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NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: June 18, 1976

Forwarded to:

Honorable Asaph H. Hall
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
400 Seventh Street, S. W.
Washington, D. C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-76-23

At 9:10 a.m., c.s.t., on November 19, 1975, Amtrak turboliner passenger train No. 301 was struck by a dump truck carrying a load of asphalt across a grade crossing in Elwood, Illinois. The crossing was unprotected and had limited sight clearance between the road and the track. Four cars of the five-car train were derailed and 41 persons were injured. The train was owned by Amtrak and was operated by an Illinois Central Gulf Railroad (ICG) crew over the ICG track. The road was a county highway maintained by the Will County Highway Department.

The train involved in this collision was a French turboliner which employed a European-type coupler different from the H-type coupler used on American trains. The forces generated during the accident dynamics caused the left side of the couplers' buffers on the second and third cars to separate. This permitted the link coupler to bounce loose and disengage from the hook, which caused the cars to separate and contributed to the derailment of the third, fourth, and fifth cars.

The ease with which this European-type coupler can uncouple increases the potential for each car to react independently in an accident situation. When cars are not attached to other equipment, they are more likely to derail and to roll over; this increases the risks of loss and injury. A standard H-type coupler probably would not have uncoupled under similar conditions. Although the uncoupling of the cars in this accident did not increase the severity of the collision, the potential for a catastrophe because of similar uncouplings in the future is possible.

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

Require improvements to the coupler assembly on the French-manufactured turbotrains currently in service to minimize the possibility of uncoupling under crash conditions.
(R-76-23) (Class II, Priority Followup)

TODD, Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, BURGESS, and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.



By: Webster B. Todd, Jr.
Chairman



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