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WORLD

Spain subway crash: Dozens dead

Monday, July 3, 2006; Posted: 1:41 p.m. EDT (17:41 GMT)

VALENCIA, Spain (CNN) -- More than 30 people were killed when a subway train derailed in Valencia, Spain, in what officials said appeared to be an accident.

"The number (killed) will exceed 30," said Vicente Rambla, representative of the Regional Government of Valencia. He said the dead were being identified and would be removed shortly from the tunnel and taken to the Institute of Medicine.

The cause seems to be an accident, Mayor Rita Barbara Nolla told reporters.

Luis Felipe Martinez, subdelegate of the government, said a combination of excessive speed and a broken wheel appeared to be at fault. "One of the wheels broke, which is what caused the derailment," he said.

CNN+ reported the death toll at 36. The newspaper El Pais said "at least 34" were dead.

The government of Valencia, a city of 800,000 people about 350 kilometers (220 miles) southeast of Madrid, said 32 people were hurt, two of them critically, five seriously, five moderately and 20 lightly.

All of the injured were evacuated within half an hour of the accident, which officials learned about at 1:03 p.m. (1103 GMT), when a passenger called using a cell phone, the government said in a written statement.

The train was traveling along the Number 1 line when it derailed in the subway tunnel along a curve in the track -- called a precaution zone -- as it was traveling from Plaza de Espana to Jesus Station, officials said.

Journalist Enrique Pallas, speaking from the scene, said that "90 percent" of the dead and injured had been inside the train.

A 21-year-old student, Cesar Hernandez, said the train was traveling faster than usual and shook violently before it braked suddenly and derailed.



An injured passenger is taken away on a stretcher after the train derailed.

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Hernandez kicked the glass out of a door and walked down the tunnel.

"There wasn't much light and I couldn't see much of what was on the tracks. I saw people on the ground, but I just ran," Hernandez told newspaper El Mundo, adding that he had turned down emergency service offers of trauma counselling.

"I didn't want psychological help or anything. I just wanted to see my Dad," he said, according to Reuters.

In all, 150 people were evacuated from the tunnel. Police sealed off streets near the station to keep crowds away as emergency team wheeled injured people into ambulances.

Pope to visit

The president of the government of Valencia called for three days of mourning and Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero said he will possibly cut short an official visit to India.

"I would like to express my profound condolences to the victims' families and the entire nation," Zapatero said later at a news conference in India, according to The Associated Press.

"I want to send a message to the whole city of Valencia," he added, saying that "you are going to overcome this tough moment." He said he was in contact with regional authorities in Valencia.

The crash happened as hundreds of thousands of people began traveling to the Mediterranean port city for this week's World Meeting of the Families, which will be attended by Pope Benedict XVI on Saturday and Sunday.

The pope was praying for victims, the Vatican said, AP reported. He was informed immediately and "has followed with pain ... the dramatic reports" from the city, the Vatican said.

Recent mass transit accidents in Spain include one in Madrid in January 2005 in which about 20 people were slightly injured when a train with passengers bumped into an empty one at Madrid's Atocha station.

A more serious accident occurred in June 2003 when 19 people were killed and 48 injured in a head-on crash in central Spain. The crash, in which a passenger train collided with a freight train, occurred outside the station in the town of Chinchilla.

Bombs placed on commuter trains in Madrid by Islamic radicals killed 191 people in March 2004.

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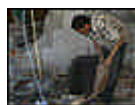
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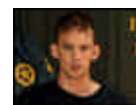


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