece. Every community has the ability to look at that list and see what's going through. How that community wishes to communicate that information to its own citizens is at their discretion.

The second thing the chief mentioned, a very important piece, is the AskRail initiative, if you will. A first responder—or anybody, really, who's registered—can go on, and if you see a tank car—when the mayor talked about, “Hey, there are tank cars on an intersection, and I don't know what's in them”—you simply put the number of that car in, and it will tell you what's in that car at that time, so that information's available.

Again, the other initiative, which is more after the fact, is the CANUTEC information. When you have an incident, you can get instantaneous results 24-7 from the CANUTEC initiative.

First responders, especially those with the competencies and people.... When we talk about ERAPs, remember, these get tested, if you will, on an ongoing basis. That's part of the requirement. Typically, a company, whoever owns the ERAP—it'll be the shipper or the rail company, or it could be a trucking company as well—and the emergency contractors and first responders on the routes for that product are going to sit down every year and refresh their knowledge of that chemistry, that substance, what's going through and how they have to respond to incidents.

There's a range of things, but those are key aspects of that information.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Chief, would you like to add to this?

Mr. Chris Case: It's worth noting that we get the information from directive 36, which comes twice a year, and from our perspective, we use that for our training. However, do we know what's coming through on a day-to-day basis? No.

It's worth noting that, whilst we assume that we can provide this adequate response, the municipality will set the level of service for that fire department based upon their own needs and circumstances, and, more importantly, their own tax base. There is this vision that we can have firefighters who can arrive immediately at the scene of a derailment or a release of a chemical and immediately get to work, but that might not always be the case. Most—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: If I may just interject, has it improved, since Lac-Mégantic, for the cities to be aware? Has it improved in some way, or is there still a lot of room for improvement? That's my first question.

My second question is, are the cities that are affected by this crossing of rail lines equipped to have the proper emergency plans if an incident would ever arise?

• (1705)

Mr. Chris Case: To answer your first question, as we said in our opening statement, it's certainly improved. Are the cities equipped? That very much depends on the city. In some cities, there may be a very highly functioning hazardous materials response team. In other cities, there may be a very basic firefighting component. Those levels of service will dictate what that city can do.

We heard from Transport Canada at the last meeting. I was advised that we're talking about doing mass evacuations in a very short space of time. That's a very difficult thing to do, to try to evacuate a large area. I can tell you, since I'm somebody who's done it a number of times.

My message would be that, while there have been improvements, as we've pointed out today, there's certainly a lot of room for improvement and a lot of room to improve the safety of our communities.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: What role does the railway's police force play when there is a rail incident involving a potential release of dangerous goods? Is its role the same in all the cities, or does it vary depending on what type of police force exists?

Mr. Chris Case: I can comment from my own circumstances and what I've heard from members. The rail police is our first point of contact, normally through our own police dispatch. Again, that very much depends on where the police are based and how long it will take them to respond to the scene, which I imagine would be part of these emergency action plans.

What we're talking about here is very much a continental issue. It's very difficult to apply a standard response across the breadth of Canada and North America and to say that we have a standard response to all of the issues, with the differences in communities, language, landscape and all of the other factors that may change.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, gentlemen.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

[Translation]

Mr. Barsalou Duval, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Mayor, we've heard that railway companies disclose to cities the dangerous goods that pass through their territory on an annual or semi-annual basis. Cities also have the opportunity to tell the public about the top 10 goods that pass through their boundaries. Is that enough for you?

Mr. Yves Lessard: No. That way of doing things provides comfort to those who argue that it's enough. However, it can't be enough because, operationally speaking, it leads to nothing.

Even if we know the entire list of dangerous goods that can be transported by rail, it's only when an incident or accident occurs, such as a derailment, that we can learn what materials are in a particular train. Providing a list in advance is useless, because we don't know what material is being transported that day. There are dozens of hazardous materials, but it's only when a spill occurs that we know how to respond. However, municipalities can't prepare for contingencies with respect to all toxic materials, either in the event of fumes or a fire. For example, how to extinguish a fire depends on the type of material.

So it doesn't eliminate the danger at the source. This is something that gives comfort to those who maintain that there's no danger from the moment we learn about the list. Even if the entire list were made public, we'd be no further ahead because people would just be more concerned.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I think Mr. Chris Case said earlier that the availability of specialized equipment to respond to an incident varies from one municipality to the next, depending on its fiscal capacity and budget. So even though there are some very dangerous goods going through, cities don't necessarily have what they need to adequately respond to situations that may arise.

In a way, this is a transfer of risk since cities are now responsible for protecting themselves against such situations. Do you think it's normal for cities to assume all the risk?

• (1710)

Mr. Yves Lessard: No, it's not normal. It's an economic activity carried out by producers and rail carriers, but cities inherit the damage and must respond when there's an incident or accident.

To answer the first part of your question, like Mr. Case, we can say that the availability of specialized equipment varies greatly from one city to the next, depending on its resources. Even if a city has a lot of money, it somewhat plays Russian roulette because it never knows what disaster to prepare for. Those disasters can take many forms.

For example, in the past we had the polychlorinated biphenyls disaster. When that happened, we knew what the product was, but we didn't know how to respond. We intervened with foam, but that wasn't the right way. So even though you have a lot of money, there are dozens of dangerous goods going through your territory and you're somewhat playing Russian roulette, because you can't protect yourself against everything.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: We talked today about the emergency response assistance plans that railway companies are required to establish under Transport Canada regulations. Since this department has a certain oversight role, to your knowledge, has your municipality had any discussions with Transport Canada about

its ability to deal with incidents or the emergency response plan? Has Transport Canada had any discussions with your municipality or the fire department about those things?

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes, but we're going around in circles because the measures that can be put in place are designed to deal with disasters. Most economic sectors plan ways to eliminate hazards at the source based on their activities. However, we can't do that in the rail sector unless we circumvent municipalities that have high population densities.

In conclusion, I'd say that it's like giving a rattle to the municipalities, as was the case at Lac-Mégantic. That town paid a heavy price, however, and it was only after the disaster that measures were put in place to prevent it from happening again. Why isn't that done in municipalities where it can happen?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor.

[*English*]

Next we'll go to Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours for six minutes, please.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm struck by those last comments and also by the fact that so many of the improvements we've seen, such as directive 36, are written in the blood of people who have lost their lives in disasters. I think what we're trying to do here at this committee, through this study, is look down the road and try to strengthen the protective system without it costing the lives of our neighbours.

Thinking about what we've heard around these plans and preparedness, I'm struck by Chief Case's words about Canada's geography and the difficulty of applying a standard response across Canada. That hits home, because the part of Canada I represent is a region of rural and remote communities, yet the same volume of goods goes through our communities as through downtown Edmonton. It seems that the risk is dictated by the products and the capacity for response is dictated by the tax base.

Could you talk a bit about the unique challenges that small rural fire departments face when dealing with the volumes of hazardous goods that we're talking about moving through our towns?

Mr. Chris Case: Between you and Mayor Lessard, you've hit most of the issues that we would talk about.

If you're talking about your own area, it's a volunteer area.

As you've seen from our census, which we referred to, 56% of our reported fire departments are struggling to maintain basic equipment for firefighting. Because of the increase in the cost of fire trucks, which has gone up massively over the past two years, the cost of training and the cost of PPE, some of our fire chiefs are struggling to maintain a basic firefighting provision.

What we're talking about now is a highly technical hazardous materials response to a really complex incident that would challenge any fire chief.

When it comes to the risks, you're quite correct. We've talked a lot about preparation and about the strengthening of railcars and trying to prevent the incident from happening, but we're also now talking about when the unknown happens.

Our business is the unforeseeable. We're the people who get called when there's an unforeseeable incident, and it's really difficult to maintain that level of response across such a wide area. It would also be very difficult for your local municipality to fund the level of response that might be needed to deal with such a catastrophic incident.

• (1715)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I want to ask about the cost of providing capacity. As a former mayor, I know that small municipalities are stretched when it comes to their resources. Small fire departments are stretched, as you've just mentioned, yet many of the companies shipping goods through our communities have millions if not billions of dollars in revenue.

The costs don't seem equitably distributed. Should the costs of responding to major industrial spills and fires along the rail line be borne by municipal property taxpayers? Is it fair?

Mr. Chris Case: Through you, Mr. Chair, if we had a chemical factory built in your area, the E2 regulations and the rest of the federal regulations would demand that the plant not only be safe to operate but have mitigation plans, should there be a leak within that plant. It's not fair, because you now have that risk that travels at speed through different areas, and I will also concede to Mr. Masterson that it's incredibly difficult to have a response that can follow that risk.

However, you are quite correct. In a lot of the areas these trucks are going through, the first responders will not be equipped. They won't be trained, and it's very difficult. We're seeing recruitment of volunteer firefighters become harder and harder because of the changes in people's lives and the way they work. We're also seeing that, in some provinces, you have to be licensed as a firefighter the same way that a full-time firefighter is, so the costs are not going down, and the level of technical response needed for an incident like this would be extreme.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Given all of that, how do we protect residents in small communities? I'm thinking about my community of Smithers. It's named after the chairman of the railroad. It's a railroad town. There are hundreds of people who live right along the rail line. They live and work in close proximity to those trains that are coming through. Given the challenges around capacity, how do we protect their lives?

Mr. Chris Case: Overall, there has to be prevention rather than response. The work that is taking place to improve safety has to be the way to deal with this, but there has to be an acknowledgement that it's not only a risk to life but also a risk to the community and to the environment. There has to be an investment that is at least an effective stopgap that's put in place until the industry experts show up.

I realize I'm not answering your question; it's a very difficult one to answer.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Some of the most difficult scenarios to talk about are these worst-case scenarios that are of extremely high consequence. If we're talking about multiple rail cars on fire in the heart of a community at risk of BLEVE, these boiling liquid evaporating vapour explosions that we've seen, is it reasonable to expect there to be a response that prevents the loss of human life?

As a resident, I would sure hope that there is, but when you look at the hard facts: the time required to evacuate, the number of people who would need to be evacuated and the capacity of the community, it really stretches the imagination to understand how a small fire department would get people out of the way.

The Chair: I'll let you respond, Chief Case.

Mr. Chris Case: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With a hazardous materials incident, the incident commander has two very definite options: Move the people away from the bad stuff, or move the bad stuff away from the people. At the very least, there has to be a response whereby you can do a meaningful evacuation. That is training, awareness and community education, so that people are aware that this stuff is coming through the municipality and the evacuation plan. You're basically—again, I'm speaking from a professional perspective—seeking an element of self-evacuation to effectively get people away from this.

Getting a crew that can arrive and immediately mitigate a BLEVE or something like that is nearly impossible at times. You really do have to put as much water on it as you can and get everybody away for up to 24 hours.

• (1720)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Case.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we'll go back to Mr. Muys.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Dan Muys: Chief Case, you said, of course, that prevention versus response is obviously the preferred way of going about things. I asked Transport Canada officials last meeting about direction 36 and the frequency with which data is provided to communities about what's travelling through. You said earlier on that the data is primarily used for training purposes, because it's periodic and it's after the fact. I asked them whether real-time data was possible, and they didn't seem to think so.

I'm just wondering what would be optimal in terms of achieving a frequency of data that would give you something to act upon and prepare for in the vein of that prevention, rather than just receiving something after the fact and using it only for training purposes. What would be possible?

Mr. Chris Case: Knowing that something is coming through the area with a couple of hour's notice might not be any help at all, but if there was a trends analysis to show that....

I'll give you an example. When I look at my own direction 36 data, it used to be very much alcohols. We have a plant that manufactures alcohol in Chatham-Kent, and we're very used to dealing with that. Then we began to see a sudden increase in lithium-ion batteries.

If Transport Canada could say that there is a plant coming on line or there's a contract coming where we might start seeing different things, that could be helpful. We could actually get ahead of this and start proactively training rather than reactively training.

That would be one suggestion I would make.

Mr. Dan Muys: You indicated that the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs was involved in the post-Lac-Mégantic regulations on flammable liquids. Obviously, there have been some improvements, and you've indicated that as well.

Are there still some very obvious gaps or lags, or some low-hanging fruit that could be addressed quickly?

Dr. Tina Saryeddine: Absolutely. As Chief Case said, it's not just about where we are post Lac-Mégantic and the recommendations; it's about the new challenges that we haven't seen before.

Chief Case gave the example of lithium-ion batteries. Is that even on the radar of tracking?

This is why the fire chiefs are calling for a national fire administration. The fire chiefs know what the risks are. In fact, we've met with 56 countries over the summer at the World Fire Congress. These issues need to be brought to the forefront, as Chief Case said, in a holistic and systematic way. They can't be in our blind spot.

We don't expect policy-makers to be fire chiefs. We expect them to be policy-makers. They need a mechanism to coordinate and get fire service expertise, like the one we're lucky to have here today.

Mr. Dan Muys: Thank you.

Mr. Masterson, you talked about the fact that you're focused on the future. You talked, I think, about some virtual reality technology. This is all beyond me, but I actually had a chance last month, at a LiUNA training centre, to see the use of this virtual technology in training people on equipment, which I thought was interesting.

Maybe you can talk a bit about some of the new technology and innovations that are being used through your association and your association's members, that will help change this landscape in the future.

We can talk about what's been done in the past, but there may be tech that's going to really help advance things and make things safer just because of where we are, which is 40 years from when Responsible Care actually started.

Mr. Bob Masterson: Thank you.

I would certainly encourage this committee to speak directly to the railways. There have been a number of comments here that are simply factually not true. They are the real driving force for rail safety. If you look at the equipment and the spend that CN and CP-KC have put toward improved rail safety, they're best to talk about that.

What I would say is that the job of either preparing for or preventing, and responding to an emergency is not borne solely by the municipalities. Industry, from the shippers right through the railway providers and emergency contractors, does shoulder a lot of those costs. For the smaller communities, when you talk to the railways, ask them about how they pre-position emergency response equipment so that it is available in those instances where it takes more time to get there.

There's a lot of work. It's good work. We're all in this together. It's not a case of industry, and railways especially, trying to dodge their responsibilities. I think Canada's two class 1 railways are incredible leaders in rail safety.

There's always more to do, but they will work with you to get there. Please do speak to them directly.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Masterson.

Next, we'll go to Mr. Badawey.

The floor is yours for five minutes, sir.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chief, I want to drill down a bit more on the overall planning and protocols that you're a part of. Quite frankly, when you see the panel here today, for the most part these are people who would otherwise sit around the table when you have those situations.

Prevention is first and foremost, and with that comes disaster mitigation, something that this government has invested in over the past three or four years, from both the operational and the capital sides, which are extremely important.

Also important are the CERTs, the community emergency response teams, that you put in place from the operational side; evaluating the risks within the municipality, which I'll get back to in a second; and, with that, recognizing, as was just mentioned, the sectors that are well-equipped—rail, industry, etc.—on the capital side of it in terms of having equipment in place or overall planning with the CERTs that are part of the community.

What is also important is the capital, and when I say the capital, I mean really taking into consideration the secondary planning and actually recognizing that if you have a leak from a train, it may leach into the water system, and, therefore, recognizing how important it is to also have as part of the process the engineers of the city, public works operations and others such as that, like coordination, training and communication.

How do you inform the public? Sometimes it's quiet at three o'clock in the morning, so how is the public informed that they should not drink the water the next day? Of course, there are plans and protocols attached to that.

To you, Chief, with all that said, run us through the process. First, who should be sitting around that table? Second, give us an example of the prevention models your exercises are participating in with those people. Third, how far do you go with those you would otherwise include around that table, including not just the obvious in terms of the emergency responders but also the others in the city's operations, jurisdictional operations and others who are very relevant to individual situations? By the way, what about the capital needed to pay for that?

Mr. Chris Case: We're getting into two very different focuses here. We have emergency response, and we have emergency management. In a lot of areas, the fire chief is both the emergency management coordinator and the fire chief.

In the event that the incident takes place, the emergency response will immediately go. That level of response is determined by council, whether or not they are in haz-mat operations, technical or even just in awareness. Awareness is that they can actually identify what's on fire, what's involved and then call for help. That's about all they can do, and then they can do evacuations and the like.

Should that then become something that is beginning to impact large numbers of people, as you know, the mayor might declare an emergency. An emergency operations centre will be declared, and that is when you get the industry partners. You get all the community partners, like the director of the PUC, police, EMS, fire and all the municipal departments. Even some of the charities are then around that table, trying to manage the incident and support the operations that are going ahead.

That is immense, and speaking as somebody who has had three ongoing emergencies simultaneously, that basically stops your municipality, and you're all working just to deal with an emergency. It's incredibly time-consuming. It's incredibly impactful on all the members of staff, not to mention the actual trauma that it brings to the community.

To answer your question, it very much depends on what it is we're dealing with.

I will say one thing. When Lac-Mégantic happened, I was still in the U.K. We studied it as firefighters, and I recall seeing a firefighter say that he arrived to a wall of fire and there was nothing they could do. There is nothing that causes more feelings of helplessness in a firefighter's mind than to show up at an incident and not be able to do anything.

That is the problem that you face. We can have all the safety issues we want and we can have all the safety plans, but in that time between it happening and our actually getting control of the situation, that's when that time belongs to the community.

• (1730)

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thanks, Chief.

Sometimes we have to recognize the reality of the situation we may be involved in with respect to the financing. I know in my day, when I was involved in some of those situations, I had on my right my clerk and I had on my left my director of corporate services, which included finance, and there were decisions that had to be made on the fly with respect to finance.

My question to you is this: Depending on the capacity of the jurisdiction, the community, is there a need for financial support in individual circumstances, first, within your operations and, second, primarily beforehand, within the capital side of it? Can the federal government, as well as the provinces and territories, participate so that it, therefore, doesn't simply default to the property taxpayer or the water and waste-water ratepayer?

Mr. Chris Case: What I can tell you is that, out of the three emergency services in my area, the police are always very well funded, because it's very political. The police usually get quite a lot of grant money, and they're also not particularly equipment heavy. You get an incident, and you might have an officer arriving in a car. EMS is 50% funded by the Province of Ontario. If you have a house fire, you probably have about 8 million dollars' worth of equipment showing up, and all of that is on the property taxpayer, every single bit.

As we said in our opening statement, we need to start looking at ways that we can get equipment to the scene and keep our firefighters equipped so that they can deal with all ranges of incidents, not just the huge ones we're talking about today.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Mr. Chairman, am I out of time?

The Chair: You are out of time, sir, well over time, but I didn't want to cut off Chief Case. He was making very valid points that were interesting to the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou Duval, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to follow up a little bit on Mr. Masterson's comments from the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada. He said that falsehoods have been spread, that the entire responsibility for risks and costs rests with municipalities.

Mr. Lessard, perhaps I'll ask my question differently.

To your knowledge, has the railway company in your region, which transports dangerous goods, ever covered the cost of fire stations? Has it ever incurred any costs for equipment? Does it pay for the firefighters who are on duty?

I don't know if it's Canadian National or Canadian Pacific in your area. I'm assuming it's Canadian National.

I'm not an expert on how that works in general. However, to my knowledge, the railway companies may be contributing to the training or information provided to you. However, does your municipality cover all those other costs, or are the railways also involved?

Mr. Yves Lessard: No. The municipalities bear those costs.

I have to acknowledge one thing. Our fire departments are very well trained. They do a good job when an incident or accident occurs. Municipalities are also able to move forward based on their needs and respond to an incident or accident.

That being said, I'm not just concerned about costs. What I'm hearing is that you care about responding to an accident or incident, but care very little or not at all about preventing such an incident or accident from happening.

Indeed, they feel comfortable in saying that they can provide the town with a list of hazardous materials. As I explained, they could do the same thing for citizens and provide them with a list of hazardous materials. However, that won't prevent an accident or incident. What do railway companies or companies that transport hazardous materials by rail do to prevent an incident or accident from happening? What do they do at the source?

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I think your point is excellent, but I'd like to come back to the issue of costs. In your opinion, is the cost sharing fair?

Mr. Yves Lessard: No, it isn't fair at all because those companies don't participate. As for our municipality, we're involved in the maintenance of railway tracks at level crossings, where cars pass through, and we bear the costs. However, railway companies and companies that transport hazardous goods through our territory don't share the costs of firefighters or of managing situations that concern the city as such.

• (1735)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much, Mr. Lessard.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chief Casey, you described situations in which it's just not going to be possible for local fire departments to attack a fire, to get in there and respond directly, and there's a need to get people out. There's a need for people to self-evacuate.

It would seem to me that this is made harder by the emergency response distance that's recommended, which is 450 metres.

I talked to a local fire chief who spoke of the challenge that presents for firefighters, because the people in that radius are their

neighbours, and it's going to be very difficult to hold them back when they know people who work in those buildings right next to the railroad.

What is the best practice for alerting people and quickly evacuating them from situations, when first responders can't get close enough to knock on their door?

Mr. Chris Case: It's very difficult to pin down a best practice, because, again, this comes down to geography and other such things. Alerting people can be done through.... We've used reverse-911 systems, systems of alerting through mobile phones. We can actually do the federal and provincial alerts, which alert everybody's phones, but, again, that all takes time.

In my experience, the most effective way of evacuating people is when someone has to knock on their door and basically say, "You need to leave." People will see something on their phone, and when they get that trusted face at the door.... I've seen firefighters and police officers pleading with people to leave their homes. We can't force anybody to leave their homes.

In terms of best practice, that would really be an interesting point, from a federal perspective, about what would be the best way to do this over a wider area, but I accept your chief's point: Some of the evacuation distances listed in the ERG are flabbergasting. We're talking kilometres, especially at night, when people are asleep. It is a significant challenge.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Mayor, I wonder whether I could ask you, based on what you know about your community and what you've heard at these hearings, whether you feel your residents are adequately protected from major incidents involving dangerous goods.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: The answer is no. They aren't well protected.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You did that well, Mr. Bachrach.

Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor.

[English]

Next we go to Mr. Lawrence. Mr. Lawrence, you have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much

I've listened to the testimony intently, and I think I've picked up a fairly considerable disconnect between what Mr. Masterson is saying and what the mayor and the chief are saying. I want to be clear here: I'm not blaming anyone. I just want to get to the root of it and, hopefully, help solve this issue.

I start with you, Mr. Masterson. Do you believe it would be of value—if, in fact, one of these high-consequence events were to happen—for the first responders to have information with respect to the potentially dangerous substances that might be manufactured by your members? Perhaps you could expand, if you don't mind, as to what the differences or responses might be with respect to, maybe, a couple of the most dangerous chemicals that would be produced by your members.

Mr. Bob Masterson: To start with your first question, certainly, on the disconnect you spoke about, I don't think there's a disconnect. I think we're talking about a lot of different things, and they're getting twisted together. We hear about prevention, and then we hear about response.

What I was saying about who bears the cost for prevention is that there were many millions of dollars spent—tens of millions—on the upgrades to new railcars to keep the product in. I think we heard there were 2,000 violations of the regulations, but only—what was it I heard?—eight of them led to a release. That's eight too many, but that's because of the equipment that's put in place, the tank car standards, the investments the railways have made on.... We used to have a lot of incidents because of bearings overheating. That's almost eliminated because of the boxes they have. Every single car, every bearing, is tested or signalled. That's the disconnect here. There's a lot of money spent on prevention. Don't lose sight of that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: What I was trying to get at, though, is that it appears as though your evidence or testimony is that your industry provides information as to the contents of various freight trains and so forth, but it doesn't appear as though that information is actually of much value, if I can be candid, with our first responders. I'm just looking to bridge that gap. Surely, of the chemicals that you would have, different chemicals would require different responses and, perhaps most importantly, might have different impacts on first responders who are rushing in there to save people.

● (1740)

Mr. Bob Masterson: I have three quick responses.

First of all, there was a misstatement earlier. It is not the railways that prepare the ERAPs. It's the producers or the importers of the substance that's regulated that prepare the ERAPs and how they have to be administered. That's an important piece of information for you right there, to make sure you understand.

Again, that ERAP will talk about the means of containment, and that will differ depending on the commodity in question. Certainly, you may wish to look a little deeper into toxic inhalation hazards and those few substances—whether that's ammonia, chlorine or ethylene oxide—and how those get managed.

One of the things to remember, when the question about prevention comes up—and this is really important too—is that, when industry has the choice, it will not ship those products. If you're making ethylene oxide, and you have a customer who wants to turn it into another product, guess what? You're going to locate on that site where it's produced, so it doesn't have to go on the tracks to begin with.

However, when you talk about farming and having to move around anhydrous ammonia, or water treatment for municipalities,

these goods must be moved. There are residual risks that can't be overcome, but the questions are: Are we taking more steps for prevention, and are we better prepared to respond? Those are two different questions, and they're both very important for the business of this committee.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Masterson.

I go back to the fire chief, Mr. Case. What I was trying to get at—and maybe unsuccessfully with Mr. Masterson there—is the fact that I find it quite troubling that your firefighters would be driving up, potentially, to an explosive scene or even just a potentially dangerous scene, and not have immediate information as to what they're going into. First of all, I just want to clarify that I did understand you correctly on that.

Mr. Chris Case: It very much depends on the call. If we get a derailment and an accident, a 911 call will be made, and that information will be key. The dispatcher will then send a fire crew to a railway derailment where there are potential chemicals involved.

It could be the case that the rail company phones in and says exactly what it is and, “We have plans in place,” but when you look at where it could happen, what could be around there, the differences.... There are so many variables that it would be really difficult to have a very specific plan for that one specific incident, should it happen at any time of day or night.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Like Mr. Masterson, I just see your members as being incredibly valuable in this. It's not just one chemical. There might be multiple chemicals mixing together, which can create entirely different circumstances, and, as much as the firefighters might train, there's just no way they're going to understand that.

I guess I'll leave it there. I have another question round. I'll come back to you, gentlemen. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lawrence.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here. This is an issue that affects me personally.

Mr. Masterson, when I was chairman of the Commission de la sécurité publique de la Ville de Gatineau, during the work on a public transit system, we studied six problem intersections and met with stakeholders. We even met with representatives of the Quebec Government and the federal government, including the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, the TSB.

However, I don't remember a time when an organization such as yours, the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada, was involved in the whole process. Is there a lack of communication, or are you more used to dealing with cities through Transport Canada or the TSB to issue recommendations and get involved in the social acceptability process?

[English]

Mr. Bob Masterson: Yes, as the association for the producers we deal with the policy-makers, the regulators and the lawmakers. The individual companies will be engaging with municipalities on incidents involving their goods and how to prepare for that.

We do some collective work. I mentioned the work on TRAN-SCAER and TEAP, which is collective across our association. In the past, we visited Gatineau, Ottawa and many of the municipalities represented on this call. That is done through the association, but, again, it's the expertise of our member companies, the railways and emergency responders that do come.

• (1745)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I have a follow-up question. In the process surrounding a project, are you an integral part of the solutions to ensure the social acceptability of implementing a new system in a network?

[English]

Mr. Bob Masterson: It's a highly regulated industry, and there's very little that's as highly regulated as the transportation of dangerous goods. It's a very thorough regime. Again, this is a question of improving it for the future, and we're all for that.

We are involved with Transport Canada, with their dangerous goods committees, to bring the industry together and respond to the proposals that are being made. I don't think that, if you asked Transport Canada, you would hear resistance from industry, whether that's the shippers or the carriers, to these measures. It's, "How do we do this in a way that's actually achievable?"

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Sir...

[English]

Mr. Bob Masterson: The question has come up—if I may add one brief thing, again—about the information that's available. We should commend groups, like the Railway Association of Canada and its members, that have put in the AskRail app on their phones so that the first responders, immediately, when they see a car number, can put that in. They will know the product; they'll know if it's full or empty, and it will link them right away to other information they need, including who to call and the CANUTEC information on how to handle that safely. There's a lot of information.

We could do better, but let's not make the assumption that there's no information or that the industry or the railways are trying to keep this private. That is not the case.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: That's not the case, Mr. Case.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I have a simple question for you.

[Translation]

I represent small municipalities. I have 41 of them in my riding, and there are a number of industries. Chemical materials circulate on the territory. There are also volunteer firefighters everywhere.

On the other hand, you can't even build a two- or three-storey apartment building, because the firefighters don't have the training needed to use a tall ladder; in fact, they don't even have such a truck.

We're talking about awareness, training and national coordination for those small municipalities. However, I can't imagine the gap between reality and where we should be heading. What is the role of government? What concrete steps can be taken to get as close as possible to what's being proposed? This work will take a long time.

Dr. Tina Saryeddine: That's a very important issue. We want to talk about a national fire authority.

Right now it's almost impossible.

[English]

Because of that scale, it makes hard to predict all of the issues that will be in the blind spots. We need to better engage the fire sector up front in this type of planning.

Oh, I can see your red card there, so....

The Chair: I'll give you another 10 seconds.

Dr. Tina Saryeddine: Our best recommendation is for a national fire administration, and we'd be happy to give the committee more information.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Feel free to submit any additional information you'd like us to consider as testimony.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

[English]

Next, we'll go back to Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Lawrence, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you.

I'll get back to the line of questioning I was on before.

One of the elements that came up was with respect to batteries. Obviously, with the growth in the electric car sector and electric buses, there are going to be some massive batteries, and massive numbers of batteries are going to be on the rails.

We've all seen videos of firefighters trying to put out a single vehicle battery and it reigniting. What training or what resources has Transport Canada given you? Has the federal government given you any support with respect to those batteries?

• (1750)

Mr. Chris Case: When it comes to lithium-ion batteries, somebody once commented to me that if you ask five firefighters their opinion on how to fight a lithium-ion battery, you'll get eight different answers. We do not have a single guidance on how to do this.

In addition to the fact that this is being placed on a rail car and being put through communities, the whole issue of lithium batteries is one of the big things that my 50 colleagues talked about two weeks ago when they came to visit you and your colleagues. That is just an example of the unknown coming down the pipe that we have yet to understand the full ramifications of, and that's for all fire departments—not just the small volunteer fire departments, but even the larger ones as well.

In every conversation I have with fire chiefs, lithium-ion batteries come up—cancer prevention, lithium-ion batteries and fire code changes. It's always one of the first things we talk about, because one thing we do not like is not knowing how to deal with something, and, to a certain extent, lithium-ion batteries are a big unknown at the moment.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: With the massive numbers of lithium-ion batteries that are going to be on our rails and on our roads, we don't currently have a set federal standard as to how to deal with those. Is that correct?

I'm not criticizing, by the way. I just think this is a problem that we need to solve.

Mr. Chris Case: We turn to the National Fire Protection Association in the U.S. a lot.

They're beginning to develop standards, but from a fire chief perspective, one of the reasons I'd like to see a national fire administrator is that it's the question your administrator would be putting to you at policy: "Let's talk about how we're going to do this, and let's get that guidance down to all fire chiefs." Once we know what we're dealing with and what we need to do, believe me, we can then go and seek funding from whomever to try to get the equipment we need.

Again, we keep repeating this, but everything comes back to it. There needs to be a single person at the federal level who can advise policy-makers and who can bring forward that perspective so that these gaps don't appear.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Not to put too fine a point on it—and I understand that I'm probably putting you in an unfair position—but let's say that tomorrow a train derails while containing a large number of sodium-ion batteries. What's your plan of attack?

Mr. Chris Case: First of all—knocking on wood—let's hope not. Secondly, it's evacuation. Like I say, we have two choices: We move the bad stuff away from the people, or we move the people away from the bad stuff.

If you were to get an incident of that magnitude, which we see now with some lithium-ion batteries—we're seeing quite large cells being placed in wind turbine farms to collect and maintain energy—all of those are designed, to a certain extent, with evacuation, with getting people away. I know that one of my colleagues has equipped his vehicles with chains, so that if there's a vehicle fire, a battery fire up against a building, they'll physically pull the vehicle

away from the building. That's the level of intervention we have right now.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I think it's fair to say that the lack of a standard for firefighters to rely on to attack a sodium-ion battery fire is concerning or highly concerning. Is that fair?

Mr. Chris Case: In speaking to colleagues around the world, I can tell you that with the fact that the technology of lithium-ion batteries is advancing so quickly, it's going to be very difficult to keep up with it in terms of what can be a response. That's one of the benefits of such an agile industry, but yes, this is the type of thing where we'd very much like to see federal guidance, the same way we'd like to see federal guidance on cancer prevention and PFAS and bunker gear. A single voice of leadership would be much appreciated.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Case, for your excellent testimony. I apologize for putting you on the spot a bit.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lawrence.

Next is Mr. Badawey.

The floor is yours for five minutes, sir.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chief, I want to give you, as well as the mayor, the opportunity to speak a bit more in depth about the national fire administration. It seems to be the topic of your passion today with respect to trying to get this off the ground. Quite frankly, I agree with you. One point of contact is very beneficial to streamline a coordinated approach of relevant partners to any given situation.

Again, I've been in situations in the past where it was three o'clock in the morning and we'd have a ship coming into the Welland Canal with everyone on the ship sick, and we wouldn't know why. It was delegated to my fire chief versus Health Canada. It was very frustrating. Simply having that protocol in place before the fact, versus trying to deal with it during or even after the fact, would be beneficial.

May I first request that you submit to us the report you've authored, Tina—not you, but your association—so that we can enter it into the testimony? It would be reflected on the record, to be included with the final recommendations or the final report, and, therefore, with the recommendations the analysts will provide us.

That said, I'd like you to comment on the emergency management attached to local, provincial and national priorities, and the alignment of same. I know that's one of your priorities within the plan of moving forward with the national fire administration. I'd like you to talk a bit more in depth about that and your thoughts on how, especially in our case, it aligns with our jurisdiction over national priorities.

• (1755)

Mr. Chris Case: Through you, Mr. Chair, when you look at the things that Canada is now facing in terms of wildfires, climate change and all the aspects we've talked about today, to be able to have that single voice that can advise the federal level, as well as having the provincial level.... To be able to see those three levels of government more aligned would be gratefully received by first responders.

Speaking from personal experience about some of the incidents I've dealt with in the past, where we've had some real evacuations and explosions and that type of thing, we go straight to the province, but to see that leadership on all three levels would be very reassuring for the community. The fact that we're all seen to be aligned and everybody is looking at this.... From what I've seen in the past, that really would be appreciated more by the people we serve. I think it would send a real, powerful message to the communities.

Mr. Vance Badawey: To that, again, as I mentioned earlier, there is a reality attached to the costs, which I'm sure you struggle with every single day. You're right; policing is more HR-related. I think 95% to 96% of a police budget is human resources—through a collective agreement—and about 4% or 5% is the capital side of it in terms of equipment and so on.

EMS, as you mentioned correctly, is half covered by the provinces, while you are simply covered by the property taxpayers. That includes your human resources as well as your suppression equipment, your vehicles, and the list goes on—totally driven by costs to the property taxpayers. When we run into situations like wildfires, climate change and disaster mitigation, again, it falls to property taxpayers, water and waste-water ratepayers, which then can be a burden on them.

With that, do you believe that, with a lot of the mechanisms that we're putting in place at all levels of government—at the federal level, we have the carbon tax—a portion should go to municipalities to cover some of those costs that would otherwise be defaulted to a property taxpayer?

We have the disaster mitigation fund. We have the Canada community-building fund, and the list goes on with respect to some of the contributions that we're making at the federal level.

The provincial level, we would expect, would do the same, and of course other partners, such as the private sector, within their own organizations and sectors, would do the same. Do you find any other funding mechanisms that can be made available to otherwise cover some of those costs?

Tina.

Dr. Tina Saryeddine: Yes. Thank you very much for the question.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Before I go to you, Tina, I would love to give the mayor an opportunity to speak.

Dr. Tina Saryeddine: Sure, absolutely. Please.

Mr. Vance Badawey: He's at that level.

Mr. Mayor, I would love to hear your comments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: As long as the railways and those who transport hazardous materials by rail aren't responsible for the damage caused by an incident or accident, the current situation will suit them. Today, all we're talking about is the responsibility of firefighters and municipalities.

Mr. Masterson clearly explained the philosophy behind this by saying that he's working to limit the damage. He isn't saying that he makes sure there's no damage or that he pays for the damage. I'm not calling him anything by saying that. He's absolutely right. That's what we're seeing, and what he's confirming today.

However, I think we need to change that paradigm so that the railways and the companies that move dangerous goods by rail take responsibility for the damage they cause. I'll give you a concrete example. The companies didn't pay for what happened in Lac-Mégantic; it was the government. So citizens paid for that. It cost over \$500 million.

• (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Thank you, Chief, and thank you, Tina. I appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Badawey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou Duval, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I'd like to thank Mr. Case for his testimony. I haven't had the opportunity to ask him questions so far, but I may do so later on, depending on my speaking time.

I wanted to respond to something that was raised by one of my colleagues, and that's the issue of transporting batteries, which is a new technology. I find that relevant and interesting. How could we intervene on that? Nevertheless, I wonder whether it was a self-serving or disinterested question.

We're talking about the transportation of dangerous goods in general. When I talk to people in my riding, that's a concern. What happened in Lac-Mégantic has to do with the transportation of dangerous goods. As the mayor of Saint-Basile-le-Grand said, the concern is the same in his area.

In general, people talk to us mainly about the transportation of those famous petroleum products because they're the dangerous goods that circulate the most on our tracks. In the case of the Lac-Mégantic tragedy, petroleum products exploded, destroyed the town and killed 47 people. In my riding, people are concerned about the effects of transporting those petroleum products, especially since the construction of the Kildair facility in Sorel.

Mr. Lessard, you said earlier that the best strategy to prevent that kind of disaster was to eliminate risks at the source. To do that, we need fewer petroleum products on our tracks. Right now, in Quebec, but elsewhere in the world as well, we're working on an energy transition, we're working to get out of oil by eliminating those products, or at least by greatly reducing their quantity. Do you think that's part of the solution?

Mr. Yves Lessard: We must recognize that petroleum products and other hazardous goods will continue to circulate for a short time. Serious consideration must be given to building bypasses in densely populated areas, such as those with a string of towns and villages. That would solve part of the problem.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barsalou Duval.

[English]

Next, and finally for today, we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes, sir.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I want to thank all our witnesses. This has been really excellent testimony.

Mr. Case, your recommendation around a national fire administration is one that we'll certainly take to heart. I can pledge to you that I'll do my part in trying to ensure it's among the recommendations in this report.

I did want to go back to community preparedness and this wide variation that we see among communities of different sizes. In my region, local fire departments are offered training by the shippers several times per year...or once per year—I'm not sure of the frequency. I've had a chance to observe some of that training, and I think it's certainly better than nothing.

The question is around whether there should be national standards for community preparedness and capacity. I don't think that many residents of our small communities understand the limitations of first responders. Our fire departments, our first responders, do incredible work, and they do incredible work within serious limitations. The question is whether there should be some thought put to establishing a standard for communities to respond to dangerous goods incidents, or whether the current patchwork of volunteer training opportunities is adequate to really protect lives.

We've had the conversation about how the costs should be distributed. I think they have to be distributed fairly. That's a clear point, but when it comes to having adequate and sufficient response capacity and having the capability—having enough water, having enough materials, having enough trained people—should there be some sort of standardization across the country so that communities know that they are adequately protected?

• (1805)

Mr. Chris Case: We've talked a lot about leadership. We see differences between the different provinces. I'll give you one brief example. When we talk about incident command, it's an incident command system. In some provinces, emergency management is an incident management system, which sounds like a difference in language, but it's a difference in approach.

When we talk about the national fire administration and when we talk about the lessons learned from Mégantic, leadership is what's needed right now, and I think that having any kind of leadership at the federal level that comes down to a community is going to be significant.

I'll draw your attention again to the E2 regulations, whereby large producers of dangerous goods have to consider the community, have to consider their emergency response plans and have to consider what they do with us as responders. That might very well be a model.

I appreciate the question.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach.

Chief Case, I want to thank you for your service on behalf of all members of our community, and for your testimony today.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here, sharing with us and contributing to this very important study.

With that, I want to wish everyone a wonderful evening. This meeting is adjourned.

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