

Log # R-671 I



## National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

### Safety Recommendation

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**Date:** August 28, 1997

**In Reply Refer To:** R-97-44

To the Baltimore County Emergency Management Agency,  
the Baltimore City Emergency Management Agency,  
the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments,  
the Jefferson County Commissioners, and  
the Berkeley County Commissioners  
(address list attached)

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About 5:39 p.m. on February 16, 1996, Maryland Rail Commuter (MARC) train 286 collided with National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) passenger train 29 near Silver Spring, Maryland. En route from Brunswick, Maryland, to Union Station in Washington, DC, MARC train 286 was traveling under CSX Transportation Inc. (CSXT) operation and control on CSXT tracks. MARC train 286 passed an APPROACH signal before making a station stop at Kensington, Maryland; proceeded as if the signal had been CLEAR; and, then, could not stop for the STOP signal at Georgetown Junction, where it collided with Amtrak train 29. All 3 CSXT operating crewmembers and 8 of the 20 passengers on MARC train 286 were killed in the derailment and subsequent fire. Eleven passengers on MARC train 286 and 15 of the 182 crewmembers and passengers on Amtrak train 29 were injured.<sup>1</sup>

The CSXT, as well as a local resident, contacted the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Services (MCFRS) 911 dispatcher about the collision at 5:41 p.m. Within 1 minute, the first fire engine company was notified, and it arrived on scene within 5 minutes of notification. All MCFRS commands had been established by 6:15 p.m. The National Transportation Safety Board concluded that even though the MCFRS personnel responded promptly to the emergency, they could do nothing to save any of the accident victims because passenger coach cab control car 7752 was already completely engulfed in flames when the first firefighter arrived on scene. The Safety Board investigation did identify problems with the MCFRS preparedness for railroad passenger train accidents; the CSXT, the Maryland Mass Transit Administration (MTA)/MARC, and the MCFRS contingency planning; and the interaction between these three agencies.

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<sup>1</sup>For more detailed information, read Railroad Accident Report--*Collision and Derailment of Maryland Rail Commuter MARC Train 286 and National Railroad Passenger Corporation Amtrak Train 29, near Silver Spring, Maryland, on February 16, 1996* (NTSB/RAR-97/02)

Confusion between the CSXT and the MCFRS at the accident site and untimely notifications between the CSXT and MARC of the collision resulted because neither the CSXT nor MARC had a formal emergency management plan available that contained procedures for dispatchers and traincrews to notify emergency responders of train movements near an accident site. When the train dispatcher authorized the engineer of CSXT train Q401 to move his locomotive closer to assist in evacuating passengers, the MCFRS incident commander was not advised that the train would be approaching the accident site. The movement of trains toward an accident area should have been addressed by the CSXT and MCFRS dispatchers. The implementation of an emergency management plan that addressed communications and training would have eliminated the confusion between the CSXT and MARC.

The CSXT traincrews of MARC passenger trains had minimal guidance, compared with Amtrak instructions for conductors and assistant conductors, to properly perform passenger train functions. Since the CSXT operation in 1985 of the MARC passenger service, the CSXT had not maintained a comprehensive passenger program that would provide guidance to traincrews for passenger train functions. The CSXT passenger traincrews reported that they had not received any emergency training in passenger train operations and in passenger responsibility in emergencies. The Safety Board concluded that the CSXT personnel operating MARC passenger trains are not adequately trained to understand and therefore execute their responsibilities for passengers in emergencies.

To achieve the protocols and procedures described in any emergency management plan, emergency drills should be performed in conjunction with local emergency management agencies and with the railroad to reinforce training, to test communications, and to determine whether procedural changes are needed. Therefore, the Safety Board believes that the emergency management agencies of Baltimore County, of the city of Baltimore, of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, and of Jefferson and Berkeley Counties in West Virginia, in cooperation with the CSXT and the MTA/MARC, should conduct periodic disaster drills to assess their emergency management plans, to reinforce and evaluate their emergency training, and to test the communications with the organizations.


Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Baltimore County Emergency Management Agency, the Baltimore City Emergency Management Agency, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the Jefferson County Commissioners, and the Berkeley County Commissioners:

Conduct, in cooperation with the CSX Transportation Inc. and the Maryland Mass Transit Administration/Maryland Rail Commuter, periodic disaster drills to assess their emergency management plans, to reinforce and evaluate their emergency training, and to test the communication with the organizations. (R-97-44)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations R-97-9 through -21 to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA); R-97-22 through -25 to the Federal Transit Administration; R-97-26 through -31 to the CSXT; R-97-32 through -35 to the MTA; R-97-36 to the U.S. Department of Transportation; R-97-37 to the Federal Emergency Management Agency; R-97-38 to the Governor and the General Assembly of Maryland; R-97-39 through -42 to the Association of American Railroads; R-97-43 to the Montgomery County Emergency Management Agency; and R-97-45 to the American Short Line Railroad Association, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the United Transportation Union, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and the American Public Transit Association. The Safety Board also reiterated Safety Recommendations R-87-16, R-92-10, and R-93-12 to the FRA; R-92-16 to the General Electric Company; and R-92-17 to the Electro-Motive Division of General Motors.

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 action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation R-97-44 in your reply. If you need additional information, you may call (202) 314-6430.

Chairman HALL, Vice Chairman FRANCIS, and Members HAMMERSCHMIDT, GOGLIA, and BLACK concurred in this recommendation.

  
By: Jim Hall  
Chairman

Honorable C.A. Dutch Ruppberger  
County Executive  
Baltimore County  
Baltimore County Court House  
Towson, Maryland 21204

Honorable Kurt Schmoke  
Mayor  
City of Baltimore  
100 North Holiday Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Ms. Ruth R. Crone, Executive Director  
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments  
777 North Capitol Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002

Mr. James G. Knode, President  
Jefferson County Commissioners  
Post Office Box 250  
Charlestown, West Virginia 25414

Mr. James C. Smith, President  
Berkeley County Commissioners  
126 West King Street  
Martinsburg, West Virginia 25401