



Log R-601

National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: June 28, 1988

In reply refer to : R-88-16 through -18

Mr. Denman K. McNear
Chairman, President, and
Chief Executive Officer
Southern Pacific
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About 1:15 a.m. on June 15, 1987, Southern Pacific Transportation Company (SP) freight train Extra 7791 West collided head-on with SP freight train Extra 7267 East near Yuma, Arizona. The yardmaster had instructed Extra 7791 West to proceed westward on the westbound main track to the subway, stop, wait for an eastbound train to pass, cross over to the westbound main track, and proceed to the yard office. Meanwhile, the yardmaster had planned for Extra 7267 East to depart the yard office and proceed eastward on the eastbound main track to the subway, stop to align the crossover switches, and proceed eastward on the eastbound main track. However, Extra 7267 East crossed over to the westbound main track at the subway and the trains collided head-on. The engineer of Extra 7267 East was killed. 1/

During the investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board found many instances of signal system malfunctions in the Yuma yard. The signals were repeatedly "failing safe" before the accident, and they continued to "fail safe" on at least two occasions during the week after the accident. The Safety Board is concerned that traincrews being governed by the Yuma yard signal system may not have had complete confidence in that system because of the numerous malfunctions. The Safety Board believes that the signal problems were a result of a lack of coordination between the local SP management responsible for the signal system and the local SP management responsible for track maintenance. The Safety Board also believes the SP should take action to develop a reporting system that would alert the division superintendent when a signal has been reported defective more than once.

The Yuma yardmaster acted contrary to established SP operating rules when she instructed the crew of the caboosless train crossing over at the subway before the accident to leave the crossover switches reversed. SP operating officials stated that a yardmaster does not have the authority to issue instructions that are contrary

1/ For more detailed information, read Railroad Accident Report--"Head-On Collision of Southern Pacific Transportation Company Freight Trains, Yuma, Arizona, June 15, 1987" (NTSB/RAR-88/02)

to an operating rule. However, the Safety Board determined that it was standard practice in Yuma for all yardmasters to issue such instructions. The Yuma trainmaster knew of the practice but had not taken action to either make it a legitimate procedure by a special instruction in the timetable as was done at other SP locations or to bring the practice into compliance with the rule. The Safety Board believes that for operational rules to be effective, the rules must be uniformly and consistently enforced. When supervisors ignore or condone violations of rules, employees are sent a message that casts doubt on the credibility and applicability of the entire rules system.

The Safety Board supports SP's policy to have conductors and certain other personnel complete written certification that crewmembers in their charge are in compliance with rule G (the use of alcoholic beverages or intoxicants by employees while on duty). Further, the Safety Board believes that to fully comply with this policy, employees required to complete the certification should be trained to recognize signs of drug intoxication. However, for any policy to be effective it must be consistently implemented. When the Yuma trainmaster became aware that Tucson-based conductors were refusing to complete the rule G slips, he reportedly informed the involved conductors that it was their responsibility to do so. Despite his discussions with the conductors, the Safety Board did not find any rule G slips completed by Tucson conductors. The Safety Board can only conclude that either the trainmaster was not vigorous in his pursuit of compliance or that he was overburdened with other responsibilities and did not have sufficient time to follow up his discussions to ensure compliance with the policy.

On the day of the accident, the Yuma yardmaster raised the question of the sobriety of Extra 7267 East's engineer and stated that she believed the engineer had been drinking alcohol before assuming duty. Later that evening, she made statements to Federal Railroad Administration officials in the presence of a Safety Board investigator to that effect. The Safety Board believes the testimony from the maid at the rest modules provided by SP confirms that the engineer had an unresolved alcohol problem. Based on the yardmaster's statement that she had suspected the engineer of drinking four or five times in about a 7-month period before the accident without taking any corrective action, the Safety Board concludes that the engineer's drinking and the yardmaster's inaction had been a continuing uncorrected problem at Yuma.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Southern Pacific Transportation Company:

Develop a reporting system that would alert the division superintendent when a signal has been reported defective repeatedly. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-88-16)

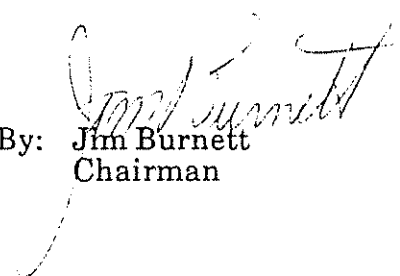
Issue an advisory to all Southern Pacific Transportation Company operating officers informing them of the anomalous main track switch lining procedures employed in Yuma, Arizona, before the accident on June 15, 1987, with instructions that they ensure all operating employees comply with current applicable timetable instructions and that the applicable timetable be immediately modified to reflect any site-specific locations where main track switches can be safely left unattended in reverse position. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-88-17)

Provide training to all employees required to certify another employee's condition relative to rule G on recognizing the standard signs of drug intoxication. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-88-18)

Also, as a result of its investigation, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations R-88-19 through -22 to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). The Safety Board also reiterated Safety Recommendation R-87-23 to the FRA.

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 regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendations in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations R-88-16 through -18 in your reply.

BURNETT, Chairman, KOLSTAD, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER and NALL, Members, concurred in these recommendations.

By: 
Chairman