

R-277

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: March 5, 1980

Forwarded to:

Honorable John M. Sullivan
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-80-6 and -7

The National Transportation Safety Board has investigated at least 10 accidents during the past 10 years in which serious shortcomings were noted in the procedures used by railroad operating personnel during the emergency response. During this 10 year period, little or no action has been taken by the railroads to overcome these problems. In view of recent increases in the number of train accidents, the Safety Board undertook a special study ^{1/} to document the reasons for these procedural shortcomings.

Repeated instances of confusion and a lack of direction and organization were observed during these accidents. The lack of systems to disseminate information to responding civil emergency personnel has repeatedly resulted in needless exposure to hazards. The lack of training of crewmembers in the use of emergency equipment and emergency door mechanisms has delayed evacuations and prolonged exposure to hazards. The circumstances surrounding these accidents combined to show that a safety problem exists because of the unavailability of emergency procedures and instructions, and the lack of training of personnel expected to cope with emergencies. Conversely, in a striking example of the accomplishment of training and emergency planning, train crewmembers and emergency response units functioned in an efficient and professional manner at a passenger train derailment in Elma, Virginia, on December 3, 1978.

Examination of the rules used as emergency procedures by the various railroads revealed those directives to be vague and nonspecific in establishing lines of authority, task identification, task scheduling or task assignment. There is at present no standardization to define what constitutes an emergency and emergency procedures are not usually documented or set out as distinct elements of guidance to crewmembers.

As a result of its findings in the special study, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Railroad Administration:

^{1/} For more detailed information see "Special Study--Railroad Emergency Procedures" NTSB-RSS-80-1.

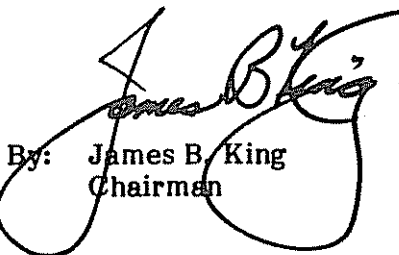
Develop and validate through simulated disaster exercises a model emergency response plan for the guidance of the railroad industry in formulating individual plans to be utilized by their train crewmembers in the event of emergency. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-80-6)

Require operating railroads to develop emergency response plans, put them into effect and file those plans with the Federal Railroad Administration in a similar manner as is required by 49 CFR 217 with respect to operating rules. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-80-7)

The Safety Board also reiterates its recommendation of July 30, 1976, that the Federal Railroad Administration:

"Require carriers to train employees in emergency procedures to be used after an accident, to establish priorities for emergency action, and to conduct accident simulations to test the effectiveness of the program, inviting civic emergency personnel participation." (Class II, Priority Followup) (R-76-29)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: James B. King
Chairman