

[CN faces criticism over crew deaths]

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PRINCE GEORGE, B.C. -- The family of a CN Rail crewmember killed in a derailment last week is angry with how the railway handled the man's death, according to this Canadian Press report.

Don Faulkner was one of two CN crewmen killed when a locomotive and lumber car went off the tracks on a steep grade near Lillooet, in southern British Columbia, and burst into flame.

(Brother Faulkner was a member of UTU Local 1778 in North Vancouver, B.C.)

"I heard rumors," said his daughter, Melony Faulkner. "I was under the impression for the longest time that my dad burned to death.

"It's not enough they send out their piece of (crap) train to kill my dad, they didn't have the compassion to even tell us word one about it.

"We got their condolences over the TV and it is still all we've gotten from them. Nobody from CN called us."

Don Faulkner's son, Shane, who does contract work at CN's Prince George rail yard, said he found out about the Thursday afternoon accident from family members just before going to work early Friday morning.

"I had to be on-site at 2 a.m.," he said. "If I'd found out about my father over coffee talk, things would not have been pleasant."

Mr. Faulkner, 59, died when the CN locomotive went out of control and plunged over a 300-metre cliff into the Fraser River gorge.

Mr. Faulkner, the conductor, died in the locomotive while brakeman Tommy Dodd, 55, died on the loaded lumber car they were pulling as an anchor.

(Brother Dodd was also a member of UTU Local 1778.)

Mr. Dodd was trying to set the car's manual brake when the two speeding hulks separated, both ending in balls of fire over the cliff.

Engineer Gordon Rhodes, 49, managed to leap free of the 350-tonne locomotive.

All three were seasoned railway workers and long-time friends.

"I spoke with Gord," said Melony Faulkner. "He is having a really hard time right now.

She said Mr. Rhodes is also angry because CN workers had been warning the railway about mechanical problems and technical dangers in the way trains were being run through the Fraser Canyon.

She said she hopes federal authorities now will investigate those claims.

Mr. Rhodes told her the train's crew had plenty of time to think about what would happen.

"He told me it is not like a car accident, where you hit some ice and in a second it is all done," said Melony Faulkner. "'We knew for miles and miles what was going to happen, how it was going to be,' he told me."

She said Mr. Rhodes told her that he and Mr. Faulkner were prepared to leap off the hurtling locomotive but couldn't find a safe place to jump.

At the last second before the train left the tracks, Mr. Rhodes made his move. He was injured in the fall but it saved his life.

"He made it back to my dad," Shane Faulkner said. "Dad wasn't alone at the end. Gord wasn't sure if he had passed on or not, but he was there for him. He didn't leave him until they got there with the stretchers."

A funeral service for Mr. Faulkner is scheduled for Friday in Kamloops, followed by another service in Port Stanley, Ont., where most of his family lives.

The accident is under investigation. CN officials wouldn't speculate on the cause but there have been suggestions the locomotive's brakes failed.

CN Rail has been under a microscope after a series of derailments, more than 20 in 2005.

A 43-car CN derailment near Wabamum, west of Edmonton, dumped 700,000 liters of oil into a lake last August.

Two days later, a CN train derailed and spilled sodium hydroxide into the Cheakamus River about 30 kilometers north of Squamish, B.C., doing substantial damage to the river's wildlife.

Figures from the Transportation Safety Board show railway accidents have been climbing steadily for all of Canada's railways.

Last December, CN Rail pleaded guilty to failing to properly keep records of maintenance and inspection work it did on a bridge where a fatal derailment occurred in 2003. Two employees were killed in that accident.