

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: June 29, 1981

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Forwarded to:

Mayor Larry Hooper  
City of Kenner, Louisiana  
1801 Williams Boulevard  
Kenner, Louisiana 70062

Honorable David C. Treen  
Governor of Louisiana  
P.O. Box 44004  
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Mr. James E. Martin  
Senior Vice President  
Illinois Central Gulf Railroad  
233 North Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60601

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-81-32

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At approximately 6:58 p.m., c.s.t., on November 25, 1980, a southbound tractor/cargo-tank semitrailer loaded with 8,600 gallons of gasoline approached a railroad/highway grade crossing on Williams Boulevard in Kenner, Louisiana. The vehicle was driven around the automatic grade crossing warning gates which were down and was struck by an eastbound Illinois Central Gulf Railroad freight train. The freight train's lights were illuminated, its whistle was sounding, and its bell was ringing. The overturning semitrailer struck a northbound automobile stopped at the crossing. Gasoline flowing from the ruptured cargo tank ignited. The burning gasoline destroyed the automobile, a building, the semitrailer, and damaged 19 other automobiles. The train locomotive was derailed and was damaged by fire. Seven persons were killed and six others were injured in the accident. 1/

In March 1972, the Federal Railroad Administration and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration began a joint effort to determine driver performance and related human factors that contributed to motor vehicle/train accidents and to develop and demonstrate the effectiveness of countermeasures for these factors. A significant effort was made to understand driver behavior at railroad crossings, to develop accident prevention countermeasures, and to predict which would improve behavioral safety.

1/ For more detailed information, read Railroad/Highway Accident Report--"Illinois Central Gulf Railroad Freight Train/Mobil Oil Company Tractor Cargo-Tank Semitrailer Collision and Fire, Kenner, Louisiana, November 25, 1981" (NTSB-RHR-81-1).

"These driver-oriented countermeasures included: (1) driver education to eliminate intolerant attitudes about delays at railroad crossings; (2) enforcement of laws that stipulate grade crossing behavior; and (3) efforts to increase appropriate 'looking behavior.' As part of the study, drivers were asked to suggest ways to reduce crossing accidents. After increased use of gates and better warning signs and signals, drivers thought improved driver education, stricter law enforcement, and public safety campaigns were useful methods to improve crossing safety."

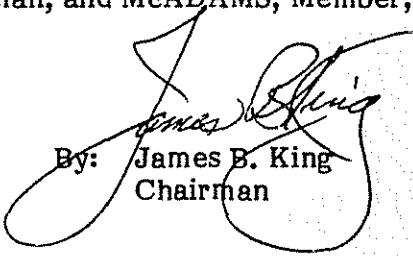
The National Transportation Safety Board has issued a number of recommendations to improve railroad/highway grade crossing safety. The Safety Board has advocated further development of improved train and crossing equipment, better methods of upgrading crossing protection, and improved driver education and law enforcement.

Congress has mandated that the Federal Highway Administration pursue an aggressive program to develop better crossing equipment and upgrade crossing protection and has provided specific funds to achieve that objective. Currently, there is no nationwide effort to implement a driver-oriented countermeasures program or to provide a focal point for combining and enhancing existing education, enforcement, and engineering efforts within the States. However, several States and major railroads, with the assistance of the National Safety Council, have implemented crossing safety programs titled "Operation Lifesaver." These programs seem to have provided an effective focal point for combining and enhancing existing education, enforcement, and engineering efforts within a State. Initial indications are that these programs have achieved some success, but there is a need to provide additional resources to insure complete development, implementation, and evaluation of this effort toward maintaining continued activity in this area after an initial concentrated effort.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad, City of Kenner, Louisiana, and the State of Louisiana:

Combine efforts, in conjunction with the National Safety Council, to implement the "Operation Lifesaver" program to alert citizens to the need for safety considerations at the railroad/highway crossings in Kenner and other crossings in the State. (Class II, Priority Action)  
(H-81-32)

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

  
By: James B. King  
Chairman