

Leaking Trains

Recently there was a news item about a train that spilled its cargo – with a twist. Instead of the usual hazardous chemicals that spill from trains like hydrochloric and phosphoric acid, acetone, liquid soap, antifreeze, fuel, coal, and herbicide; this particular train spilled its contents of tallow, also known as animal fat. Unlike other hazardous spills, this one was dangerous in a different way than possible human ingestion of chemicals. The fat on the roadway caused it to be slippery which led to numerous car crashes. To make matters worse, apparently the rush-hour vehicles got the tallow on their tires and tracked it around the entire area, causing more complications in cleanup. And you thought rush-hour traffic was aggravating enough all by itself!

Animal Fat Leak Wreaks Havoc For Commuters

ELMHURST, Illinois – An eastbound Union Pacific freight train carrying a load of animal fat sprung a leak as it passed through DuPage County Friday, dousing intersections between Elmhurst and Lombard with the slippery goo.

Police departments in the area reported numerous crashes that occurred as a result of the substance, also called tallow.

Tallow is the rendered form of beef or lamb fat. It is used for soap, cooking and bird feed.

Hazardous materials teams from various fire departments were sent to numerous sites trying to determine the best method to deal with the spill, said Union Pacific spokeswoman Donna Kush.

“We’re incredibly sorry for the trouble this has caused, but more importantly we’re working on a cleanup solution and we’re working as quickly as we can,” she said. “The hazmat officials are out there to ensure it’s handled correctly.”

What seemed to work the best for roads where the fat had spilled was sand to soak up the goo and provide motorists with traction, said Metra spokeswoman Judy Pardonnet.

Crews continued to add sand to the roads throughout the evening, she said.

Kush said there appeared to be a "heavy concentration" of the spilled fat in the Lombard area. Police officials in Elmhurst said they were working on several accidents as a result of the leak as well. Kush said the leak spanned miles.

Because cars carried the fat over all three sets of tracks, all trains were running at walking speed between Elmhurst and Lombard, Pardonnet said.

Commuter trains were running about 30 minutes late at the start of the evening rush hour.

Some trains were delayed as much as two hours initially, she said.

Saturday train traffic was expected to be normal, she said.