

# NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: August 11, 1981

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Forwarded to:

Mr. J. W. Gessner  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Missouri Pacific Railroad Company  
Missouri Pacific Building  
St. Louis, Missouri 63103

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-81-83

On May 17, 1978, a northbound Missouri Pacific freight train struck the rear of a standing St. Louis Southwestern freight train near Gorham, Illinois, on a section of Missouri Pacific track over which the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company has operating rights. The engineer and head brakeman on the striking train saw the impending collision and abandoned their train. They were unable to warn the occupants of the caboose on the struck train since the radios were not on the same operating frequency. The conductor inside the caboose was killed as a result of the collision, and five employees on the two trains were injured. The total damage was estimated at \$484,000.

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In another accident on February 1, 1981, a southbound Kansas City Southern train collided with a northbound Missouri Pacific extra train at New Roads, Louisiana (MP-KCS 763.5). This portion of the track is owned by the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company and dispatched by The Kansas City Southern Railway Company. The collision occurred 5 minutes after a meet order had expired and 3 minutes after the Kansas City Southern train had left the designated meet point. The accident resulted in damages totaling \$555,000. Neither train could communicate with the other because of different radio operating frequencies. If both trains had radios on the same frequency, it is likely that they would have attempted to contact each other before the established meet time, thus improving the chances for avoiding the collision. In addition, there had been radio communication between the Kansas City Southern dispatcher and the Missouri Pacific traincrew concerning the meet order. If this conversation could have been monitored by the Kansas City Southern traincrew, the trains probably would not have collided.

Radio contact from one train to another to establish meeting points is not allowed under standard industrywide operating rules; however, a radio may be used to convey train location and other data from train to train. The National Transportation Safety Board is concerned that although these trains had operating radios they were unable to communicate because of incompatible operating frequencies. The inability to communicate increases the probability that accidents similar to those described above will continue to occur.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company:

In conjunction with The Kansas City Southern Railway Company and the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company, require both ends of all trains while operating on Missouri Pacific trackage to be equipped with radios operable on a common frequency. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-81-83)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

*For*   
By: James B. King  
Chairman