

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

May 12, 2008

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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***Woodbridge Mayor John E. McCormac Seeks Federal
Investigation into Port
Reading Train Derailment on Sun., May 11...***

Woodbridge Township Mayor John E. McCormac today forwarded a letter to the National Transportation Safety Board seeking an immediate and official investigation into the circumstances surrounding the derailment of a Conrail freight train in the Port Reading community of Woodbridge Township, Middlesex County, on Sun., May 11, 2008. The request for investigation targets the refusal of Conrail authorities at the scene to provide emergency response, fire department and hazardous materials teams, and/or police with a copy of, or access to, the Material Safety Data Sheets and train manifest documents.

While emergency responders initiated all the appropriate protocols given the limited information available – and no loss of life resulted – the actions of Conrail authorities was without cause or justification. The emergency response community is deeply troubled by Conrail's lack of apparent concern and, more importantly, concerned about the ability to timely obtain information in the event of a future derailment.

A copy of Mayor McCormac's letter to the NTSB and to Congressman Albio Sires, 13th Congressional District is attached.

May 12, 2008

Mr. Mark V. Rosenker, Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza – SW
Washington D.C. 20594

VIA FAX: 202-314-6482

Dear Chairman Rosenker:

I am writing to request an immediate and official investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) into the circumstances surrounding the derailment of a Conrail freight train in the Port Reading community of Woodbridge Township, Middlesex County, New Jersey, on Sun., May 11, 2008, and the refusal of Conrail authorities at the scene to provide emergency response, fire department and hazardous materials teams, and/or police with a copy of, or immediate access to, the Material Safety Data Sheets and train manifest documents.

As a result of the outright refusal of Conrail authorities at the scene to provide the Material Safety Data Sheets and train manifest documents and/or information regarding the contents of the three derailed tank cars, emergency responders were greatly hampered in their deployment of appropriate emergency response equipment and, more importantly, public safety was jeopardized in the wake of the evacuation of more than 40 homes and hundreds of area residents.

The train derailment was reported to the Woodbridge Township Police Department Dispatch Center at 4:57 p.m. on Sun., May 11. The Woodbridge P.D. immediately responded, along with fire, emergency response and hazardous materials teams from the Port Reading Fire Department, Woodbridge Fire Department, Iselin Fire Department, Woodbridge Township Office of Emergency Management, Carteret Office of Emergency Response, and the Middlesex County Hazardous Materials Team. In arriving on the scene, ranking fire department officials responsible for command and deployment at the scene immediately requested a copy of the Material Safety Data Sheets – that request was met with outright refusal to provide the documents by the train engineer and Conrail authorities. As a matter of fact, nearly 24 hours later, Conrail has yet to provide Woodbridge Township with the Material Safety Data Sheets.

As a result of the refusal to provide the Material Safety Data Sheets, responding emergency hazardous materials experts were unsure of the type, nature and contents of the overturned tank cars and whether the cars were breeched and leaking potentially toxic and/or combustible materials into the environment. Working with only the placard information contained on the outside of the tank cars, emergency and hazardous materials workers moved to evacuate the community well beyond the crash site, implemented unmanned hose-line set-up lines and related fire and hazardous release suppression protocols, and deployed foam tankers and additional firefighting and hazardous materials equipment – far beyond that which may have been required had timely information regarding the contents of the tankers been provided. After some 45-50 minutes into the on-scene response, the train engineer acquiesced under the threat of arrest to

“allow” Woodbridge authorities a visual review of the Material Safety Data Sheets – an accommodation that was too little and too late given the potential severity of the situation.

The absolute first priority of Woodbridge Township, and neighboring fire department, emergency response and police responding to the scene of the derailment, was to protect public safety. It is troubling to report that Conrail authorities were totally disinterested in public safety and seemingly more interested in ignoring and/or blocking requests for the vital information that exists for the express purpose of protecting the public in time of such a train derailment disaster. (In point of fact, one purported Conrail official arriving at the scene intentionally ran through a police barricade and exited the vehicle immediately adjacent to the overturned tank cars with a lit cigarette. A response and action at a potentially volatile disaster scene that is particularly troubling.)

In requesting a formal investigation by the NTSB, I am also demanding that Conrail, and/or any other responsible parties, provide full reimbursement to Woodbridge Township, the Borough of Carteret, the County of Middlesex and any and all other responding emergency response teams, fire departments and police for costs incurred in responding to the derailment.

Woodbridge Township authorities stand ready to provide any and all information relative to the investigation into the cause, circumstances and response by Conrail to this disaster. While there was no loss of life or extended impact on the Port Reading community from this derailment, there was potential for greater disaster given the indifferent response from on-site Conrail authorities. We are gravely concerned about any future events and the Conrail response, or lack thereof.

Thank you for what I anticipate will be a prompt and thorough investigative review by the NTSB.

Sincerely,
John E. McCormac, Mayor
Woodbridge Township, New Jersey

c: Congressman Albio Sires
13th Congressional District, New Jersey

May 12, 2008

Honorable Albio Sires
Congressman
13th Congressional District
1024 Longworth HOB
Washington D.C. 20515

VIA FAX: 202-226-0792

Dear Congressman Sires:

As we discussed earlier today, I am forwarding a letter sent to the National Transportation Safety Board seeking an immediate and official investigation into the circumstances surrounding the derailment of a Conrail freight train in the Port Reading community of Woodbridge Township, Middlesex County, on Sun., May 11, 2008. The request for investigation targets the refusal of Conrail authorities at the scene to provide emergency response, fire department and hazardous materials teams, and/or police with a copy of, or access to, the Material Safety Data Sheets and train manifest documents.

While our emergency responders initiated all the appropriate protocols given the limited information available – and no loss of life resulted – the actions of Conrail authorities was without cause or justification. The emergency response community is deeply troubled by Conrail's lack of apparent concern and, more importantly, concerned about the ability to timely obtain information in the event of a future derailment.

In requesting a formal investigation by the NTSB, I am also requesting the assistance of your office to secure a commitment from Conrail, and/or any other responsible parties, to provide full reimbursement to Woodbridge Township, the Borough of Carteret, the County of Middlesex, and any and all other responding emergency response teams, fire departments and police for all costs incurred in responding to the derailment.

Thank you for your concern and prompt attention to our request.

Sincerely,

John E. McCormac
Mayor
Woodbridge Township, New Jersey