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# State Fire Marshal

2025 AskRail Legislative Report

April 1, 2025

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# Introduction and background

Minnesota Statute [299A](#) requires the commissioner of public safety, through the Minnesota Fusion Center, to receive and disseminate emergency response information as provided through the AskRail application or other wireless communication devices.

All rail carriers subject to Minnesota Statute 299A and Minnesota Statute [115E.042](#) must provide information on the transportation of oil or other hazardous substances in a digital format through a wireless communication device application by July 1, 2024.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety's State Fire Marshal (SFM) and Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) divisions were tasked with collaborating with interested emergency management organizations and fire chiefs to encourage the adoption of the AskRail application, or other wireless communication device applications, to enhance statewide emergency response capabilities.

Additionally, Minnesota Statute 299A requires the commissioner of public safety to submit a report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over transportation and public safety policy and finance regarding the effectiveness of efforts to adopt the AskRail application or other wireless communication device applications.

This report details the efforts taken to encourage the adoption of the AskRail application and summarizes the effectiveness of those efforts. It also provides recommendations to maximize the effectiveness of the AskRail app among users throughout Minnesota.

## Overview of the AskRail application (app)

The AskRail app, launched in 2014, is a collaborative effort among the emergency response community and multiple North American rail carriers. The app provides first responders with immediate access to accurate, timely information on the types and quantities of hazardous materials being transported by rail in their respective jurisdictions, supporting informed decision-making during emergency response to rail emergencies. Users can look up specific train and railcar information, including:

- Dangerous goods being transported.
- The position of railcars.
- Emergency contact information.
- The nature of hazards, such as flammability or toxicity.
- Details on railcar identification and routing.

## Key features of the AskRail app

- Real-time data access: Provides up-to-date information about hazardous materials in transit.
- Emergency information: Provides emergency response protocols specific to the hazardous materials in transit, which helps aid first responders.
- Search capabilities: Users can search by train number, car ID or location to quickly retrieve relevant data.
- Security and privacy: Access to the app is restricted to authorized personnel, ensuring data integrity and security.

## Efforts to encourage the adoption of the AskRail app

Over the past 12 months, the following steps have been taken to encourage the adoption of the AskRail app throughout the state of Minnesota:

1. Coordination to ensure utilization by state agencies responsible for response to rail emergencies.
2. Marketing and advocacy during statewide training, exercises and other public safety forums.
3. Marketing and advocacy via various forms of media.
4. Coordination with rail carriers throughout the state to verify adherence to 299A.55 Subd. 5 (c), which requires all rail carriers to provide information on the transportation of oil or other hazardous substances in a digital format through a wireless communication device application.

## Successes and indicators of effectiveness

1. Multiple state agencies responsible for response to rail emergencies are using the AskRail app, including:
  - Minnesota Department of Public Safety's State Fire Marshal division (both division staff and the Minnesota Hazardous Materials Response Teams coordinated by the division)
  - Minnesota Department of Public Safety's Homeland Security and Emergency Management division
  - Minnesota Department of Public Safety's Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, Minnesota Duty Officer Program
  - Minnesota Department of Transportation
  - Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
  - Minnesota State Patrol
2. Over the past 12 months, the AskRail app has been marketed and advocated for at multiple trainings, exercises and other public safety forums throughout the state, including:
  - Over 30 State Emergency Response Teams meetings.
  - Four multi-agency collaboration meetings comprised of state agencies, local public safety personnel and federal partners.
  - Over 20 hazardous materials training sessions delivered to local fire departments.
  - Over 20 hazardous materials exercises.
  - Six public safety and/or emergency management related conferences.

3. Over the past 12 months, SFM provided information about the AskRail via GovDelivery alerts, info sheets for county fire chief association meetings and website posts.
4. There are five rail carriers operating rail lines within the state of Minnesota (see Figure 1 below). All five carriers are using the AskRail app to provide information on the transportation of oil or other hazardous substances to app users.

<b>BNSF Railway</b>	<b>1,490</b>
<b>Canadian National (CN)</b>	<b>377</b>
<b>Canadian Pacific Kansas City Southern (CPKC)</b>	<b>1,132</b>
<b>Union Pacific (UP)</b>	<b>418</b>
<b>Rapid City, Pierre &amp; Eastern Railroad (RCPE)</b>	<b>43</b>

Figure 1: Minnesota rail carriers with total rail miles in Minnesota for each carrier

## Recommendations

To maximize the effectiveness of the AskRail app among users throughout Minnesota, the following recommendations are proposed:

### Survey local fire departments to better determine app usage

There are over 700 fire departments in Minnesota, however the exact number of departments utilizing the AskRail app is not currently known. Developing and disseminating a survey to departments across the state could be useful in better determining the volume of emergency response agencies statewide who are using the app, as well whether additional efforts to promote the app are needed. Steps would need to be taken to ensure a high response rate to capture actionable data. Steps include:

- Providing ongoing calculations of the survey response rate.
- Ensuring the survey is short and concise to decrease the risk of abandonment.
- Ensuring mobile optimization.
- Maximizing timing and frequency.
- Working with external stakeholders to target the appropriate respondents.

### Continue to expand awareness through local training delivery

- Increase the number of hazmat training sessions provided to emergency responders in Minnesota's urban and rural areas.
- Continue to utilize this venue to ensure that first responders across the state are familiar with the application.

## Improve data accessibility in remote areas

- Enhance support for users in rural areas by working with local responders and cellular providers to ensure stable data connections in areas with less robust coverage.

## Encourage widespread adoption across all public safety agencies

- In addition to fire departments and local emergency management organizations, other first response entities, such as law enforcement and emergency medical services should be encouraged to ensure their personnel have access to AskRail.

## Conclusion

The AskRail application has become a critical tool for enhancing safety and improving emergency response capabilities related to rail transportation emergencies in Minnesota. Multiple steps have been taken to encourage the adoption of the AskRail app throughout the state, and there are multiple indicators these steps have been effective in facilitating adoption of the app. Currently, all five rail carriers operating in Minnesota are utilizing the AskRail app to provide information on the transportation of oil or other hazardous substances to app users. Lastly, additional steps can be taken to continue to facilitate awareness and use of the app, and maximize its effectiveness among users.

