



Curt Bemson via AP

This photo provided by Curt Bemson shows smoke and fire coming from an oil train that derailed Wednesday in Heimdal, North Dakota.

## Oil train crashes, catches fire in North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A train that derailed and caught fire early Wednesday in rural North Dakota was hauling crude from the state's oil patch, raising questions about whether new state standards intended to reduce the volatility of such shipments are sufficient.

The six tank cars that exploded into flames were a model slated to be phased out or retrofitted by 2020 under a federal rule announced last week.

It's the fifth fiery accident since February involving that type of tank car, and industry critics responded to the latest with calls for them to be taken off the tracks immediately to prevent further fires.

No injuries were reported in the derailment of the 109-car BNSF railway train at around 7:30 a.m. That prompted the evacuation of the 20-resident town of Heimdal, about 115 miles northeast of Bismarck.

The Health Department was monitoring air quality and advising people not to breathe in the smoke. The danger from the smoke is mainly the particles it contains such as ash, not toxic chemicals, Glatt said. Rain might have helped wash some of the particles out of the smoke, though it might also keep the plume closer to the ground and more likely to be encountered by people, he said.

In the immediate aftermath of the accident, BNSF vice president Mike Trevino said the intensity of the blaze prevented firefighters from directly attacking the flames. But crews positioned firefighting foam and other resources nearby and planned to try to put out the fire beginning Wednesday evening, Trevino said.

State officials initially reported 10 cars on fire but

later revised that to six. They were hauling Bakken oil loaded in the Tioga area, said Jeff Zent, spokesman for Gov. Jack Dalrymple.

Curt Bemson, a 68-year-old retired sheriff who alerted authorities, said he was getting ready for the day when the explosion outside town rattled his house. With the large number of oil trains that come through the community each day, he figured that was the cause.

"I got in my car, still in my underwear, had shaving cream on my face, and drove down there," he said.

There was no immediate word on the cause.

Industry representatives and state officials said oil companies have been complying with a standard that went into effect April 1 requiring them to remove propane, butane and other gases that occur in North Dakota crude to reduce the chance of tank cars catching fire. There was nothing to immediately indicate a violation of that rule with the train involved in Wednesday's accident.

North Dakota officials said the new standard makes the volatility of treated oil comparable to unleaded gasoline.

Members of Congress, who have called for a stricter standard to be imposed at the federal level, said Wednesday's accident underscored that more needs to be done to prevent oil train fires that could cause a major disaster in an urban area.

Tessa Sandstrom with the North Dakota Petroleum Council said safety efforts should instead focus on preventing accidents through enhanced inspections of tracks and railroad equipment.

The EPA planned to gauge any contamination to waterways near the spill.

## Texas incident fuels concern about lone-wolf attacks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The attempted attack on a provocative cartoon contest in Texas appears to reflect a scenario that has long troubled national security officials: A do-it-yourself terror plot, inspired by the Islamic State extremist group and facilitated through the ease of social media.

Trying to gauge which individuals in the United States pose such threats — and how vigorously they should be monitored — is a daunting challenge for counterterrorism agencies. Some experts caution that a limited number of small-scale attacks are likely to continue.

Michael McCaul, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, said federal authorities are aware of "thousands" of potential extremists living in the U.S., only a small portion of whom are under active surveillance.

Concerns have been intensifying since the rise of Islamic State group and were heightened this week after two gunmen were shot dead while trying to attack the event in Garland, Texas, that featured cartoon images of the Prophet Muhammad.

One of the men, 31-year-old Elton Simpson of Phoenix, was arrested in 2010 after being the focus of a four-year terror investigation; investigators are trying to determine the extent of any terror-related ties involving him or his accomplice, Nadir Soofi.

At the White House, Press Secretary Josh Earnest said Wednesday that intelligence officials would be investigating Islamic State's claim of responsibility for the incident.

"This is consistent with what has previously been described as a lone wolf attack," Earnest said. "Essentially you have two



Les Stukenberg/The Daily Courier via AP

In this 2003 photo, Elton Simpson goes uncontested for a layup during a Yavapai College basketball game in Prescott, Ariz. Simpson was one of the two gunmen who was shot and killed by authorities outside a suburban Dallas venue Sunday that was hosting a contest for Muslim Prophet Muhammad cartoons.

individuals that don't appear to be part of a broader conspiracy, and identifying those individuals and keeping tabs on them is difficult work."

Terrorism experts say the spread of social media — and savvy use of it by extremist groups — has facilitated a new wave of relatively small-scale plots that are potentially easy to carry out and harder for law enforcement to anticipate.

While plots orchestrated by al-Qaida have historically involved grand plans designed to yield mass carnage — airline bombings, for instance, or attacks on transportation systems — the Islamic State group has endorsed less ambitious efforts that its leaders say can have the same terrorizing effect on Western society.

"If you can get your hands on a weapon, how is the state security apparatus supposed to find you?" said Will McCants, a fellow for

the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington. "It's attractive because it gets just as much attention as a small- to mid-size bomb."

A public forum like Twitter, with its millions of followers, means those who might otherwise have had limited exposure to terrorist ideologies now have ample access to what FBI Director James Comey has described as the "siren song" of the Islamic State group. Social media provides a venue for agitators to exhort each other to action, recruit followers for violence and scout locations for potential attacks.

"The speed with which someone can find an active jihadist and connect with them over Twitter, let's say, and start direct messaging with them — that speed happens much faster now," McCants said.

This phenomenon poses a challenge for investigators

as they sift through countless online communications.

"Where is the threshold of saying this is more than just an avid consumer of propaganda?" asked William Braniff, executive director of a terrorism research center at the University of Maryland and a former instructor at the U.S. Military Academy's Combating Terrorism Center.

"It's exceptionally difficult to estimate of the number of people who've considered becoming foreign fighters," he said. "Often you're not dealing with specific behaviors, but with expressions of belief, which are constitutionally protected."

U.S. officials say that more than 3,400 people from Western countries — including nearly 180 from the U.S. — have gone to Syria or Iraq, or attempted to do so, to fight on behalf of Islamic State or other extremists groups.

Although there is concern that fighters returning to the U.S. might pose a terrorism threat, some national security experts say a more immediate danger is posed by individuals in America who are inspired by these extremist groups yet have no direct ties to them.

Such individuals "can be motivated to action, with little to no warning," National Counterterrorism Center director Nicholas Rasmussen told the House Committee on Homeland Security in February. "Many of these so-called homegrown violent extremists are lone actors, who can potentially operate undetected and plan and execute a simple attack."

He predicted that the threat posed by these individuals will remain stable, "resulting in fewer than 10 uncoordinated and unsophisticated plots annually from a pool of up to a few hundred individuals."

## In reversal, Baltimore mayor asks for federal police probe

BALTIMORE (AP) — Baltimore's mayor was emphatic last week: She did not want federal oversight of her police department.

"Nobody wants the Department of Justice to come in here and take over our city," Stephanie Rawlings-Blake declared as the National Guard enforced a 10 p.m. curfew.

But it was hard to find any opposition Wednesday after she changed course and asked the U.S. Justice Department to launch a broad civil rights investigation that could eventually force the city to make

changes under the oversight of an outside monitor.

The Democratic mayor now says she'll accept outside intervention to rebuild public trust in a city torn by riots over the death of Freddie Gray, a black man who suffered a fatal spinal injury in police custody.

"I am determined not to allow a small handful of bad actors to tarnish the reputation of the overwhelming majority of police officers who are acting with honor and distinction," she wrote in a letter to the new U.S. attorney general, Loretta

Lynch.

The mayor's announcement came the day after her closed-door meeting at City Hall with Lynch, who pledged to improve the police department and told faith and community leaders that "we're here to hold your hands and provide support."

Lynch has received the mayor's request and is considering it, Justice Department spokeswoman Dena Iverson said Wednesday.

"I think that's probably a step in the right direction," Republican Gov. Larry Hogan said.

The city's police union and City Council president also welcomed the development.

A key figure who didn't immediately respond was Police Commissioner Anthony Batts, brought in from Oakland, California, by the mayor 2 1/2 years ago to reform the department.

The mayor's request could put Batts' leadership under a microscope. A police spokesman had no immediate response to requests for the commissioner's reaction. An email and a text message were not immediately returned.

### BRIEFLY

#### Tornadoes touch down in both Oklahoma and Nebraska

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A storm that produced tornadoes across parts of southwestern Oklahoma bore down on suburban Oklahoma City during the evening rush hour Wednesday, and forecasters declared a tornado emergency for suburban Moore, which was hit hard two years ago.

Forecasters had warned that severe storms could hit much of Tornado Alley. Twisters were also reported in Kansas and Nebraska.

No injuries were reported in Wednesday's weather. Local television stations reported that some storm spotters had seen signs of damage southwest of the Oklahoma capital.

National Weather Service meteorologist Angela Pfannkuch said the rural town of Roseland, Nebraska, near Grand Island, was hit at 4:22 p.m. Wednesday. No injuries were immediately reported to emergency management personnel and it wasn't yet known whether homes and buildings were damaged.

A weak storm formed in southeastern Oklahoma shortly after 3 p.m., according to weather service meteorologist Michael

Scotten, and the supercell thunderstorm that created it held together until it reached Oklahoma City.

#### Israel's Netanyahu completes formation of government

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu completed the formation of a new coalition late Wednesday, putting him at the helm of a hard-line government that appears to be on a collision course with the U.S. and other allies.

Netanyahu reached a deal with the nationalist Jewish Home party shortly before a midnight deadline, clinching a slim parliamentary majority and averting an embarrassing scenario that would have forced him from office. But with a government dominated by hard-liners that support increased West Bank settlement construction and oppose peace moves with the Palestinians, he could have a hard time rallying international support. Controlling just 61 of 120 parliamentary seats, the narrow coalition could also struggle to press forward with a domestic agenda.

Netanyahu's Likud Party won March 17 elections with 30 seats, securing a fourth term as prime minister.

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