

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: August 9, 1979

Forwarded to:

Mr. N.M. Lorentzen
President and Chief Executive
Officer
Burlington Northern, Inc.
BN Building
176 East 5th Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-79-57 and -58

About 5:50 p.m. on March 28, 1978, Amtrak train No. 8, The Empire Builder, operating on Burlington Northern track, derailed nine cars at Lohman, Montana. *Forty-eight persons were injured in the derailment and the property damage was estimated to be \$333,500.* ^{1/}

Train No. 8 was moving through a 1°34' curve just west of Lohman at approximately 75 mph. About 6,737 ft west of the east siding switch at Lohman, the right rear wheel on the trailing truck of the fourth car moved inward off its axle seat. This caused a decrease in the wheel-to-wheel gage, and it allowed the wheel to derail inside the south rail. It continued inside the south rail causing minor track damage until it struck the frog at the east switch. When the wheel struck the frog, a portion of the wheel broke out. Immediately following this, a general derailment occurred. The last four of the nine derailed cars overturned.

The two car inspectors who inspected train No. 8 at Havre, Montana, said they discovered that the car on which the cracked wheel was found—Amtrak baggage car No. 1248—arrived at Havre with the brakes cut out. They also noted that a number of the composition-type brakeshoes needed to be replaced. However, reportedly because they feared criticism or a reprimand if they delayed train No. 8 for repairs, they did not report to their supervisor the brakeshoe condition or the fact that the brakes were cut out. Because one brakeshoe that had been applied in Seattle, Washington, had no measurable wear, the brakes could not have operated much, if any, en route to Havre. Therefore, it appears that the car left Seattle and passed through Spokane, Washington, and Havre with the bad brake condition.

^{1/} For more detailed information read "Railroad Accident Report—Derailment of Amtrak Train No. 8, The Empire Builder, on Burlington Northern Track, Lohman, Montana, March 28, 1978" (NTSB-RAR-79-7).

As a result of its investigation of the accident, the Safety Board concludes that: BN car inspectors are reacting to real or implied supervisory pressure to avoid delays to trains; they are either not knowledgeable of Federal regulations or qualified for their jobs; or they are not being properly supervised and are being negligent in the performance of their work.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Burlington Northern:

Determine why car inspectors knowingly allowed train No. 8 to depart Havre with defects which violated minimum safety standards, and take remedial action. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-79-57)

Establish procedures which will insure that minimum safety standards required by Federal regulations are complied with completely. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-79-58)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, BURSLEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.

Patricia A. Waldman
By: James B. King
Chairman *for*