

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Washington, D.C. Railroad Accident Brief Report

ATL 97 FR 005
REAR-END COLLISION
UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY
ODEM, TEXAS
FEBRUARY 21, 1997

On February 21, 1997, about 2:08 a.m., central standard time, Union Pacific Railroad (UP) northbound freight train 1HGHEM 20 (train EM-20) collided with the rear car of UP northbound freight train BVFW-20 (train BVFW). The rear-end collision occurred on the UP's Brownsville Subdivision Main Line at milepost (MP) 152.54, near Odem, Texas.

The two rear cars of train BVFW were derailed and the lead locomotive of the striking train was damaged. At the time of the collision, it was reported to be foggy with an ambient temperature of 54° F. Total damages were estimated at \$31,000.

Postaccident investigation revealed that the crew of the standing train received an incorrect computerized car count at Kingsville, Texas. When the train arrived at Kingsville, the inbound crew informed the clerk at UP's National Customer Service Center (NCSC) that the train consisted of 136 cars. The clerk at the NCSC improperly entered in the computer that train had only 64 cars. As a result in the outbound crew received an incorrect computer-generated car count.

The crew departed Kingsville and arrived in Odem, Texas. Upon arrival, the train dispatcher informed the crew that they had cars to set out. The train dispatcher had information that the train was carrying 136 cars. The train crew advised the train dispatcher that they had 64 cars in their train and that they were all through cars. For an undetermined reason, neither the crew nor the train dispatcher questioned this discrepancy. The train dispatcher then instructed the crew to pick up 30 cars destined for Fort Worth, Texas.

The crew uncoupled the locomotives and the first 5 cars from the train and proceeded onto the yard track that had the 30 cars. This uncoupling left the rear portion of their train approximately 2,100 feet south of the yard limit sign, which was located at MP 153. At 1:28 a.m., the crew, thinking that they had 64 cars, reported to the train dispatcher that their train was clear of the yard limits at MP 153. After the crew of train BVFW reported their train clear of the main track, the train dispatcher issued train EM-20 permission to proceed to MP 153.0.

Train EM-20 was operating at 45 mph on approach to the yard limits in Odem, Texas. The engineer made an initial brake pipe reduction with the train brakes in preparation for entering the yard limits. As the train proceeded, the crew observed the marker light flashing on the rear car of train BVFW. The engineer placed the train into emergency braking 1,046 feet from the rear end of the stopped train. The crew of train EM-20 jumped from their train at approximately 20-25 mph. Both crewmembers of the train received non-life threatening injuries. The crew of the standing train BVFW was not injured.

PROBABLE CAUSE

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of this accident was that the crew of train BVFW-20 were inattentive to their duties and failed to ascertain that the rear of their train was not clear of the yard limits in Odem, Texas. Contributing to the accident was the incorrect consist information supplied by the clerk.

Adopted: April 23, 1998