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News

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U.S. Department of Transportation's Full-Scale Investigation into West Virginia CSX Derailment

Charleston, West Virginia – Today the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced that is now able to move forward with its full-scale forensic investigation into the derailment outside of Montgomery, WV followed by a slower start earlier this week hampered by weather and safety concerns.

During a media conference in Boomer, WV, FRA announced next steps in its ongoing investigation into the incident, which includes participation from the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA). The FRA is the lead Federal agency charged with investigating Monday's derailment.

"With the response and recovery effort now complete, and the dangers associated with the initial derailment now minimized, the FRA will now begin its thorough investigation into the derailment," said Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. "I thank the emergency responders who stepped into harm's way to evacuate the affected communities, and I am eternally grateful that no residents were seriously injured."

On Monday, February 16, a 109-car unit train pulled by two locomotives derailed 27 tank cars carrying Bakken crude oil near the Kanawha River, approximately 30 miles southeast of Charleston, WV. The Department's FRA and PHMSA, the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, and West Virginia state agencies have been at the site of the derailment since Monday evening.

"We are grateful to the first responders for evacuating residents safely, and grateful to the Coast Guard, the EPA and state and local agencies that worked together to immediately address urgent conditions at the derailment site," said Sarah Feinberg, acting Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration. "Now it is time for the FRA to begin our investigation into this incident in earnest, to identify any warranted enforcement actions, and to continue our work to ensure accidents like these do not continue."

A full team of FRA investigators will remain in the Montgomery area for several days, and possibly weeks, as the investigation continues.

Initial activity at the derailment site focused on response and recovery, including controlling fires, containment of the crude oil release into surrounding areas, and protection of communities and drinking water sources near the derailment site. Although inclement weather, safety concerns for the community and its water supply, evacuations and fire containment limited the DOT's initial steps in its investigation and data collection, the Department is now moving aggressively with a full-scale, thorough investigation into the cause of the derailment.

The FRA will now inspect all damaged tank cars, recover damaged rail from the accident site, and review maintenance and inspection records for rolling stock, track, signals, and locomotives. Equipment recovered from the accident site, including tank cars, tank car wheels and trucks, and damaged rail will be reassembled, documented, or reconstructed by FRA investigators at a location near the derailment site.

The FRA will systematically examine all recovered components to either eliminate or identify issues related to wheels, track, axles or other components that could have caused or contributed to the accident.

Additionally, the PHMSA is conducting testing of the crude oil product involved in the derailment to determine gas content, volatility, tank car performance and to ascertain compliance with federal hazardous material regulations related to proper product classification. The results of the inquiry will be included in FRA's final investigative report.

"We continue to look into the composition of Bakken crude oil, which is why we took samples of the product to verify appropriate classification and whether emergency responders received the accurate information to respond to this derailment," said Tim Butters, Acting Administrator of the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

Investigations into derailments can take significant time and resources. A full team of FRA investigators will remain in the Montgomery area for several days, and possibly weeks, as the investigation continues.

As the Department's investigation continues, other federal and state agencies will continue to monitor the derailment site and surrounding areas to ensure it remains safe for residents. The EPA and the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection will continue to work closely with the U.S. Coast Guard to test and monitor water quality and atmospheric conditions in the vicinity of the derailment.

The Department will make the findings of its investigation public through the FRA website at www.fra.dot.gov.

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