

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: June 29, 1981

Forwarded to:
Mayor Larry Hooper
City of Kenner, Louisiana
1801 Williams Boulevard
Kenner, Louisiana 70062

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-81-31

At approximately 6:58 p.m., c.s.t., on November 25, 1980, a southbound tractor/cargo-tank semitrailer loaded with 8,600 gallons of gasoline approached a railroad/highway grade crossing on Williams Boulevard in Kenner, Louisiana. The vehicle was driven around the automatic grade crossing warning gates which were down and was struck by an eastbound Illinois Central Gulf Railroad freight train. The freight train's lights were illuminated, its whistle was sounding, and its bell was ringing. The overturning semitrailer struck a northbound automobile stopped at the crossing. Gasoline flowing from the ruptured cargo tank ignited. The burning gasoline destroyed the automobile, a building, the semitrailer, and damaged 19 other automobiles. The train locomotive was derailed and was damaged by fire. Seven persons were killed and six others were injured in the accident. 1/

Accident history records provided by the Kenner Police Department indicate that there have been two previous accidents at this crossing since 1976. In both instances, the drivers drove around properly actuated warning gates. During their investigation of this accident, Safety Board investigators observed two vehicles drive around the crossing gates and cross the track in front of trains.

At the time of this accident, the truckdriver observed two vehicles bypass the crossing gates before he did the same thing. Citizens at the accident scene gave verbal reports of extensive gate violations. Such unsafe actions indicate disregard for Sections 171-A-(1), (2), (3), and (4) and 171-B of the Motor Vehicle and Traffic Regulation, Title 32, of the 1950 Louisiana Revised Statutes as amended. Some citizens felt that this disregard was caused by the frequent long delays, anywhere from 15 minutes to 45 minutes, encountered at the crossing when the roadway was blocked by switching freight trains.

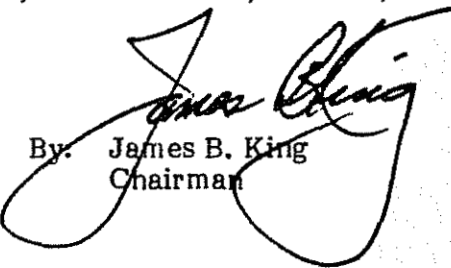
1/ For more detailed information read Railroad/Highway Accident Report--"Illinois Central Gulf Railroad Freight Train/Mobil Oil Company Tractor Cargo-Tank Semitrailer Collision and Fire, Kenner, Louisiana, November 25, 1981" (NTSB-RHR-81-1).

Kenner City Ordinance No. 13 1/2-3 prohibits a railroad train from blocking a crossing in excess of 10 minutes. If motorists could depend on the crossing being blocked no longer than this period of time and expect enforcement action to be taken against them if they drove around the warning gate devices and crossed the tracks in front of a train, they would be encouraged to honor the regulations at the crossing and avoid accidents.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the City of Kenner, Louisiana:

Institute an aggressive program to enforce Section 171-A-(1), (2), (3), (4) and Section 171-B of the Motor Vehicles and Traffic Regulations, Title 32 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950 as amended, which prohibit vehicles from driving around a lowered railroad crossing gate at a railroad/highway grade crossing, and Kenner City Ordinance No. 13 1/2-3 which prohibits a railroad train from blocking a crossing in excess of 10 minutes. (Class I, Urgent Action) (H-81-31)

KING, Chairman, and GOLDMAN and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in this recommendation. DRIVER, Vice Chairman, and McADAMS, Member, did not participate.


By. James B. King
Chairman