

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: November 29, 1984

Forwarded to:

Mr. P. R. O'Connor  
Illinois Commerce Commission  
106 North La Salle Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60601

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-84-44

About 9:48 a.m., c.d.t., on July 28, 1983, Amtrak train No. 301, operating on the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad (ICG), collided with a Marquette Motor Service Terminals, Inc., delivery truck at the New River Road railroad/highway grade crossing about 1 mile north of Wilmington, Illinois. The locomotive unit and all three cars of the train were derailed, and the truck and its lading were destroyed. Two train crewmembers, the truckdriver, and 18 train passengers were injured. Total damage was estimated to be \$584,000. 1/

On November 16, 1977, as a result of its investigation of an accident in Des Moines, Iowa, on July 1, 1976, 2/ the Safety Board made recommendations (H-77-25 through -30) to the National Safety Council, the Association of American Railroads, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Railroad Administration, and the International Association of Chiefs of Police, encouraging them to develop, implement, and evaluate a nationwide Operation Lifesaver program directed to reducing accidents at railroad/highway grade crossings. The program, which began in 1972 and initially caught on only in a few western States, now is supported by 43 States, many railroads, and numerous safety organizations. Since 1977, the fatality toll from accidents at crossings has dropped from nearly 1,200 to 600.

The State of Illinois, through the agency of the Illinois Commerce Commission, has been active in the "Operation Lifesaver" program, and the incidence of grade crossing accidents in the State has been reduced markedly in recent years. The number of incidents has been reduced from 606 in 1980 to 398 in 1983. In this program, the State has had the support of the railroads, Amtrak, and various organizations of public safety officials. The program has been supported by the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police and the Illinois State Police. Considerable work has been done to promote the program throughout Illinois. On June 7, 1979, the Illinois Commerce Commission's manager of the Operation Lifesaver program made a presentation covering the program to the Police Chiefs Association of Will County, Illinois, where the accident occurred.

1/ For more detailed information, read Railroad/Highway Accident Report--"Collision of Amtrak Passenger Train No. 301 on Illinois Central Gulf Railroad with Marquette Motor Service Terminals, Inc., Delivery Truck, Wilmington, Illinois, July 28, 1983" (NTSB/RHR-84/02).

2/ Railroad/Highway Accident Report--"Collision of a Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company Freight Train with an Automobile, Des Moines, Iowa, July 1, 1976" (NTSB-RHR-77-2).

The ICG has a "near-miss" program which train crewmembers are encouraged to report narrowly averted collisions at grade crossings. Such reports are said to be channeled to supervisory officers and the railroad's special police agents.

Will County is near the greater Chicago metropolitan area and is criss-crossed by numerous heavily traveled railroad lines as well as by a substantial highway system. ICG alone has three main lines that cut across the county. When questioned by Safety Board investigators, the sheriff of Will County and some of his key personnel stated that they had never heard of Operation Lifesaver or of the ICG's "near-miss" reporting program. However, the sheriff was familiar with a similar "near-miss" program promoted by the Joliet-based Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railroad. The police chief of Wilmington similarly stated that he was unaware of either the Operation Lifesaver or ICG programs. A spokesman for Marquette Motor Service Terminals, Inc., said that the company was not aware of Operation Lifesaver or the ICG's "near-miss" program.

One of the primary ways that Operation Lifesaver has been effective has been in making all parties--drivers, railroads, and law enforcement personnel--aware of the risks at crossings and how to reduce the risks. It is surprising that neither the trucking company, the sheriff of Will County, nor the police chief of Wilmington was aware of Operation Lifesaver or the ICG's "near-miss" program. Truckdrivers and law enforcement personnel are essential ingredients in a successful Operation Lifesaver program. The Operation Lifesaver program manager in Illinois and the ICG's key person in the program should contact appropriate county and municipal officials of areas through which the ICG operates, including the sheriff of Will County and the police chief of Wilmington, and encourage them to participate in Operation Lifesaver.

Therefore, as a result of its investigation of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Illinois Commerce Commission:

In company with the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad (ICG), meet with and solicit participation in the Operation Lifesaver program from the sheriff of Will County, the police chief of Wilmington, and other county and municipal officials in areas through which the ICG operates. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-84-44)

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility ". . . to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations and would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and BURSLEY, Member, concurred in this recommendation.

By: Jim Burnett  
Chairman