

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: August 21, 1978

Forwarded to:

Honorable John M. Sullivan
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
400 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-78-48

About 3:20 a.m., a.s.t., on December 1, 1977, a Louisville and Nashville Railroad switchman was killed when he fell from the deck of a moving flatcar and into its path. The switchman should have been gripping on the side of the flatcar with his feet on the sill step and his hand(s) on the handfold provided. The switch crew foreman, who was also on the deck of the flatcar, stated that they were riding on the flatcar because they were unable to maintain a stable footing on the sill step and unable to maintain a secure grip on the side handhold.

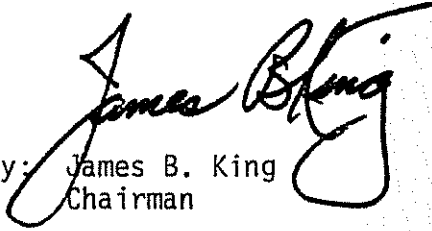
The purpose of safety appliances on the sides and ends of cars is to provide for the security of persons involved in switching operations; 49 CFR 231.6(c) requires that four side handholds and four sill steps be placed on each flatcar near the ends of the car, but it does not prescribe a vertical location for the side handhold. In many cases, there is insufficient clearance between the top of the sill step, on which the switchman stands, and the side handhold for a switchman to comfortably ride the side of a flatcar. For this reason, switchmen will normally opt to either select another type of car to ride during the switching operation or stand or sit on the deck of the flatcar.

The Board believes that a minimum distance between the top of the sill step and the side handhold should be established for flatcars. This minimum distance should be sufficient to allow a man to ride the side of a flatcar safely and securely.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Railroad Administration:

Amend 49 CFR 231.6 regarding the location of side handholds to more nearly conform with their placement on other types of cars so that a person may safely ride the side of a flatcar in the performance of his duties. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-78-48).

KING, Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and DRIVER, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.


By: James B. King
Chairman