

Who responds? When do you evacuate? A look at Lancaster County's Hazardous Rail Transit Plan

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The Hazardous Rail Transit Plan for Lancaster County, [provided by county officials through a right-to-know request](#), addresses railroad transportation risks and gives emergency responders a general response plan.

The plan, which is distributed to first responders and local emergency managers, outlines when to take action, how to identify hazardous material placards on a variety of railcar types, the procedures for emergency notification, how to establish incident command and organization, and information on how to inform other county, state and federal authorities.

The HART plan includes details on the railroads that operate in Lancaster County, areas for potential ecological risk and how to establish a disaster declaration.

The plan delineates responsibilities and protective equipment needed for fire departments, government officials, railroads and emergency management officials.

Here are highlights of the plan, which was redacted by county officials to protect “sensitive municipal and transportation routing information” and confidential information for the railroads.

When to take action

In an emergency on a rail line, first responders take into account several potential response actions, depending on the specific emergency.

The responses are classified as “offensive” for quick emergency control and aggressive action; “defensive” for confining the situation with action from a distance to keep the responders safe; or “non-intervention,” in which no action is taken due to high risk for responders or where action could make a situation worse.

Duane Hagelgans, emergency management coordinator for Millersville and Manor Township, provided examples of the response situations. Hagelgans is also the fire commissioner for Blue Rock Fire Rescue and a professor of emergency management at Millersville University.

Offensive

An example would be crews going toward a leaking tanker to shut off a valve and stop a leak.

- Dynamic actions to promote quick emergency control, mitigation or tactical resolve.
- Enhanced risk to emergency responders.
- Resource/sustainment-dependent operations and considerations.

Defensive

An example would be a large fire in which crews set up ladder trucks and lines that flow large amounts of water and are not held by responders.

- Confining incident footprint to prevent additional harm, spread or collateral damages.
- Immediate rescue/ isolation and denying of entry.
- Spill-control actions to minimize spread/contamination.
- Control/exposure protection of and against secondary fires.

Non-intervention

An example would be a situation with unknown chemicals or chemicals that are water-reactive; applying water to a large fire

with burning oil would create runoff of contaminated water, possibly to nearby waterways or groundwater.

- Allow incident to run its course.
- Noncommitment of resources because of high risk.
- Monitor for worsening conditions.
- Ensure public protective actions are initiated