Railroad Paid $325K So Far after Derailment

BRUCE SCHREINER,Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Paducah & Louisville Railway has paid out at least $325,000 to reimburse people evacuated from their homes because of a chemical fire from a derailed tanker car, seeking to compensate evacuees who incurred hefty expenses for motels, meals, lost wages and other costs of relocating for days.

Shelby Givins, 73, said Monday he waited more than two hours to have his name called at a reimbursement center set up by the railroad. It didn't take much longer to get a check. He and his wife received a total of $1,600 from the railroad.

"They were fair to me," he said. "No problem."

A spokeswoman for the railroad said it had issued 550 checks by late Monday morning to cover out-of-pocket expenses from the derailment and fire in southwest Lousville that forced hundreds of people from their homes for days.

The blaze broke out last Wednesday, two days after the P&L train derailed near a main corridor between Louisville and Fort Knox. People received little notice before they had to evacuate, including the entire town of West Point, and the evacuation order wasn't lifted until Sunday.

Emergency shelters were opened but many people stayed with family and friends or in motels while ousted from home.

Cindy Kutz, who lives close to the derailment, said she and her husband had received one round of checks from the railroad totaling $800. And she had more receipts for nearly $500 in out-of-pocket expenses for which she was seeking reimbursement Monday.

Kutz said she didn't change clothes for days after being abruptly forced from her home.

"I'd rather have been home all this time," she said.

Kutz also said she thought the railroad had been fair with evacuees.

She had already dropped her husband off at their home to start cleaning the mess caused by their pit bull. The family pet tore up stuffed animals, rummaged through a food cabinet and left messes throughout the house.

"My house is a disaster," she said. "I wish they'd pay for that."

Besides reimbursing people for documented expenses, the railroad made "inconvenience" payments amounting to $100 per adult for each day they were

evacuated and $50 daily for each child.

A railroad executive said he expected the reimbursement total would eventually go up "quite a bit."

"We really do want to reimburse the people for any inconveniences they had. And I think we're getting there," said P&L Chairman and CEO Tony Reck said Monday.

The evacuation zone that covered a 1.2-mile radius around the fire was lifted Sunday after crews moved and stabilized two rail tank cars containing hydrogen fluoride, a corrosive chemical that can cause severe respiratory damage. Those two tankers had been the most worrisome for authorities because they were situated a few feet from the fire in another tanker that contained butadiene.

The fire burned out on its own Sunday morning. The fire erupted when workers were using a torch to try to separate derailed train cars.

Authorities said Monday that six chemical tank cars that were part of the derailed train still needed to be emptied of their contents, including the two cars carrying hydrogen fluoride and two containing butadiene.

Butadiene, a chemical commonly found in rubber used to make tires, can damage the central nervous and reproductive systems.

Doug Hamilton, executive director of the Louisville Metro Emergency Management Agency, said those cars were stabilized and secure.

Work to transfer the chemicals out of the stricken cars is still days away, because local authorities had not yet received the 72-hour notice they are expecting to receive before the work is done, Hamilton said.

Officials estimated it would take about eight hours to transfer the contents from each chemical tanker, Reck said.

"We want to make sure we're very cautious and we're not going to be in a rush to get that done," he said.

Reck did not offer an early estimate of the total cost to the regional railroad due to the derailment and fire.

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