

R-36f

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: June 29, 1981

Forwarded to:

Honorable David C. Treen
Governor of Louisiana
P.O. Box 44004
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Mr. William J. Taylor
President and Chief Executive Officer
Illinois Central Gulf Railroad
233 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60601

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-81-76

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/

As part of the State of Louisiana railroad-highway grade crossing program, an onsite inspection of the Williams Boulevard crossing was conducted on April 24, 1979, by officials of the ICG and the State of Louisiana. The recommendations resulting from the inspection were: (1) replace the existing automatic gates with longer gates; (2) install new, 54-foot-long, rubber pad grade crossings on the track centerline; (3) change the wiring under the crossing and update the circuitry to include motion sensors; and (4) relocate the flashing light signal and gate in the northwest corner if the old siding track is removed. The State of Louisiana was waiting for engineering plans and estimates from the ICG before scheduling this crossing for the recommended improvements.

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).

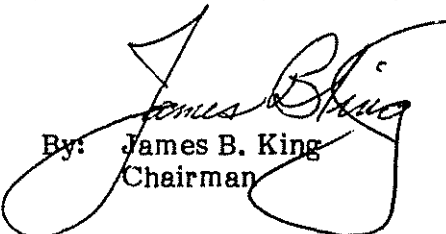
A longer gate arm extending further across the traveled portion of the roadway requires a much more definitive movement by a vehicle to bypass the barrier. The greater effort required to drive around a barrier ordinarily requires a greater decisionmaking process to provide the extra motivation. This may permit a more thorough evaluation of the circumstances and cause more motorists to accept the safer alternative of waiting for the train.

The changing of the wiring and updating the circuitry to include motion sensors appears to be compatible to the recommendations of both the Association of American Railroads 2/ and the Federal Highway Administration 3/ guidelines for installation of special devices or circuits to provide reasonably uniform notice in advance of all train movements over a crossing so that uniform warnings are given regardless of train speeds. This could upgrade the credibility of the crossing warning devices with motorists who in the past have complained of signals operating over a long period of time while switching is being accomplished in the area.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the State of Louisiana and the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad:

Expedite implementation of recommendations made in 1979 by the evaluation program of the State of Louisiana and the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad for upgrading the Williams Boulevard and Illinois Central Gulf Railroad grade crossing. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-81-76)

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

2/ "Recommended Practices for Railroad-Highway Grade Crossing Warning Systems," Bulletin No. 7, published by the Communication and Signal Section, Association of American Railroads, 1974.

3/ FHWA Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, Part VIII 8C-5, dated April 1, 1978.