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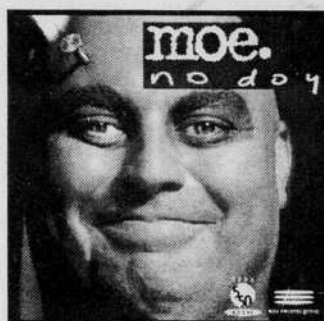
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Members of the hazardous materials division of the Eugene fire department respond to a train accident near the University power plant Saturday night. The train ran over a three-foot steel sign that punctured the diesel fuel tank, spilling fuel for a mile. Police are investigating the incident for possible criminal intent.

Sign slices open train's diesel tank

■ SABOTAGE: Police fear the damage could have been caused deliberately

By Ryan Maughn
Community Reporter

The diesel fuel tank of a Union Pacific train was punctured "dangerously close" to the Willamette River Saturday night by a sign laid across the tracks in what police are calling a possible sabotage attempt. They are investigating the possibility of someone trying to derail the train with a sign.

"I'm thinking that someone intentionally did that," said Lieutenant Lee Sorter, Eugene fire fighter, who was on-scene responding to the call. "The train wouldn't pick up something like that just laying along the tracks."

The police department was not able to give any further information about the investigation.

According to a press release, the sign punctured the train's second engine and spilled fuel

for the next mile before it was able to stop just behind the University power plant.

About twenty firefighters in total, including members of the hazardous materials division of the Eugene fire department, were deployed to contain and assess the spill at 8:51 p.m. The spill was plugged with a foam cork and firefighters left the scene at 11:20 p.m.

Lt. Sorter was concerned about the danger entailed in something like a sign being laid across the tracks. The locomotives that travel on those tracks can carry passengers and large tankers carrying numerous chemicals. If one of those had been punctured or derailed, the situation could have been extremely serious, he said.

There was little concern about the flammability of the diesel fuel, according to the fire department, because of the cold weather. The reason the hazardous materials division responded was because of the environmental

problems that could have developed with the spill so close to the Willamette River.

Sorter said the spill was contained before it reached the river and the train was transported to Union Pacific yard where the hole was repaired.

Eugene has one of the few hazardous materials teams in the state, said Eugene fire department District Chief Daniel J. Wirth. Team members are part of the emergency response division and respond to calls as far away as Florence to deal with situations ranging from nuclear spills to potentially dangerous gas leaks.

The most frequent calls that they receive, according to fire engineer Roger Garver, are methamphetamine laboratories, which are usually located in people's houses. Garver said that the chemicals that are used can be explosive and in some circumstances can keep firefighters on-scene for up to 12 hours.



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