

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Forwarded to:

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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-79-6 through R-79-9

About 10:31 a.m., on September 18, 1978, Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company (L&N) local freight train Extra 542 South collided head-on with L&N yard train No. 101 inside yard limits at Florence, Alabama. The engineer and head brakeman of the local freight and the conductor of the yard train were killed. Property damage was estimated to be \$462,500. 1/

The investigation disclosed that the accident occurred on the main track and that both trains were governed by L&N Rule 93 which permits use of the main track within yard limits "prepared to stop within one-half the range of vision, but not exceeding 20 mph." Postaccident stopping tests indicated that the speed of the local freight was greater than that which would have complied with the rule. Contributing to the severity of the accident was the apparent failure of the engineer of Extra 542 South to apply the brakes of his train in emergency after he was in a position to see the opposing train.

The local freight was operated daily, except Sunday, from Mt. Pleasant, Tennessee to Florence and back -- a distance of 136 miles. Trains were operated by timetable and train orders. Maximum authorized speed was 25 mph except within yard limits and over about 7 miles of line where speed was restricted to 10 mph. The local freight made numerous stops to set off, place, and pick up cars. Excluding terminal delays and waits at meeting points, the one-way trip to Florence would require 6 to 7 hours, providing the rules and restrictions were complied with.

1/ For more detailed information about this accident read "Railroad Accident Report - Head End Collision of Louisville and Nashville Railroad Local Freight Train and Yard Train at Florence, Alabama, September 18, 1978" (NTSB-RAR-79-2).

On the day of the accident, the local freight crew had been on duty 4 hours 31 minutes when the accident occurred. The investigation revealed that during the course of the trip the crew had violated speed restrictions and L&N Rule 99 pertaining to the protection of their train, as well as L&N Rule 171 and Birmingham Division Bulletin 17-166 pertaining to required airbrake tests. Since placarded tank cars were located next to the locomotive and two cars from the occupied caboose, the crew was also in violation of Federal hazardous materials regulations at the time of the accident.

All crewmembers involved in the accident had taken written examinations on the L&N operating rules in February 1978. The examinations were conducted by the trainmaster who had also composed the examination questions. The L&N's rules examiner had told the trainmaster what rules to cover but uniform questions or interpretations of the rules were not provided. The one question pertaining to Rule 93 asked for the maximum allowable speed within yard limits rather than the full definition of yard speed. Additionally, it was learned that supervisors checking compliance with Rule 93 always made such checks in locations of unrestricted visibility where a speed of 20 mph would comply with the rule's provisions. Few supervisory checks had been made between Mt. Pleasant and Florence, and none at all at Florence since October 1977. Although a head-on collision had occurred in the same territory 2 months before the accident, supervisors had not initiated a corrective program of crew observation and rules enforcement.

The Nashville Sub-division rules examinations did not include any questions regarding hazardous materials regulations. Surviving crewmembers and their supervisors did not have the correct understanding of current hazardous materials handling requirements. The timetable contained hazardous materials instructions that had been obsolete since January 1, 1977, and no bulletin or general order correcting the situation had been issued. Management's explanation was that the regulations were considered "advisory" and not binding.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company:

Take immediate steps to insure that its train operations are conducted in accordance with its operating rules. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-79-6)

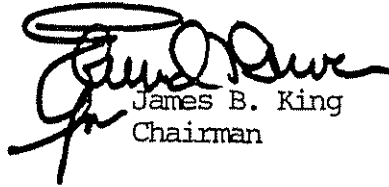
Provide supervisors and employees periodic, supervised training that is based on a uniform understanding of rules and regulations. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-79-7)

Correct its timetable instructions on handling and placement of hazardous materials cars so that they comply with current Federal regulations. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-79-8)

(3)

Include in the required supervisory efficiency and safety checks the monitoring of compliance with hazardous materials regulations. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-79-9)

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


James B. King
Chairman