



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

*Log R-604A*

Date: August 9, 1988

In reply refer to: R-88-38

Honorable Alfred A. Dellibovi  
Administrator  
Urban Mass Transportation Administration  
Washington, D.C. 20590

In 1987, the National Transportation Safety Board undertook a safety study to review the first full year of implementation of the current Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) alcohol and drug rule. Also, the Safety Board wanted to examine what actions beyond those required by the rule could be undertaken by the railroads and the Federal government to reduce high losses from accidents involving railroad employees in safety-sensitive positions who continue to use alcohol and/or drugs on the job. <sup>1/</sup>

In 1987 and 1988, attention has been focused on accidents/incidents in which the use of alcohol and/or drugs by railroad employees has led to fatalities and serious injuries. The Safety Board's study reviewed the results of its accident investigation activities over the past 16 years (1972-87), all safety recommendations related to those accidents, and the responses of the organizations (public and private) to the Board's recommendations. Additionally, the Safety Board visited 10 railroads and interviewed more than 120 people directly involved in the railroad industry.

Rail rapid transit accidents are investigated by the Safety Board as railroad accidents. In 1987, two accidents not under the FRA rules reported to the Safety Board involved the use of drugs by transit operating employees. The first, a rear-end collision involved two Southern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) transit cars on January 26, 1987, at Ardmore, Pennsylvania. <sup>2/</sup> Eighteen passengers received minor injuries and property damage was estimated at \$148,000. The Safety Board determined that the probable cause of this accident was the failure of the engineer/operator of the SEPTA train to comply with the approach and stop signal, due to impairment caused by drug use.

<sup>1/</sup> For more detailed information, read Safety Study--*Alcohol/Drug Use and Its Impact on Railroad Safety* (NTSB/SS-88/04).

<sup>2/</sup> For more detailed information, read Railroad Accident/Incident Summary Reports--Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 10, 1986, and Ardmore, Pennsylvania, January 26, 1987 (NTSB/RAR-88/01/SUM).

In the second transit accident, a four-car Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) train collided with a standing two-car test train on May 4, 1987, near the East Point, Georgia station. <sup>3/</sup> Three people were injured and property damage was estimated at \$410,000. The Safety Board found that the operator of the MARTA train had a serious medical condition, was on prescription drugs, and should not have been operating equipment.

As a result of its investigation of a rear-end collision of two Metro-Dade Transportation Administration trains in Miami, Florida, on June 26, 1985, <sup>4/</sup> the Safety Board recommended that the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA):

R-86-34

Require that all employees involved in a rail rapid transit accident with fatality, injury, or property damage be tested in a timely manner for alcohol and drugs.

R-86-35

Require rail rapid transit systems to screen for drug and alcohol abuse all prospective and transferred employees prior to employment in safety-sensitive positions.

R-86-36

Require rail rapid transit systems to institute procedures and information systems to inform employees of the deleterious effects on work performance of some over-the-counter and prescription drugs.

R-86-37

Require the removal of employees from safety-sensitive positions if the rail rapid transit medical department determines that the employees' use of a prescription drug will affect their work performance.

R-86-38

Encourage the creation of effective employee assistance programs to detect and treat substance abuse among rail rapid transit employees in safety-sensitive positions.

After extensive correspondence with the Safety Board, the UMTA responded on February 1, 1988, that it had forwarded to the DOT General Counsel's Office a draft notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) on "Control of Drug Use in Mass Transit Operations." As a result, the Safety Board has classified Safety Recommendations R-86-34 through -38 as "Open--Acceptable Action."

<sup>3/</sup> For more detailed information, read Field Accident Briefs Nos. 87-53A and -53B.

<sup>4/</sup> Railroad Accident Report--*Rear-end Collision of Metro-Dade Transportation Administration Train Nos. 172-171 and 141-142, Miami, Florida, June 26, 1985* (NTSB/RAR-86/03).

Additionally, as a result of two previous MARTA accidents investigated by the Safety Board, one in 1984 <sup>5/</sup> and one in 1986, <sup>6/</sup> and the accidents reported in this study, the Safety Board believes that the UMTA should act immediately to issue the alcohol and drug rules. Also, the UMTA should ensure that the new rule covers procedures to review regularly the medical fitness of transit operators, the need for periodic medical examination of operators, and procedures for timely followup of employees whose condition requires medication.


The Safety Board is aware that the UMTA published in the Federal Register on July 8, 1988, a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) entitled "Control of Drug Use in Mass Transportation Operations," UMTA Docket No. 88-F. Although a complete analysis of the NPRM has not been completed by the Safety Board's staff, it appears that the NPRM addresses the intent of Safety Recommendations R-86-34 through -38. The Safety Board looks forward to expedited handling of the rulemaking process by the UMTA/DOT to release this rule without further delays.

Therefore, as a result of its study, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Urban Mass Transportation Administration:

Require periodic medical examinations, including alcohol and drug screening, for rail rapid transit employees in safety-sensitive positions.  
(Class II, Priority Action) (R-88-38)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations R-88-23 through -33 to the Federal Railroad Administration, R-88-34 through -36 to members of the Association of American Railroads, R-88-37 to members of the Railway Labor Executives' Association, and R-88-39 to the Association of American Railroads.

BURNETT, Chairman, KOLSTAD, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, NALL, and DICKINSON, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

  
By: Jim Burnett  
Chairman

<sup>5/</sup> For more detailed information, read Field Accident Brief File No. ATL-85-MR-04, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>6/</sup> For more detailed information, read Field Accident Brief File No. ATL-86-MR-19, Atlanta, Georgia.