

# NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

WASHINGTON, D.C.

## Railroad Accident Brief Report

CHI98FR011

COLLISION

CENTRAL KANSAS RAILWAY

GENESE0, KANSAS

JULY 16, 1998

On July 16, 1998, about 6:40 a.m. central daylight time, a Central Kansas Railway (CKR) Hutchinson North Switcher (HNS) train collided with a parked Hoisington Local (HL) train near Geneseo, Kansas. The HNS train was traveling about 8 miles per hour when the collision occurred. The HNS train consisted of 4 locomotive units and 128 freight cars. The HL train consisted of 6 locomotive units and 13 freight cars. At the time of the collision, the HL train was being refueled from a fuel truck. The weather was clear and sunny; the temperature was 91° F.

Seven cars on the HNS train derailed; five were destroyed. Six locomotive units from the HL train were damaged; three derailed and two of those derailed were destroyed. The fuel truck was overturned and destroyed, and it lost its contents. There were no injuries or fire. The cost of the derailment was \$824,028.

The HNS train departed Hutchinson, Kansas, for Geneseo about 2 a.m. with 97 cars. The engineer operated the train from the lead locomotive unit, and the conductor accompanied the train in his private vehicle, as prescribed by CKR operating practices. The train crewmembers had track warrant authority to operate their train from Hutchinson to Sterling Junction, Kansas. From Sterling Junction through Geneseo, the crewmembers were required to operate their train under "restricted speed"<sup>1</sup> operating rules. From Geneseo through the area where the collision took place, the crewmembers were again required to operate their train by track warrant authority.

The HNS train crewmembers were instructed to deliver their 97-car train to Geneseo and to pick up 30 freight cars on the pass track, as well as an additional 98 freight cars on the Union Pacific Railroad (UP) siding. The train crewmembers decided to make the switching movement by coupling the lead locomotive unit to the 30 cars parked on the pass track, and then shoving them forward and coupling them to the 98 cars parked on the UP siding (with 97 cars still in tow).

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<sup>1</sup> When a train is required to move at restricted speed, movement must be made at a speed that allows stopping within half the range of vision short of: a train, an engine, a railroad car, men or equipment fouling the track, or a derail or switch lined improperly. The crew must keep a lookout for broken rail and not exceed 20 mph.

After the crewmembers coupled the trains, the engineer stated that he was having a difficult time moving the 225-car train. The conductor instructed the engineer to uncouple the 97 cars from the rear of the train, so they could shove the 128-car train onto the main track and clear of the UP siding.

The engineer notified the conductor that he had uncoupled the cars as instructed. The conductor then instructed the engineer to shove the 128-car train forward. The engineer asked the conductor if he had a track warrant for the movement. The conductor replied that he did. The engineer stated that he started the shoving movement, assuming that the conductor was protecting the grade crossings and the lead car of the train. During the shoving movement, the conductor instructed the engineer to increase the train's speed because the train was approaching an ascending grade. No further radio communication was conducted. The engineer had shoved the cars about 3.5 miles when an undesired emergency brake application occurred. The train had collided with the parked HL train.

Postaccident investigation revealed that the parked HL train had a valid track warrant to occupy the main track at Geneseo and that the HNS train did not have either written track warrant authority or verbal authorization to enter the main track there. The investigation further found that it was common practice for the conductor to contact the train dispatcher via a CKR cellular telephone and then to communicate the track warrant authority to the engineer. According to CKR's Operating Rule 14.8, both the conductor and the engineer must have a copy of any track warrant issued to their train, and each crewmember must read and understand the track warrant.

CKR operating rules required the conductor to be positioned at a point from which he could see the developing situation well enough to provide protection for the shoving movement. The engineer shoved the 128-car train without knowing where the conductor was located. Also, the rules required the conductor to maintain radio contact and to continue to give the engineer movement instructions. The conductor did not communicate with the engineer after instructing him to increase speed.

OmniTRAX, the parent company of the CKR, required that every train crewmember be efficiency tested<sup>2</sup> on a monthly basis. Two managers were assigned to efficiency test about 30 operating train crewmembers each month over a 1,200-mile territory. The CKR General Director of Operations subsequently changed the frequency of the testing so that each manager only had to test eight train crewmembers each month. CKR records indicated that the engineer had not been efficiency tested since he began work as an engineer on September 29, 1997. The conductor had only been efficiency tested twice, on November 27, 1996, and January 2, 1997. The conductor had been employed in the CKR operating department since March 1995.

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<sup>2</sup> A periodic test and inspection conducted by a railroad to determine the extent of compliance by operating personnel with its code of operating rules, timetables, and timetable special instructions in accordance with a written program.

## **PROBABLE CAUSE**

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of this accident was that the Hutchinson North Switcher train crewmembers allowed their train to enter and proceed along the main track without first obtaining track warrant authority and the Central Kansas Railway management's lack of operational safety oversight.

**Adopted: December 1, 1998**