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IAFF Submission: 2017-18 Statutory Review of the Railway Safety Act

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Executive Summary

Canada boasts one of the largest rail networks in the world.¹ As the movement of goods and passengers continue to increase, enhanced rail safety measures are necessary to protect our communities and build a safer, sustainable transport system.

The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the review of the *Railway Safety Act*, as fire fighters serve as the first line of defence in virtually any emergency. The IAFF represents over 302,000 professional full-time fire fighters in North America, including over 23,000 in Canada, and protect 85% of Canada's population and infrastructure.

Devastating train derailments such as the Lac-Mégantic tragedy in 2013, raise serious questions about the level of preparedness and safety risks for first responders in municipalities across Canada. It highlights the enormous strain on emergency resources and the need to assess emergency plans and prevention measures. It also raises concerns about the gaps in first responder training. The lack of adequately trained personnel in the fire service leaves communities surrounding rail corridors vulnerable, resulting in serious implications that include property loss, death and injury to both private citizens and responding fire fighters.

As the use of rail transport increases, it is prudent to consider the safety implications of future projects, such as more transportation of dangerous goods, expansion of commuter rail corridors, including the potential for high-speed rail and greener transport solutions. Communities must be prepared to mitigate the impacts of emergencies that may arise as a result. Additional resources should be allocated towards rail safety, including training first responders to safely and effectively respond to railway emergencies.

The IAFF is concerned that the legislative and regulatory framework of the *Railway Safety Act* does not appropriately consider fire fighters as affected stakeholders given the on-the-ground emergency response they provide. As such, the IAFF recommends that the *Railway Safety Act* in its scope consider the role of fire fighters in rail emergencies and include guidance for fire

fighters' access to specialized training, adequate emergency resources and access to information affecting rescue operations.

Relationship Building and Coordination

The *Railway Safety Act* sites under Objectives 3(b), *encourage the collaboration and participation of interested parties in improving railway safety and security.*

Railway emergencies involve the coordination of multiple authorities, including local, provincial and federal agencies. When reviewing safety management systems, standards and regulations to help define roles and responsibilities, it is incumbent that the fire service has the opportunity to participate. To ensure greater interoperability, a better understanding of how emergencies are responded to in communities across Canada is necessary.

Access to Training

Training and preparation are key aspects in mitigating emergencies. When large-scale rail emergencies occur, fire fighters are in a race against time to identify and coordinate safe and efficient incident management plans. Lack of training forces delays in emergency management, which may result in loss of lives, property and economic productivity. It may also put a strain on resources in neighbouring communities.

Many rail corridor communities are in rural areas with limited emergency response capabilities and limited access to training. Gaps in training can be addressed with greater accessibility and multi-level investments.

The *Railway Safety Act* authorizes the Minister to create grants for programs, studies, projects and works under section 14(1). Consideration should be given to creating grants that would provide first responders the most up-to-date training tools to safely and effectively respond to rail emergencies.

The IAFF has an existing partnership program with the federal government, called the IAFF Canadian Haz-Mat and CBRNE Training Initiative, that provides an internationally accredited level of hazardous materials and chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive (CBRNE) response training to first responders across Canada at no cost to municipalities. The method of course delivery is not only cost effective, but wide reaching, as two IAFF master trainers travel directly to the communities that request training.

Expanding the scope of federal grants to fund programs to include the rail sector would enable the IAFF to deliver a training course for first responders targeted towards rail safety that focus on the nuances of rail car operations, regulations, and safety features.

Investment into such programs would enhance current federal rail safety initiatives and complement existing training programs hosted by industry groups.

Access to Resources

When responding to any emergency, fire fighters are limited to the resources they have on hand. Large-scale emergencies can stretch a fire department's resources to its limit.

As the rail industry continues to evolve, we must consider the safety implications of future projects, such as more transportation of dangerous goods, expansion of commuter rail corridors, including the potential for high-speed rail and greener transport solutions. Fire fighters should be informed and prepared to adapt to the impacts of such changes.

Much like the need for adequate training, fire fighters require access to the proper equipment needed to safely conduct search and rescue operations.

Railway-Municipality Interface

Fire fighters need to be aware of the materials that are being transported through their jurisdictions and identify the resources required for an effective response.

Information sharing between railway companies and municipalities must be relayed to fire departments in a timely manner to ensure safe and effective emergency response. The IAFF is supportive of modern applications such as CN's AskRail App to help identify real-time information on railcars for mobile devices. As mechanisms to promote transparency through information sharing become available, we also need to evaluate their effectiveness.

The IAFF recommends frequent evaluation of best practices in information delivery.

The information shared must be turned into useful information, including planning tools, best practices, prevention strategies, and training programs.

The last word

The IAFF appreciates the opportunity to participate in the statutory review of the *Railway Safety Act*. We hope that the panel will consider the important role of fire fighters in rail emergencies and include guidance for fire fighters' access to specialized training, adequate emergency resources and access to information affecting rescue operations.

Our recommendations will help to provide a higher level of protection for all Canadians and the nation's infrastructure from the most dangerous kinds of emergencies.

References

¹Transportation Safety Board of Canada <http://www.bst-tsb.gc.ca/eng/rail/>