

1.2km train derailed

Alert over toxic spill

By BRAD LAWSON

A FREIGHT train carrying hazardous materials derailed yesterday, spilling chemicals on to a track and causing nearby homes to be evacuated.

The main rail link to Melbourne was still blocked last night after six wagons on the 1.2km-long Melbourne-bound express came off the rails near a level-crossing at Station St, in Douglas Park near Picton, about 4.50am.

Because of concern about the spread of a potentially fatal cloud of sodium cyanide gas an area within 250m of the site was evacuated and an air exclusion zone 610m above the site and 3.2km around was enacted.

The Melbourne and Canberra XPT Country Link services were stopped and buses used to transport stranded railway passengers between Picton and Campbelltown.

Inspector Ian Krimmer, of the NSW Fire Brigade, said a full-scale emergency zone was created because the train carried hazardous materials.

Several containers burst open spilling thousands of empty cans, fine gravel and rolls of paper on to the track, together with 40 tonnes of a white powder that immediately raised alarm.

"Initially we became aware that the train was carrying a substance known as sodium cyanide," said Mr Krimmer.

"On arrival, the fire brigade noted white powder be-



Rail chaos ... carriages from the Melbourne-bound train at Douglas Park, near Picton, yesterday.

Picture: PETER BARNES

side the track. For the safety of the community we assumed the worst case scenario and we worked on the basis that we were dealing with sodium cyanide."

Spillage of sodium cyanide and subsequent contact with moisture could cause a potentially fatal gas cloud.

"For that reason we evacuated a 250m radius," Mr Krimmer said.

It was later found that the sodium cyanide was in wagons that did not derail and the white powder was a herbicide.

"Several of the containers that spilled had split open and had revealed a number

of unknown chemicals and substances," said Mr Krimmer.

"We were aware there were other hazardous materials on board the train."

Bruce Greening, from track owner Rail Access, said the cause of the derailment was still to be investigated.

He said the length of time it would take for the line to be reopened depended on the extent of damage to the track but rail workers had not yet had access to it because of the spilled chemicals.

Former railway worker Tom Summers was in his

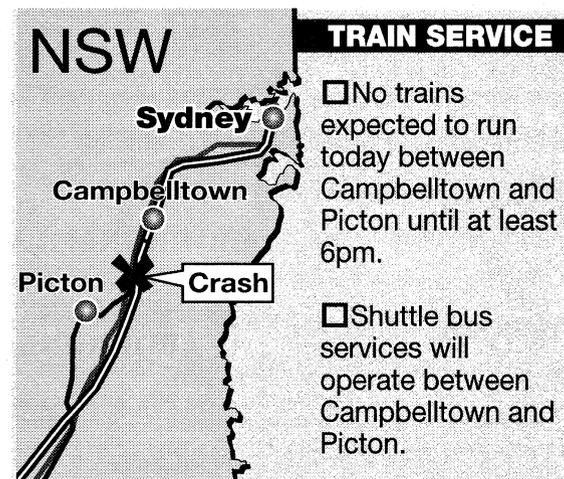
home next to the level crossing when the crash occurred.

"I thought the train had hit a car, it was a terrible noise," he said.

"It sounded like an explosion. Mum thought it was going through the house."

Don Smythe, who lives on the other side of the line, said he was woken by "a lot of noise" which continued on and he knew it was coming from a train.

Adrian Faber, who lived four doors down from where the derailment occurred, said there was an explosion when carriages slammed up against the cutting and fragments of metal littered the front yards of nearby homes.



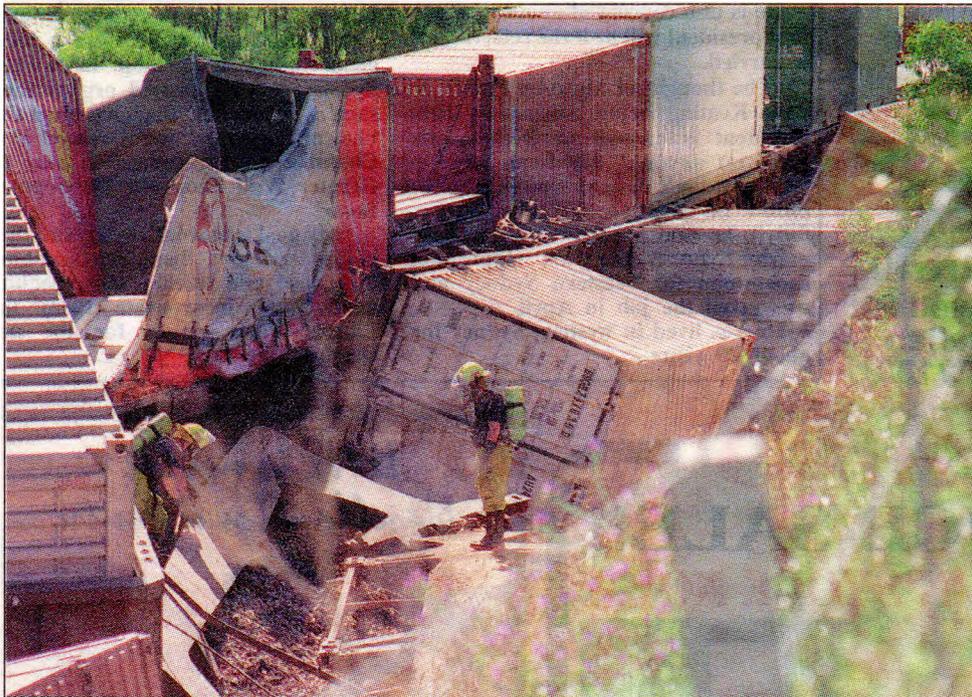
TRAIN SERVICE

No trains expected to run today between Campbelltown and Picton until at least 6pm.

Shuttle bus services will operate between Campbelltown and Picton.



Cyanide fear fills air



■ ABOVE: FIRE crew inspect the damage with breathing apparatus after the spilled substance was thought to be the hazardous substance sodium cyanide. Top: The confusing scene that greeted brigade members.

Photos: ROBERT GRUJICIC

By BELINDA WEBER

A FULL inquiry is under way to establish the cause of a cargo train's derailment at Douglas Park on Thursday.

Rail Access Corporation and the National Rail Corporation are jointly investigating the early morning incident, which caused concern among emergency workers and evacuated residents.

Six carriages of the 1.2km long train derailed just metres past the Douglas Park railway station, causing the contents of several wagons to spill onto the track and beyond.

It was first thought that the white powdery substance was the hazardous material sodium cyanide, which was being carried on the train at the time.

Emergency workers were unable to get within 100 metres of the area and about five nearby homes were evacuated.

A NSW Fire Brigades officer said it took several hours to identify what the spill was, as

■ Continued Page 16

Inquiry on derailment

■ From Page 1

the carriages had fallen in such a way that it was impossible to check what was in what carriage.

The spilled substance was urea, used in the manufacture of fertiliser, and there was no danger to the public.

Rail services between Campbelltown and Picton were suspended until Friday evening when one of the tracks was cleared.

Rail Access Corporation's corporate relations manager, Simon Foster, said he was unsure when the cause will be determined but a report will be presented to the Department of Transport.

"It's up to them to consider the report and decide what sort of actions, if any, should be taken," he said.

"The cost of the damage is also still being assessed," Mr Foster told

the Advertiser.

Residents praised the local fire crews, police and emergency rescue officers for their prompt clean up of the materials, said the member for the Southern Highlands, Peta Seaton.

They were entitled to know why the accident occurred, she said.

Ms Seaton said she was concerned about the state of the tracks on the main southern line.

"Following a derailment at Mittagong in July, I called for a safety audit of the rail line but the Government took no action," she said.

"Surely after this more serious incident at Douglas Park, it will recognise the real need for urgent action."

Mr Foster said computerised track monitoring was carried out about six weeks ago in the area.