

Scenario

Pagers started ringing around 3 AM on June 18th in the small community of Cozad Nebraska for the volunteer fire department members. Four train cars carrying hazardous material derailed and caught fire forcing the evacuation of some residents of Cozad. Most of the community was awakened by the explosion, many stepping out of their homes only to be overcome by fumes causing many to have respiratory issues.

Firefighters were unable to fight the blaze due to the intense heat caused by the chemicals. As many as 1,400 people were evacuated from their homes. The community Nursing Home was evacuated and nearby Assisted Living facility was also evacuated.

Forty eight people were transported to the Cozad and Lexington hospitals for related respiratory issues including 5 first responders attempting to evacuate residents within a block of the derailment site. A long time retired elementary school teacher was transported and later died from respiratory complications. Pets that lived outside were overcome by fumes or heat and died on the scene.

A temporary shelter was put in place in the Lexington High School for the displaced residents. No estimate was given to when residents can return to their homes.

Nearby community volunteer fire departments were called in to assist in fighting the blaze. Nebraska State Patrol called in additional troopers to assist in closing down Highway 30 that runs along the rail line.

Region 3 Behavioral Health has been on the scene and Region 2 will also provide assistance to residence and first responders for anxiety, confusion, grief, as well as farmers and merchants near and in the community as the evacuation area has expanded.