

R-261A

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 19, 1979

Forwarded to:

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

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-79-61

About 5:08 a.m. on January 31, 1979, Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail) freight train CNEN-O collided with the rear of standing Conrail freight SYEN-O at Muncy, Pennsylvania. The lead locomotive unit of train CNEN-O was destroyed, the second unit was heavily damaged, and 14 cars were damaged. Four cars of train SYEN-O were destroyed, and one was heavily damaged. Two crewmembers were killed and three were injured.^{1/}

The accident resulted when the engineer and the front brakeman of train CNEN-O failed to operate the train at a speed required by signal indication that would have permitted the engineer to stop the train short of standing train SYEN-O. The failure of the operating rules to require the conductor to be located in a position to properly supervise the safe operation of the train contributed to the collision.

The speed of train CNEN-O remained between 30 and 40 mph after it departed Williamsport, Pennsylvania, en route to Muncy. Crewmembers on the caboose stated that there were no brake applications on the train before the collision. The crewmembers of the standing train stated that they did not hear a warning whistle from the approaching train and first became aware of the train when they saw its headlight. Because the crewmembers of train CNEN-O apparently did not take action to avert the accident or warn the crew, the Safety Board concluded that the engineer and the head brakeman were not alert as required by the Conrail operating rules. The conductor, who is in charge of the train, was in the caboose, and was not in a position to supervise the safe operation of the train.

^{1/} For more detailed information read "Railroad Accident Report—Rear-end Collision of Two Consolidated Rail Corporation Freight Trains, Muncy, Pennsylvania, January 31, 1979" (NTSB-RAR-79-6).

In 1973, as a result of its investigation of an accident in Herndon, Pennsylvania,^{2/} the Safety Board made this recommendation to the Federal Railroad Administration:

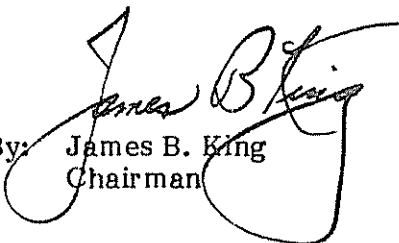
In the promulgation of regulations governing railroad operating rules, where responsibility for safe operation of the train is assigned jointly to the engineer and the conductor, require that they be located and informed so that they can make quick effective decisions. (R-73-11)

The FRA informed the Safety Board that the adoption of the FRA's proposed radio rules (49 CFR 220) would provide the conductor with the required information. The Safety Board did not agree and closed out the recommendation after notifying the FRA that its action was considered unacceptable. The Muncy accident again shows the need for the employee who is in charge of the train's operation to be located and informed so that he can properly supervise the safe operation of the train.

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

Promulgate regulations to require the conductor or other employee in charge of the train to be located and informed so that he can properly supervise the safe operation of the train. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-79-61)

KING, Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in this recommendation. DRIVER, Vice Chairman, did not participate.

By:  James B. King
Chairman

^{2/} "Railroad Accident Report—Head-on Collision of Two Penn Central Freight Trains, Herndon, Pennsylvania, March 12, 1973" (NTSB-RAR-73-3).