

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Railroad Accident Brief Report

ATL 97 FR 013
DERAILMENT
NORFOLK SOUTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY
GAINESVILLE, VIRGINIA
MAY 2, 1997

On May 2, 1997, about 2:45 p.m., eastern daylight time, Norfolk Southern (NS) westbound freight train No. NS214 derailed 3 locomotives and 7 cars while traversing the Gainesville Depot Track hand-operated switch in Gainesville, Virginia. The accident occurred on the Washington District of the NS Piedmont Division. No injuries were reported as a result of the accident, but one person in a building adjacent to the siding was seriously injured when the building was struck by a derailed auto rack. There was a release of hazardous materials as a result of one trailer on a flat car overturning. Approximately 2500 gallons of diesel fuel and 100 gallons of flammable liquid were spilled. There was no evacuation. Total estimated damages were \$650,000.

At the time of the accident, train 214 was westbound on a single main track in nonsignaled (dark) Track Warrant Control (TWC) territory. The track warrants are issued by the NS dispatcher located in Greenville, North Carolina. Train 214 consisted of 35 loads, 0 empties, 3970 tons, and was 5261 feet in length. Train 214 departed Manassas, Virginia at 2:15 p.m.

Within 2 hours before the arrival of train No. 214 at Gainesville there had been two other train movements over the Depot Track switch. NS train E43 had worked in Gainesville and had used the Depot Track. Postaccident investigation revealed that the main track switch had been left lined into the siding. The conductor and brakeman of E43 both stated that they had not returned the siding switch to its normal position for the main line when their train departed Gainesville. Carrier operating rules require that all main track switches be restored to normal position when crews report clear of the main line. The crew of train 213 failed to observe the banner indicating that the depot track switch was lined for the depot and proceeded through the misaligned switch, resulting in damage to the switch. About an hour later, train NS 214 derailed as it proceeded over the misaligned switch.

PROBABLE CAUSE

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of this accident was the failure of the crew of train E43 to restore the east end Gainesville switch to a normal position to permit main line movements of trains and the failure of eastbound train 213 to observe and report the improperly lined switch.

Adopted: August 18, 1998