



Free Press Viewpoint

Rail accident warns of risks we all face

The tragic rail accident, explosion and fire in Canada last week gives us a glimpse of just how much danger passes through our towns every day.

The disaster in Lac-Megantic, Quebec, wiped out the historic downtown district, killing up to 50 people, some of whom have not yet been recovered. It happened when a 72-car train loaded with crude oil broke loose and ran downhill until it derailed on a curve in Lac-Megantic.

The ensuing fire and explosions were horrific, but the incident is far from isolated. Similar trains of oil, alcohol, dry fertilizer and random hazardous materials criss-cross our area, and the entire continent, each week. Oil is being loaded here and moved through each county.

Other shipments involve one or a few cars of chemicals, or single trucks moving on the highways. Nearly every town is visited, usually without notice. Until something goes wrong.

In Canada, the head of the railroad first blamed fire fighters who had put out a small blaze in one of the train's engines earlier that night. Before they left, they shut the engine down. A few days after the accident, someone asked whether the train's hand brakes had been set.

The answer was uncertain. The engineer and conductor should have set hand brakes on the engines and up to 11 cars, but no one could say if that had been done. If it was not, then after the engines were shut down, it was only a matter of time before the train's air brakes failed – and it rolled away.

It's against railroad rules to leave a train standing with air brakes only, because eventually through leakage, they "bleed off." When that happens, there's nothing to hold a train except hand brakes, set by cranking a wheel on each car or engine.

Perhaps the Quebec accident will lead to better regulations and better training for crews. Perhaps the governments in the U.S. and Canada, which share a single unified rail network, will only invent some meaningless new paperwork for crews to fill out.

We hope for the former. There is too much hazardous material running up and down our roads and railroads to be comfortable with slipshod safety procedures.

If you don't believe that, go down to the nearest rail yard or highway intersection and count the number of "diamond"-shaped placards that mark hazardous loads. Be sure to write down the numbers; you can look them up on the Internet.

You'll see how lethal our transportation network can be.

– Steve Haynes

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Buy the house, buy the garlic crop

I harvested our garlic crop on Sunday.

When we bought this house almost 20 years ago, there was an herb garden beside the back deck. It was a modest affair about the size of two card tables, delineated by three logs and a sidewalk.

I'm not sure what was in the garden, because we bought the house in the fall, when most of the plants were gone.

The former owner loved lillies, but apparently didn't go for irises. While we like lillies all right, both Steve and I will tell you that the iris is our favorite flower. So we planted irises in that bed, never dreaming of the mishmash we would end up with.

In the spring, we had a gorgeous iris display and a bunch of garlic. The only other herb in the bed to make it through our replanting was the mint, which seems to think that it should be the center of every party.

So for the last 19 years, we have enjoyed the irises blooming in May and the garlic the rest of the year.

Now, our garlic isn't like what you buy in the store. If I get a head half the size of store-bought garlic, I'm really happy.

It might be that we have a different variety



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

than what the professional growers use or, more likely, ours doesn't have the room or get the fertilizer to grow to "normal" sizes.

Whatever, the reason, we're happy with our harvest, and the flavor is great.

So early the other morning, Steve set the water to trickle on the bed and left it on while we went to church. After the area was nice and wet, he turned the water off to let it seep deep into the roots of the plants.

Then Sunday evening, while he was trimming bushes, I pulled garlic.

Believe me, even with the damp ground, it's not an easy job.

Some of the bulbs came up with little or no effort. Some wouldn't come up at all, and all I got was a stem with seeds on top.

The problem is the irises. If the garlic ma-

tures under an iris rhizome, it's stuck. Unless I am willing to remove the iris – which I am not – I can't get the garlic out of the ground.

But, I only lost about one-tenth of my crop hid under the flowers. The rest came out nicely.

The next step is to cut the tops and bottoms off. The tops are the seeds, which I will dry and scatter over the bed later in the month. The muddy bottoms are the garlic bulbs.

After cutting off the bulbs, I washed and dried them on a piece of newspaper. After drying, it goes into a small paper sack – if you store it in plastic, it'll rot.

Now, I have my garlic. It won't last the whole year, but every time we use it this winter, we'll be enjoying the fruits of our iris garden.

And the mint, well, it's a nuisance, but let me tell you about the mojitos you can make with fresh mint....

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

Education and research takes investment

Time to compare university and research funding in Kansas and the United States with that in a progressive country on the move. Readers who follow this column know I am again writing from China.

In March of 1986, China initiated its State High-Tech Development Plan. Just as we have come to recognize "9/11" as an abbreviation for the September 11, 2001 attack, China uses dates to name many of its programs and this research push is known as the 863 program (1986–March).

The 863 program funds development of advanced technologies. It funnels money into industries, universities and government agencies for new materials development, energy, automation, laser technology, information technology and space (supporting their Shenzhou space program). In 1986, they added telecommunications and marine technology.

Few Americans know that China has developed the largest and most advanced undersea exploration vehicle that is diving to the deepest parts of the ocean while their spacecraft goes into orbit overhead. Incidentally, the U.S. is currently scuttling half of our ocean research vessels.

Because China made the huge error of shutting down schooling for a decade during the Cultural Revolution of 1965-75, they realized that there would be a university leadership gap in the mid-1990s that would allow them to completely re-organize their universities when the senior educational leadership retired. They seized this opportunity to close weak schools, merge small dispersed institutions, and move some federal universities to the provincial level for funding.

They likewise embarked on the largest expansion of universities in human history, doubling student capacity in five years, then doubling again by 2006 and doubling again to where it is just now leveling off. I was again at the University City in Chongqing this year where 15 new universities hold a total of 300,000 students, faculty and support staff.



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

Imagine the populations of Wichita and Topeka combined – but all university. Guangzhou and Xi'an have university cities with 10 new universities each.

At the same time in 1996, China picked approximately 100 universities for extra funding through the 211 program, named for being their 21st Century vision for one hundred schools. These schools train 80 percent of China's doctorates, have nearly all of the country's funded "key laboratories" and get about three-fourths of the science research funding from their National Science Foundation – yes, the same name and function as the U.S. National Science Foundation because it is modeled after ours. In the first five years, from 1996 to 2000, China pumped over \$2 billion into the 211 schools, and that support has gone up ever since. Project 211 schools form about 6 percent of the approximately 1800 academic universities in China.

Project 985 (founded in 1998 in May, of course) funds the top 39 universities. Both the national government and the provinces add additional money to expand these universities, fill them with state-of-the-art research equipment, bring in the best faculty, and send them to conferences worldwide. The increases in funding to these schools varies but has often grown 24 percent year-over-year.

Finally there is the Thousand Talents Program. Begun in 2008, it has hired over 2,260 world class scholars to come to China. Some go to industrial research centers and a few into financial agencies, but most join university staff. They are a mix of Westerners and overseas Chinese and they commit to stay for five

years. The criteria is that they are the expert in their field, and they get a one million yuan salary per year and ten million yuan for research start-up (divide by five for U.S. dollars). This is similar to university "raids" that occurred decades ago in the U.S. For instance, Stony Brook University raided talent from the University of Kansas in the 1970s. Our last university raids were by Arizona State 20 years ago. We can no longer afford it.

This year I spoke at South China Normal and sat on exam panels at Chongqing Normal University, both 211 schools, before coming to Northwest Agricultural and Forestry University that is both 211 and 985. I cannot walk two blocks without having to detour around new construction. Their labs are state-of-the-art and I have met both Western and Chinese Thousand-Talent professors. They plan to succeed.

So, I heard the news about the deep budget cuts for Kansas universities. Looks like we have other plans.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

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