

Letter R-0670



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

## Safety Recommendation

Date: **APR - 4 1997**

In Reply Refer to: R-97-3 and -4

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On February 9, 1996, about 8:40 a.m., near Secaucus, New Jersey, an eastbound New Jersey Transit (NJT) commuter train proceeded past a stop indication at an interlocking signal and collided nearly head-on with a westbound NJT commuter train. About 400 passengers were on the two trains. The engineers on both trains and one passenger suffered fatal injuries in the collision.<sup>1</sup>

In its investigation of this accident, the Safety Board concluded that the evacuation was not hampered even though the actions of some train crewmembers were less than adequate. The conductor on train 1254 was injured during the impact; however, he was able to evacuate passengers before he was transported to the hospital. The assistant conductor on train 1254 asked passengers if they needed assistance and used his cellular phone to call NJT officials for help. The conductor on train 1107 was visibly upset and crying, which caused concern among the passengers. However, when NJT employees who were deadheading on the train realized that the train 1107 conductor was in no condition to assess the situation and to make necessary decisions, they took control of the situation. They alerted an oncoming train to stop, thereby preventing another accident, and tended to and helped evacuate the passengers. When the emergency responders arrived on scene, passengers were safely moved to another NJT train, triaged, and transported to local hospitals.

The scenario after the Secaucus accident is typical of the conditions and problems following a major train collision, which require the skills of trained personnel who can maintain their composure, make decisions, and control and inform passengers to prevent further injuries and panic. Because injuries were involved, this accident met NJT's criteria for a "Critical Emergency," which require the conductor and other train employees to manage the emergency to make sure that trains are stopped and appropriate instructions are given to passengers to avoid

<sup>1</sup> For additional information, see Railroad Accident Report—*Near Head-On Collision and Derailment of Two New Jersey Transit Commuter Trains near Secaucus, New Jersey, February 9, 1996* (NTSB/RAR-97-1)

panic. The assistant conductor on train 1107 admitted that he went "blank" after the collision and had to ask a deadheading employee what he should say on the radio. He then said that upon seeing the damage to the train 1254 cab he ran out of the door screaming for the engineer. The conductor of train 1107 recalled instructing the passengers in two cars to remain seated; however, her demeanor and lack of direction compromised her effectiveness.

According to passengers, the crewmembers on trains 1254 and 1107 provided few instructions. Only one survey respondent stated that he heard an announcement over the public address system, but he did not know if it had been a crewmember or an emergency responder who made the announcement. Other passengers stated that they heard no announcements. Although train crewmembers said that they went from car to car to instruct passengers to remain seated, passengers said that they were not told about the severity of the situation and were concerned about a possible fire or being struck by an oncoming train. They therefore left the train and wandered around the tracks waiting for guidance, potentially posing a greater hazard because of the leaking fuel from train 1107.

The Safety Board believes that the problems identified in this accident are due, in part, to the lack of refresher training in emergency response procedures. The NJT training program does provide train crews with instruction on emergency procedures as part of their operational and specialized training; however, the company program does not have an established schedule for refresher training in emergency response procedures. In this case, one of the assistant conductors did not recall ever receiving emergency evacuation training. Records show that it had been 9 years since he had attended a transportation training program and 4 years since he had received customer sensitivity training that focused on emergency evacuation procedures. Perhaps he could not recall receiving the evacuation training because of the 4-year time span since his last course. It is reasonable to believe that if he could not recall attending the course, he probably could not recall the subjects covered. Such a time gap between training does not provide the necessary frequency to reinforce special skills. By periodically attending a refresher course, employees can become more effective in managing an emergency situation.

Drills are not included in NJT's training program even though most classes provide some instruction about emergency procedures. Employees participate in drills only if they are selected to participate in training for emergency responders. The Safety Board believes that drills should be incorporated into the training program to help employees learn how to properly assess an emergency situation, how to manage passengers, what are effective panic control techniques, and what are effective communication skills. Passengers depend on train employees for leadership and guidance in an emergency. NJT employees should be prepared and confident that they can provide appropriate emergency services should the need arise.

The Safety Board concludes that the performance of train crewmembers during emergencies could be improved if the NJT included drills and refresher training in its training program. The Safety Board believes that the New Jersey Transit should conduct drills as part of its training program and develop a refresher training program so that all employees with responsibilities during emergencies receive periodic refresher training to reinforce their skills.

The National Transportation Safety Board therefore issues the following recommendations to the New Jersey Transit:

Revise your employee emergency response training courses to include simulation drills and develop a refresher training program to reinforce employee skills in emergency procedures. In all emergency training, stress that employees use the public address system as a means to communicate with passengers. (R-97-3)

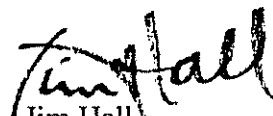
Inform your employees, especially those in safety-critical positions, of the facts and circumstances of this accident stressing that they must accurately report their use of medications or any changes in their medical condition. (R-97-4)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations R-97-1 and -2 to the Federal Railroad Administration, R-97-5 to the Association of American Railroads, R-97-6 to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, R-97-7 to the United Transportation Union, and R-97-8 to the American Public Transit Association.

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 interested in any action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendations in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations R-97-3 and -4 in your reply. If you have any questions, you may call (202) 314-6439.

Chairman HALL, Vice Chairman FRANCIS, and Members HAMMERSCHMIDT, GOGLIA, and BLACK concurred in these recommendations.

By:

  
Jim Hall  
Chairman