

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: August 2, 1979

Forwarded to:

Honorable Gary D. Gayton  
Deputy Administrator  
Urban Mass Transportation Administration  
400 Seventh Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-79-54 and -55

About 6:06 p.m., on January 17, 1979, the fifth and sixth cars of the seven-car westbound train No. 117 of the Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) caught fire while moving through the tunnel under the San Francisco Bay between Oakland and San Francisco, California. Forty passengers and two BART employees were evacuated from the burning train through emergency doors into a gallery walkway located between the two single-track tunnels and then into a waiting train in the adjacent tunnel. One fireman died when the gallery suddenly filled with heavy black toxic smoke. Twenty-four firemen, 17 passengers, 3 emergency personnel, and 12 BART employees were treated for smoke inhalation. Property damage was estimated to be \$2,450,000. 1/

Investigation disclosed a poorly fastened undercar equipment cover fell from train No. 363 causing damage and fire to following train No. 117. The investigation also disclosed inadequate inspection procedures, vehicle materials with low flame resistance that produce toxic fumes when burning, and emergency procedures that did not properly coordinate the rescue and firefighting efforts of BART and the Oakland and San Francisco Fire Departments.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Urban Mass Transportation Administration:

Promulgate regulations establishing minimum fire safety standards for the design and construction of Rapid Transit Vehicles. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-79-54)

Establish overview of Bay Area Rapid Transit District procedures to ensure that the emergency deficiencies noted in this investigation received appropriate remedial action. (Class I, Urgent Action) (R-79-55)

1/ For more detailed information, read "Railroad Accident Report—Bay Area Rapid Transit District Fire on Train No. 11 and Evacuation of Passengers While in the Transbay Tube, San Francisco, California, January 17, 1979" (NTSB-RAR-79-5).

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, and McADAMS and GOLDMAN,  
Members, concurred in these recommendations.

By: *[Handwritten Signature]*  
James B. King  
Chairman  
*FOR*