

Log H-579C



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: MAY 30 1995

In Reply Refer To: H-95-11

Mr. Charles Meeks
Executive Director
National Sheriffs' Association
1450 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

On November 30, 1993, a 184-foot-long vehicle operated by Rountree Transport and Rigging (Rountree), Inc., was en route to deliver an 82-ton turbine to a Kissimmee Utility Authority (KUA) electricity generating plant under construction near Intercession City, Florida. The private access road to the plant facility crosses over a single railroad track owned by CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT). Because of the configuration of the truck and the profile of the roadway, the cargo deck of the vehicle began to bottom out on the roadway surface as it moved across the tracks. The Rountree crew proceeded to adjust the height of cargo deck to gain greater clearance while the vehicle straddled the tracks. They had finished raising the cargo deck and were preparing to move the vehicle when the lights and bells at the grade crossing activated. Seconds later, National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) train number 88, the Silver Meteor, carrying 89 passengers, struck the side of the cargo deck and the turbine. The locomotive and the first four cars of the eight-car consist derailed, carrying the turbine and parts of the Rountree vehicle with them.¹

The Rountree vehicle and the turbine were destroyed, and the locomotive and the first three railcars were damaged extensively. Total damage from the accident exceeded \$14 million. No deaths resulted from this accident. Six persons sustained serious injuries and 53 persons suffered minor injuries, and had to be evacuated to area hospitals.

¹ For additional information, read Highway Accident Report--Collision of Amtrak Train No. 88 with Rountree Transport and Rigging, Inc., Vehicle on CSX Transportation, Inc., Railroad near Intercession City, Florida, November 30, 1993 (NTSB/HAR-95/01).

From its investigation, the Safety Board found that the cause of the accident was the vehicle operator's failure to notify CSXT in advance of its intent to cross the railroad track at the accident grade crossing and to ensure through CSXT that it was safe to do so. The Safety Board identified problems in Florida permitting requirements and procedures, Rountree's oversight of oversize moves, and move coordination between the railroad and highway carriers.

The State of Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) requires oversize/low-clearance vehicle operators to obtain pretrip route approval. The focus of the State permitting process is on determining the potential load impact on highway structures along the route. Florida also has a regulation based on the Uniform Vehicle Code that requires operators of certain types of highway vehicles with low ground clearance to notify railroads of each intended crossing at grade. Neither the railroad carrier nor highway carrier involved in this accident were aware of this requirement. When approving oversize moves, the FDOT has no procedure for either advising or requiring applicants to provide railroads with advance notification of the intent to travel over grade crossings.

The Rountree regional manager overseeing the *Intercession City* move reportedly learned that CSXT also required oversize/low-clearance vehicle operators to apply to have the railroad carrier protect crossing when one of Rountree's rigs became stuck under the cantilever signal at a grade crossing in Tampa. A CSXT signal supervisor said that he advised the Rountree official never to travel over a grade crossing unless it was protected by CSXT. He later told Safety Board investigators that the Rountree regional manager implied that he felt the small amount of time it took his vehicle to cross over tracks did not warrant having a flagman. This would indicate that the Rountree regional manager did not have a real appreciation for the hazards involved at grade crossings. On the *Intercession City* move and on several trips preceding it Rountree arranged to have CSXT flag crossings only in the immediate Tampa area. In the case of the *Intercession City* trip, this meant that CSXT personnel protected only 8 of 13 crossings. Without a flagman, Rountree lost the direct coordination with CSXT necessary to provide safe passage over all five unflagged crossings.

While the Rountree regional manager had visited the KUA Power Road crossing on two occasions, the equipment supervisor, who was responsible for the movement of the vehicle, had not. At no time did the equipment supervisor or any other member of the vehicle crew take any precautionary measures to determine if they might experience complications at the KUA access road. Further, they were not prepared to contact CSXT should an emergency arise. Obstructions blocked the crew's first attempt to turn onto the KUA facility access road. On their second attempt, they swung onto KUA Power Road and continued across the tracks until they began to bottom out. While the crew shimmed the goose neck with the cargo deck straddling the tracks, the Rountree regional manager tried to call a CSXT trainmaster in Orlando only to get no answer. He then called a CSXT toll-free number and got a menu, which prompted him to hang up in frustration. He called the toll-free number a second time and was in the process of listening to the menu items when he heard the train whistle blow. Shortly thereafter, Amtrak train 88 broadsided the vehicle and turbine.

The Rountree regional director had arranged for a Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) escort as required by the FDOT. At the time of the Intercession City trip, the FHP policies and procedures for approving requests by FHP officers to perform escort services for overdimension vehicles during their off-duty varied little from those for approving requests to perform other off-duty work, such as providing security at a public gathering. The FHP was only expected to control highway traffic along the route. In the course of the trip, the Rountree regional manager deviated from the FDOT-approved route, which voided his FDOT moving permit. However, because the FHP did not require that escorts follow prescribed measures to ensure the safety of the vehicle's movement and compliance with permit requirements, the off-duty patrolmen accompanying the Rountree vehicle did not know that the convoy was not following the permitted route or that Rountree had not arranged for CSXT to protect crossing movements. Since this accident, the FHP extensively revised its escort approval requirements, enacting procedures that the Safety Board believes should minimize the possibility of future similar occurrences in Florida. The FHP now requires that FHP officers applying to escort overdimension and certain hazardous materials vehicles obtain the following:

1. A safety plan that includes a description of the material being transported, vehicle dimensions, a route map, a trip timetable, proof that appropriate county and municipal authorities along the route have been advised of the movement, and a listing of telephone numbers for emergency service agencies.
2. Authentication that the transporter operator has obtained all required permits, and the approval and emergency telephone numbers of railroads, utility companies, and private entities whose activities might be affected by the movement.
3. A listing of any safety apparatus installed on the load-bearing vehicle.
4. Copies of any FDOT, county, and/or municipal government permits.
5. A liability release signed by an officer of the company contracting for the services of escorting officers.

During its investigation of this accident, the Safety Board contacted several States and determined that requirements for providing escort of overdimension vehicles vary widely. Some jurisdictions, like Florida, permit (or require) off-duty police personnel to provide escort services while others use on-duty officers. Other jurisdictions don't use police personnel, but instead permit (or require) private professional escort services, usually with minimum qualification and training requirements established by the lead police agency in the jurisdiction. The Safety Board believes that firms or agencies providing vehicle escort services should ensure that the vehicle being escorted is in compliance with all jurisdictional requirements. Toward that end, the Safety Board believes that official member associations, such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police, should take an active role in promoting improved escort procedures.


Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the National Sheriffs' Association--

Advise your members of the facts and circumstances of the Intercession City, Florida, accident, and request that those whose activities include providing or overseeing overdimension vehicle escort review their policies and procedures to ensure the vehicle operator is in compliance with all applicable permit and advance notification requirements, and has the communications capability and telephone numbers to contact railroad, utility, and other private entities along the route in the event of a change in plans or an emergency. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-95-11)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations H-95-7 to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, H-95-8 and -9 to the Specialized Carriers and Rigging Association, H-95-10 to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, H-95-12 to the National Committee on Uniform Traffic Laws and Ordinances, P-95-31 to the American Gas Association, P-95-32 to the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America, P-95-33 to the American Public Gas Association, P-95-34 to the American Petroleum Institute, P-95-35 to the Central Florida Pipeline Corporation, P-95-36 to the State of Florida Division of Emergency Management, R-95-24 and -25 to the Association of American Railroads, R-95-26 and -27 to the American Short Line Railroad Association, R-95-28 to the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, R-95-29 to the Osceola County (Florida) Emergency Management Division, and R-95-30 through -32 to the CSX Transportation Corporation.

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 recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation H-95-11.

Chairman HALL, Vice Chairman FRANCIS, and Member HAMMERSCHMIDT concurred in this recommendation.

By: 
James E. Hall
Chairman