Emergency care delayed following fatal train derailment, says union for rail workers

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Published Tuesday, October 2, 2018 6:55PM CST
Last Updated Tuesday, October 2, 2018 6:57PM CST

The union representing workers on a train that derailed near Ponton, Man. Sept. 15 is asking Manitoba’s Chief Medical Examiner to conduct a coroner’s inquest after it says paramedics weren’t initially allowed access to the site of the wreckage.

The train’s engineer, a 59-year old man from The Pas, was seriously injured in the crash. Its conductor, a 38-year old man from The Pas, died.

"The conductor appeared to have sustained a broken bone and he ended up dying, he bled out 9-and-a-half hours later. Paramedics were apparently not allowed to arrive on scene despite the fact a helicopter was present at the site of the derailment," said Teamster Canada spokesperson Christopher Monette in an interview via Skype with CTV News.

The union said the information it gathered is based on interviews it did with people at the derailment, which happened around 3:30 p.m.

"They were pinned beneath hundreds of tons of wreckage. The train was carrying liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), which was stable. Diesel fuel leaked from the locomotives as a result of the crash. The short story is that the conductor died on the scene shortly after 1:00 a.m. on September 16," said vice-president Roland Hackl, Teamsters Canada Rail Conference in a letter sent to the Chief Medical Examiner.

Days after the event, Manitoba RCMP told CTV News the wreckage was observed by a helicopter flying over the area at 5:45 p.m. on Sept. 15 and the pilot reported it to police.

The letter from Teamsters Canada Rail Conference said at one point paramedics weren’t allowed to administer emergency treatment to the injured crew due to concerns about diesel fuel leaking.

'It is unclear why paramedics were not allowed to attend the wreck site or how that decision was made, or by whom. These two men both survived the initial crash. The injuries sustained by the conductor were entirely survivable, assuming reasonable medical care," said Hackl.

On Tuesday RCMP said officers arrived on scene around 7 p.m. and stayed with the trapped crew members for five hours until more emergency responders arrived.

Police said the rail cars were carrying liquefied petroleum gas, which was a significant safety hazard.

"The officers gathered equipment they felt would help assist them and they were flown to the site by the pilot that had located the derailment," said spokesperson Tara Seel in an email to CTV News.

Seel said the officers held the scene until Thompson Fire and Emergency Services personnel arrived via a rail truck with additional equipment.

"The scene was then turned over to Thompson Fire and Emergency Services just before midnight. They immediately ensured the area was safe, entered the locomotive to begin lifesaving operations and worked on rescuing the trapped crew members aboard," she said.

Seel said the 38-year-old man died on site shortly before 1:00 a.m. on Sept. 16, and the 59-year-old man was later freed from the wreckage and taken to hospital.

Arctic Gateway Group, the company which owns Hudson Bay Railway told CTV News with the ongoing Transportation Safety Board Investigation it can’t comment publicly on accuracy or inaccuracy of facts.

The TSB also declined to comment because of the ongoing investigation.
CTV News reached out to the Chief Medical Examiner's office. It confirmed it received the letter. It said it's looking at the facts and will determine if an inquest is appropriate.

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