

EPA Emergency Response Site Update

Stillwater Train Derailment

July 1, 2023, Operation Period 8

[Website](#)

Site Description

On June 24, 2023, EPA received a report of a rail car incident located near Reed Point, MT, approximately 40 miles west of Billings, MT. Montana Rail Link reported the Twin Bridges bridge collapse. The rail line includes 52 total cars; 17 cars were derailed. The 17 affected rail cars contained sodium hydrosulfide, asphalt liquified petroleum, molten sulfur, and scrap metal. 10 cars entered the Yellowstone River under the Twin Bridges bridge. The sodium hydrosulfide cars did not enter the river. The quantity of the contents in the rail cars varies but is typically in the thousands of gallons.

Representatives from the Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), local law enforcement, fire department, Fish & Wildlife Services (FWS) and Montana Disaster & Emergency Services (DES) arrived on scene. EPA has deployed an On Scene Coordinator, along with technical (START) contractors who will provide additional support and help coordinate environmental assessment and response activities with State and local officials.

Notifications to downstream public water supplies have been made. There are currently no known threats to public health and public water supplies are continuing to monitor the situation. Irrigation ditch users have also been notified and are taking preventative measures. The Yellowstone River is closed to all public access 1 mile upstream and 2.5 miles downstream of the derailment site.

Site Objectives

- Participate in Unified Command.
- Stabilize rail cars containing sodium hydrosulfide and transfer contents from impacted cars.
- Document response activities.
- Establish air monitoring near the work zone.

Operations Period Objectives

- Participate in Unified Command.
- Document response activities.
- Perform ambient air monitoring near the work zone.
- Remove liquid asphalt petroleum rail car from bridge/water.
- Heat and remove any remaining product in recovered rail cars.
- Transload and remove liquid asphalt petroleum rail cars on the east side of bridge.
- Determine amount of molten sulfur and liquid asphalt petroleum released from rail cars.
- Begin Shoreline Cleanup and Assessment Team (SCAT) surveys of the response area.

Operations Period Accomplishments

- Construction crews removed the rest of the segmented rail car containing scrap metal from the river, leaving one remaining rail car containing molten sulfur in the river. The scrap metal rail car was transported to a temporary waiting area on the west riverbank, along with large portions of bridge debris that were cut into pieces by a large shears attachment to a track hoe and removed from the river. Three rail cars remain on the eastern portion of the track, awaiting product transfer (transloading) and removal.

- Construction of the causeway, or stable path, continues to extend farther into the river as needed to reach rail cars and debris that are farther east into the river. The causeway will also be used for constructing the new bridge after all of the debris is removed.
- Montana Rail Link contractors continue air monitoring in fixed locations throughout the site and with personnel. Rapid assessment technique was used to survey the release of product downstream.
- Water sampling was conducted by Montana Rail Link contractors at thirteen locations, including three upstream locations and ten downstream locations, to determine if contaminants are present in the water at concentrations greater than relevant human health standards and risk-based screening levels. Contaminants were not detected greater than the laboratory reporting limits in the preliminary data.
- MDEQ and Montana Fish and Wildlife continued to survey downstream to test possible recovery options and identify waste product that has migrated offsite.
- Unified Command continues to monitor and assess the release of asphalt material that has entered the river.



Large pieces of bridge debris are removed from the river and placed in a secondary waiting area.



Construction crews pull the remainder of the scrap metal rail car onto the shore.