

Canadian Government Revises Freight Rail Safety Rules

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Ottawa Ontario - The Canadian government has revised key provisions governing rail safety, focusing particularly on track inspections and the transport of hazardous materials during winter operations.

Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra on Monday announced changes to the Rules Respecting Key Trains and Key Routes, which are governed by the Railway Safety Act.

Transport Canada, which approved the rules, said the modifications are a result of ministerial orders that were put into place in 2020.

The revised rules:

- Require railway companies to develop winter operation plans specific to each subdivision where higher-risk key trains operate and that must be approved by a professional engineer;
- Require the use of new technology to detect a broken rail in areas where it is not currently present;
- Strengthen track inspection (increased frequency and improved quality) and track maintenance requirements (i.e., ultrasonically testing replacement rail and improved record-keeping);
- Define a "higher-risk key train" as one carrying large quantities of crude oil or liquid petroleum gases and prescribe speed restrictions for these trains.

The rules come after federal safety investigators looked into the factors that led to several crude train derailments during the 2019-2020 winter season.

The revised rules take into account the recommendations made last spring by the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, and they build upon the

wintertime speed restrictions that Transport Canada imposed last year for trains hauling dangerous goods.

Freight trains are considered key trains if they have one or more loaded tank cars of dangerous goods that are toxic by inhalation or if they contain 20 or more tank cars containing dangerous goods.

Higher-risk key trains carry crude oil or liquefied petroleum gases in a continuous block of 20 or more tank cars or 35 or more tank cars dispersed throughout the train, according to Transport Canada.

Last November, the government restricted train speeds based on low temperatures instead of setting restrictions based on a winter date range.

The November order also took into account the differences in temperature and temperature fluctuations that various regions of the country can experience during the winter season, which runs from 15 November to 15 March.