



NEWS



News Headlines 03/29/2023

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Runaway Train Carrying Iron Ore Derails in CA

By Staff Writer, Fire Engineering

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A runaway train with no passengers derailed in San Bernardino on Monday morning, catching fire, according to authorities.

The train carrying cars of iron ore — the raw material used to make steel — derailed near Kelso, according to the **San Bernardino County Fire** Protection District and fire department radio transmissions.

Fire engines and a hazardous materials team are responding, according to the government agency. The fire department confirmed around 11:20 a.m. that the fire was out, and that there were no injuries and no active threat to the area.

“It did derail and it is on fire. Carrying 180 cars of iron ore,” said a man on the San Bernardino County fire and rescue radio channel more than an hour earlier. Another fire employee said there was a fire “under the first locomotive.”

The department was sending water tenders to the scene to help battle the blaze caused by the derailment. But soon after the reports of fire, law enforcement at the scene confirmed there was no longer a fire and many of the fire trucks called to the scene were sent to other assignments.

The **San Bernardino County Fire** Protection District said it was on the scene with representatives from Union Pacific railroad company.

Union Pacific told The Times that the southbound train crashed around 8:30 a.m. Pacific time, with 55 cars and two locomotives derailing. The train was in the Mojave National Preserve, east of Barstow.

“The crew was not injured,” said Kristen South, a spokesperson for Union Pacific. “The derailed rail cars were loaded with iron ore, which spilled. Iron ore is part of the steel-making process and is not a hazardous material. Further, there were no hazardous materials on the train. The incident is under investigation.”

She confirmed no train crew members were in control of the train when it derailed.

“I can confirm the crew was not in the cab at the time of the derailment and there was uncontrolled train movement,” South said. “No one was hurt and the cause is under investigation.”

One Twitter user, who reported the derailment 15 minutes before the fire department did, described a runaway train. San Bernardino authorities could not be reached immediately to confirm if the train was a runaway.

“Heard the crew jumped off and it was run away for over an hour,” the user tweeted.

This story originally appeared in [Los Angeles Times](#).

<https://www.fireengineering.com/hazmat/runaway-train-carrying-iron-ore-derails-in-ca/>

Slow ambulance response times cause concern in Riverside County

By Jeff Horseman, The Press-Enterprise

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Riverside County has denied a one-year contract renewal to its emergency transport provider, American Medical Response.

Arriving too slowly to calls too often has cost Riverside County's emergency ambulance provider a one-year renewal of its long-running contract.

[American Medical Response's contract](#) with the county doesn't expire until July 2026. But in an unusual move, officials earlier this month rejected an extension, citing the private company's failure to meet response time standards and other expectations.

An AMR representative told the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, March 28, that the company is taking "extraordinary steps" to hire from a scarce pool of paramedics and remains dedicated to provide the county with top-quality service.

[Headquartered in Colorado](#), AMR has long been the county's choice to take patients dealing with medical emergencies to hospitals.

The current pact, agreed to in 2015, was for five years and gave AMR the ability to seek 10 one-year renewals starting in 2020. Every year, AMR submits an extension request by Sept. 1. After reviewing the company's performance, the [county Emergency Medical Services Agency](#) approves those renewals, something it's done six times.

Previously, AMR met the benchmarks needed for one-year extensions. But Bruce Barton, the county's emergency management department director, told supervisors that AMR missed response time benchmarks in five of 12 months between July 1, 2021 and June 30 of last year.

In addition, Barton said that on hundreds of occasions, AMR sent basic life support ambulances to calls requiring advanced life support ambulances outside the parameters of a system designed to handle minor calls without the need for advanced medical care.

AMR also was late submitting response-time reports and its annual report lacked required response-time data, Barton added.

While the county's emergency medical response network needs "to move to the next level ... we need the medical system to be resilient going through a medical emergency, not become a victim of that medical emergency," Barton said.

“And we’re not providing the service that we need to provide to our communities.”

Late response times also affect the county’s fire departments. In Murrieta, response-time benchmarks are currently being met 54% of the time, up from 42% in 2022, said Bernard Molloy, the city’s fire chief.

“We have two hospitals in our city and one right outside of our city,” he said. “So ambulances are never very far from us. It’s not like these are long response times.”

As a result, “Our first responders sit on scene and aren’t able to transport that patient to the hospital in a timely fashion,” Molloy said. “When we’re waiting for these ambulances to come, we no longer have a fire engine that can do fire engine work because we’re stuck with the patient.”

Jeremey Schumaker, AMR’s regional director of operations, said his company is grappling with a paramedic shortage stemming from the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), when paramedic and emergency medical technician classes were canceled and paramedics left the profession and were sidelined by the virus.

“We share in the frustrations that these shortages have had on our response times and we’ve taken extraordinary steps to mitigate those impacts,” he said.

Those efforts include giving paramedics raises and hiring bonuses, starting an “earn while you learn” program for emergency medical technicians, spending more on overtime and funding paramedic school scholarships for 70 employees.

That said, training a new paramedic takes time, Schumacher said.

“We continue to compete for the same diminished pool of paramedics with every other EMS agency across the country (and) with all of the fire departments represented (in the board chambers).”

“I think we’re going to see some significant improvements in the coming months,” he said. “But there’s still a long way to go.”

Riverside County Supervisor Kevin Jeffries, a former volunteer firefighter, said that while AMR deserves leeway for pandemic-related problems, “we’re way past the devastation that we all experienced with COVID, and yet AMR hasn’t been able to figure out how to get back to normal operations.”

“That’s unacceptable. There’s got to be a sense of urgency to get you back to full adequate staffing ... my trash doesn’t get picked up for two weeks, back to back ... the trash companies have trouble hiring trash truck operators. Nobody’s dying because of that.”

<https://www.pressenterprise.com/2023/03/28/slow-ambulance-response-times-cause-concern-in-riverside-county/>