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up. Above, two local players, the Rev. Philip Heslin, left, of the Superior Diocese and the Rev. Bill Fournier, parish priest at St. Lawrence Catholic Church in Duluth.

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Hauling toxic material is a risky business

By Pamela Rust

The transport of hazardous materials is heavily regulated, with the federal government rating each type of hazardous material and setting handling rules. But up to 1,000 pounds of certain hazardous materials can be transported without even a sign indicating they are on board.

In fact, the public has little protection from accidental discharges of hazardous materials. Even with emergency response teams in place, communities are at risk of exposure to hazardous chemicals or explosives. In most cases, emergency response teams likely don't know when the materials are being transported through their jurisdictions.

Sgt. Dan Slick of the Wisconsin State Patrol, is a "blue canary," a descriptive term for law enforcement and other first responders in potentially hazardous accident situations.

Enforcing safety regulations for more than 15 years, Slick has been trained to approach from upwind, just in case something is leaking. "It would be nice to know if hazardous chemicals were on board," he said.

A three-inch thick Federal Motor Carrier Regulations handbook dictates how hazardous materials must be identified with a visible placard or sign in the shape of a colored diamond symbol and number identifying the type of chemical. Shipping papers for non-placarded vehi-



File photo

That truck you share the road with may be hauling up to 1,000 pounds of hazardous material with no visible warning placard.

cles must be within the driver's reach if he's in the vehicle, in the door pocket or on the seat. But that may not be much help to first responders in accident situations, Slick said.

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Payday lenders: new kid on the block

Hauling hazardous materials is a risky business

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Slick said the 1,000 pound requirement specifically relates to non-bulk packages. A bulk package, such as a cargo tank, requires a placard. But 800 pounds of petroleum in one-gallon containers, for instance, would not.

Slick said there are two types of hazardous materials:

- Table 1, including explosives such as dynamite, grenades, and tear gas cartridges; poison gas and certain radioactive materials always require placards.

- Table 2, including blasting caps, fireworks and "other extremely insensitive materials." The regulations for placarding these items vary.

Slick said all state patrol officers receive hours of hazardous material awareness and recognition training. He's seen a number of minor hazardous materials violations during random weight station inspections. The most memorable was an incident where a vehicle marked as containing hazardous materials instead contained a cargo of cucumbers. He made them scrape off the hazardous materials symbol.

Keith Kesler, emergency management coordinator for the city of Superior and Douglas County, also has been in the trenches. When a Burlington Northern train derailed on a trestle in rural Douglas County and a tanker car fell into the Nemadji River 100-feet below on June 30, 1992, he led the canary team to check the ruptured tanker and read the diamond and numbers to see what it contained.

Wearing contained breathing gear and with taped-up

sleeves, the Brule fire chief and team of firefighters approached the already emptied tanker car. Kesler said benzene was in the river and was vaporizing in a hanging cloud. Some people later claimed illness from the exposure. "I didn't feel sick or notice anything different than if I hadn't smelled it," Kesler said.

At that time there was no hazardous materials response team in place. The incident spurred creation of the region's first hazardous materials response team, now part of the Douglas County Fire Department. The team has trained other departments in Brule, Ashland, Hayward and Webster.

Kesler said consumer packaging is considered safe for most hazardous materials. He said industries are required to report the quantities of certain chemicals they are storing to state, local emergency planning and local fire departments each year.

But once a hazardous material is in transit, that tracking system breaks down. "It is not reportable, even though responsibility has shifted to the Department of Transportation," Kesler said. "If 'Tri-ethyl-methyl-death' went through town," by rail or truck, those local authorities aren't notified, he said.

Would another Burlington Northern derailment be handled differently? Not much, Kesler said. The emergency response team would be sent in and evacuate nearby residential areas, as they did in 1992, he said.

Halvor Lines of Superior, the region's largest truck car-

rier, only transports Table 2 hazardous materials, said Terry Osvold, safety and compliance director.

"That's because of costly insurance and security risk factors," he said. Osvold said he's not aware of any local carriers transporting explosives.

The firm hauls flammable solids such as matches, and flammable liquids in non-compressed tanks, only in non-bulk form, such as barrels, pails, or cans.

"Placarding depends on the material and how it's packaged," he said. For example, 900 pounds of liquid or powder drain cleaner, or oil-based paint packaged for consumer use would not be placarded.

Less than 5 percent (roughly \$1.8 million) of Halvor Lines' annual revenue is generated from hauling hazardous materials, Osvold said. "We've never had a problem and have passed all Department of Transportation inspections," he said.

Osvold compares the carrier's hauling situations to a driver carrying a camp stove with a can of propane, or a boat with gas in its engine. "Where is the most danger?" he asked. "An experienced truck driver or a recreational driver? "Safety is No. 1 with our company," he said.

Since Sept. 11 last year, they are on especially high security alert. All Halvor Lines drivers with hazardous materials are certified for those cargoes, and each shipment receives individual attention to ensure it is hauled in compliance with regulations, he said.