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NATIONAL

NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Train wreck spills burning propane

■ DISASTER: 1,700 people were evacuated in case propane ignites cars

WEYAUWEGA, Wis. (AP) — Burning propane spewed from wrecked railroad tank cars Monday, threatening to blow up additional cars loaded with the fuel and keeping the town's entire population away from their homes.

"This is about as serious as it can get," emergency management official Paul Thomsen said. "A detonation would be catastrophic."

No injuries were reported.

Throughout the morning, the leaking gas blazed in a 200-foot wall of flames. At times, the light of the fire was visible more than 13 miles away in New London.

During the afternoon, however, a snowstorm obscured the inferno from view. Firefighters were pulled back to let the fire burn.

After taking an early evening helicopter tour, Gov. Tommy Thompson said it appeared fire in two propane tankers had burned out, but two others were still burning, putting 10 other tankers at risk of exploding.

Thompson said hazardous materials teams probably could not get close enough to check the site for explosive vapors before noon Tuesday.

"We think we are doing everything humanly possible but right now it is a wait-and-see game," he said. "We can't allow anyone to go in to the scene. It is just too dangerous."

Thirty-seven cars of an 81-car Wisconsin Central Ltd. freight train derailed just before dawn in this east-central Wisconsin city.

As the cars piled up, one of the train's 14 propane tank cars exploded, destroying a nearby feed mill and forcing the evacuation of 1,700 people from the town and two nearby nursing

homes.

The 14 tank cars were loaded with a total of 1 million pounds of propane, shipped liquefied and under high pressure, Thomsen said. Three of them apparently were leaking and feeding the fire started by the tank that exploded, said Wisconsin Central spokesman Bob Jones.

Authorities said they were concerned that other propane tank cars might explode.

If all the tanks detonated, the blast could shatter windows more than a mile away, said Thomsen, president of Risk Management Planning, a company hired by the state emergency management division.

Susan Nowak was making coffee at her home a few hundred yards from the tracks when the train derailed just before 6 a.m.

"I heard what I thought was thunder. Then the whole sky turned orange or red. It was just like a bomb. I opened the door. It was intense heat," she said.

Evolution issue heats up in Tennessee

■ SCHOOLS: Proposed law would forbid teachers to teach evolution as fact

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The state where John Scopes was tried and convicted in 1925 for teaching evolution again wants to restrict what students can be told about the origins of man.

The Tennessee Senate is considering legislation to fire any teacher who presents evolution as fact. The bill was expected to pass during Monday night's session but instead was sent back to committee for study of six proposed amendments.

The amendments included one that would have protected teachers who wanted to teach the Biblical theories of creation along with evolution. Another, passed on a voice vote, changed the wording to say a teacher "could" be fired instead of "shall" be fired.

The bill had been expected to pass despite an attorney general's opinion it violates the constitutional separation of church and state.

Already this year, Tennessee senators have gone on record in favor of displaying the Ten Commandments in churches, schools, businesses and homes for 10 days in May, and against same-sex marriages.

"This is a trilogy that is making this state a comedy," said Sen. Steve Cohen, a Memphis Democrat.

The sponsor of the evolution bill is Sen. Tommy

Burks, who said he introduced the bill because constituents told him evolution was being taught as fact in Tennessee schools. He won't say where.

The bill seems destined to pass the Senate and then the House without significant help from lobbyists. The conservative Eagle Forum has been the most vocal backer of the bill, which some lawmakers said is hard to oppose.

"You can't explain a no vote in a 15-second sound bite," said Rep. Eugene Davidson, who voted for the bill when it cleared the House Education Committee.

Gov. Don Sundquist, a Republican, has not said what he will do if the bill reaches his desk.

The bill is more lenient than the law under which Scopes, a substitute biology teacher, was convicted of teaching evolution and fined \$100.

That law prohibited teaching "any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach again that man has descended from a lower order of animals."

Burks' bill doesn't ban the teaching of evolution as theory or promote the teaching of Biblical theories, but teachers say no one knows how the law might be interpreted.

"Teachers will be afraid to teach anything about evolution," so students will miss a portion of their basic science curriculum, said Wesley Roberts, an ecology teacher at Nashville's Hillwood High.

Pastor criticized for planning 'slave auction'

■ RACE: High school fundraiser called insensitive and offensive

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — After criticism from black leaders and others, a conservative TV evangelist apologized Monday for inviting his parishioners to participate in a "slave auction" to raise money for high school students.

"We certainly did not intend to offend anyone and apologize to anyone offended," said the Rev. John Hagee of Cornerstone Church, a nondenominational church known nationally through Hagee's television ministry. His local congregation numbers more than 5,000.

Hagee, who is white, refused interviews with news reporters but appeared on a KTSA-AM radio talk show to talk about the uproar that began Friday with the publication of a story in his church newsletter.

Hagee wrote that "slavery in

America is returning to Cornerstone" on March 31. He explained that each senior at the private Cornerstone High School would be auctioned off in front of the congregation to raise money for a senior class trip.

The students would be expected to work at the home or business of the highest bidder. "Make plans to come and go home with a slave," Hagee wrote.

Over the weekend, black leaders and others criticized the plan.

"I think anyone should be incensed and outraged by it, and especially people of African-American descent should be outraged," said attorney Cornelius Cox, who is black.

"Slavery was one of the worst atrocities ever in this country. Is that something to make fun of? Something to mock?" Cox said.

On the radio program, Hagee said such auctions had been used in school fund-raisers for generations but that he will

rename the event a "student auction."

"I believe that name will pass and be politically correct — sterile enough," Hagee said.

Ethel Minor, president of the San Antonio branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, also criticized the plan, and said she had received calls from whites who were upset.

"These are high school seniors," she said. "You don't want anyone to call you a slave."

Cox and Minor said Hagee's appearance on the radio show was a step in the right direction but they wanted him to apologize to a larger newspaper or television audience.

Hagee said the news media had twisted his words.

"There is not one racial bone in my body," Hagee said. "I was trying to help the high school seniors raise money for their senior trip."