

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: June 29, 1978

Forwarded to:

Honorable John M. Sullivan
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-78-34 through -36

On April 6, 1978, The National Transportation Safety Board concluded a 3-day public hearing on railroad derailments and the carriage of hazardous materials. ^{1/} The hearing was prompted by the increasing number of derailments nationwide, especially those involving the release of hazardous materials from DOT 112A/114A "jumbo" tank cars. Forty-nine witnesses from the railroad industry, tank car builders and operators, shippers, State and local officials, firefighters, labor representatives, and the public testified.

The evidence indicated that DOT 112A/114A tank cars need to be made safer, and the Safety Board has addressed Safety Recommendations R-78-19 through -22, dated April 24, 1978, to the Secretary of Transportation to accelerate the installation date of safety corrections for DOT 112A/114A tanks. After fully analyzing the proceedings, the Safety Board identified additional safety areas which warrant corrective action.

Testimony indicated that annual railroad accident statistics published by the FRA need to be interpreted by degree of danger to the public. Many accidents occur at low speeds in yard operations, and the loss is primarily monetary and is borne by the railroads. The annual statistics do not categorize accidents under the varying operating track classes (lower vs. higher speeds). Additionally, the statistical bulletin does not include FRA's plans and programs to eliminate accident causal trends and the effect these programs have had in reducing the number of accidents and incidents.

^{1/} For more information read, "Analysis of Proceedings of the National Transportation Safety Board into Derailments and Hazardous Materials, April 4-6, 1978," (NTSB-SEE-78-2).

Further, testimony indicated that individual carriers and the Association of American Railroads (AAR) are addressing the safety of critical car components. However, the method for converting identified component failure rates into regulatory action has not been determined by the FRA. For example, the FRA does not have an adequate data collection program to determine the safe life of critical components. The Safety Board believes communications between the FRA and AAR need to be strengthened to insure that critical car component failure rates are identified and addressed by FRA regulatory actions as required.

Evidence indicated that derailments and release of hazardous materials is a major concern of State and local governments. The FRA State Participation Program is a major safety program (track and equipment standards only) that could increase the visibility of rail safety if the program was better utilized by the FRA. Currently, there are 57 State inspectors and inspector trainees. The Safety Board believes that the FRA should review and revise the program to encompass all rail safety regulations. Additionally, the Board believes that the FRA could measure the effectiveness of State programs and allow the States more flexibility in determining its requirements for inspectors without hampering uniform safety regulation application.

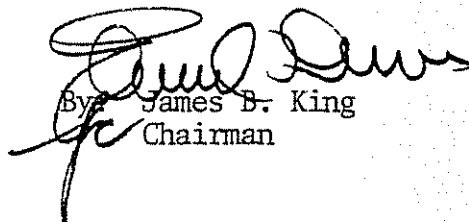
Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Railroad Administration:

Publish an annual program management report that provides FRA's plans and programs to eliminate major accident causal factors. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-78-34)

Identify critical car component failure rates and assure that they are properly addressed either by regulation or emergency order as required and expand communication channels with the Association of American Railroads to facilitate this program. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-78-35)

Evaluate and revise the State Participation Program to allow greater State flexibility; base evaluation of the program on the States' ability to adequately monitor railroad and hazardous materials safety. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-78-36)

KING, Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and DRIVER, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.


By: James B. King
Chairman