

## **Mayor Deb Higgins - September 6, 2013**

It doesn't matter where you are heading within the city, at some point you will cross a set of railroad tracks or have a bird's eye view of the rail yards driving across the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue or 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue bridges. Railways are not only some of the largest employers in our community but they have also been major contributors to the economic activity and development of our city since Moose Jaw's early settlement days.

While we are accustomed to the presence of rail activity and aware of its importance to our community, we also know that we have to be aware, cautious and obey crossing signals when we encounter railway tracks. A collision with a train very seldom has a good outcome.

Rail safety is brought to public attention during Rail Safety Week which was established in 1981 to educate Canadians about the hazards surrounding highway/railway crossings and trespassing on railway property. It has been a very successful educational campaign that has seen significant reduction in the number of highway/railway crossing collisions over the years. While progress has been made in a number of areas, every time there is a railway incident throughout the country, whether a derailment or a collision of some type, we again see the issue of rail safety raised.

This past summer was no exception, as the horrific and devastating incident of the runaway train hauling crude oil exploding in Lac Megantic, Quebec brought the issue of railway safety to the forefront in every community that has rail lines running through it.

I have been asked numerous times over the past couple of months what our city has in place and what response would occur in a case similar to this.

While we hope that we will never be put to the test, it is reassuring to know that work has been done to safeguard our city. The Moose Jaw Fire Department has established protocols in place for a response to all hazardous material incidents or rail accidents within the city of Moose Jaw. From the number of personnel that would attend; how the situation is assessed; identifying the issues from various sources of information; to notification or evacuation of the public, protocols are all laid out to manage a coordinated and safe response.

Also ongoing from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, is a National Municipal Rail Safety Working Group which is reviewing the federal government's progress on rail safety and will make specific rail safety recommendations to the federal government who has regulatory responsibility for rail traffic.

The priorities for the working group are to equip and support municipal first responders to rail emergencies; ensure federal and industry policies and regulations address the rail safety concerns of municipalities, and to prevent downloading of rail safety and emergency response costs to municipal taxpayers.

The work will continue at all levels to improve safety, but in the meantime, it is reassuring to know that we have planning in place and the trained personnel to respond to emergencies here in Moose Jaw.

Deb Higgins  
Mayor