



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

## Safety Recommendation

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**Date:** July 16, 1999

**In reply refer to:** R-99-11

Mr. Michael S. Fletcher  
President  
Mountaineer Gas Company  
414 Summer Street  
Charleston, West Virginia 25301

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About 12:37 p.m. eastern daylight time on Saturday, June 20, 1998, 30 of the 148 cars making up eastbound CSX train Q316 derailed at Cox Landing, West Virginia. Of the derailed cars, three were loaded with hazardous material, and eight others contained hazardous material residue. Two of the loaded cars were damaged in the pileup and leaked a combined volume of about 21,500 gallons of formaldehyde solution. No one was injured during the derailment of the train; however, 15 persons reported minor injuries as a result of the release of formaldehyde. Total damages in the accident exceeded \$2.6 million.<sup>1</sup>

In the accident, a derailed car struck the vertical riser on a residential gas meter located within 40 feet of the centerline of the tracks. Damage to the riser resulted in a gas leak that lasted for several hours. Gas service personnel were called, but they were not allowed to approach the damaged riser because of concern that the chlorine tank cars might also be leaking. However, because of concern about the gas leak itself, the incident commander directed gas company employees to shut off gas service in the immediate area at the site.

Without access to shut-off valves at the site, gas company employees were unable to repair the damaged riser or isolate the 2-inch line. As an alternative, pipeline personnel considered isolating the 6-inch gas main by closing shutoff valves, but they were concerned about the large number of residential and industrial customers that would be affected. In any event, because of the location of the valves and the pressure and volume of gas in the line, blocking the 6-inch line would not have immediately stopped the leak.

The incident commander eventually allowed the gas service crew to access the damaged riser and determine if the 2-inch service line could be shut down. Following their inspection, the service crew capped the 2-inch service line, but the line remained charged with pressurized gas, since the line had not been isolated from the 6-inch main supply line.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, read Railroad Accident Report—*Derailed of a CSX Freight Train and Subsequent Hazardous Material Release at Cox Landing, West Virginia, June 20, 1998* (NTSB/RAR-99/01).

Because railroad and gas company personnel did not coordinate their activities before railroad contractors began working in the area of the gas line, railroad contractors did not know that the gas line was still charged. They stated that, had they known, they would not have carried out the wreckage-clearing operations the next day that severed the gas line and created a second gas leak in the area. This released gas, if ignited, could have injured nearby recovery workers and destroyed or damaged property. Although the gas did not ignite, its release posed a safety hazard to those in the area. The Safety Board concluded that railroad wreckage-clearing operations and pipeline operations were not effectively coordinated and unified under an effective command structure,<sup>2</sup> which placed excavation personnel at risk while they worked in the vicinity of a natural gas line. A unified incident command structure would have ensured better commitment from railroad, pipeline, and public safety officials in decision-making throughout the emergency response, wreckage-clearing, and environmental remediation activities.

The National Transportation Safety Board therefore makes the following safety recommendation to Mountaineer Gas Company:

In cooperation with CSX Transportation, Inc., develop and implement incident coordination procedures that will ensure that safety-critical operations during wreckage-clearing activities are coordinated with all parties involved in those activities. (R-99-11)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations R-99-3 to the Federal Railroad Administration; R-99-4 through -6 to CSX Transportation, Inc.; and R-99-7 through -10 to Cabell and Wayne Counties' Local Emergency Planning Committee.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you within 90 days regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation R-99-11 in your reply. If you need additional information, you may call 202-314-6435.

Chairman HALL, Vice Chairman FRANCIS, and Members HAMMERSCHMIDT, GOGLIA, and BLACK concurred in this recommendation.

By: Jim Hall  
Chairman

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<sup>2</sup> See National Response Team Incident Command Technical Assistance Document: *Managing Response to Oil Discharge and Hazardous Substances Under the National Contingency Plan*, published by the National Response Team, May 1996. (Available at <http://www.nrt.org>)