

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: March 5, 1980

Forwarded to:

Mr. B.F. Biaggini
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Southern Pacific Transportation Company
1 Market Plaza
San Francisco, California 94105

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)
R-80-3 and -4

About 4:03 a.m., on July 24, 1979, a rear-end collision occurred between two Southern Pacific Transportation Company trains at Thousand Palms, California. Extra 7810 West (01-BSMFK-20) collided with Extra 8484 West (02-HOLAT-21) while it was standing in a siding. The engineer died following the collision as a result of smoke and fire, and four crewmembers were injured. Damage was estimated by the railroad at \$1,479,700. 1/

The train dispatcher, the conductor, and the engineer of Extra 8484 West had talked to the engineer of Extra 7810 West on several occasions while it was between Yuma, Arizona, and Indio, California. The response was usual and there was nothing indicated to arouse concern. The engineer of Extra 7810 West had properly called the scanners east of Indio, and the train handling had been such that no one was concerned about any problem on the locomotive.

A radio contact was made with Extra 7810 West by Extra 8484 West when that train was leaving Indio. There were no further radio contacts made to or from the locomotive of Extra 7810 West.

Extra 8484 West moved from Indio to the siding at Thousand Palms where it was stopped at the extreme west end of the siding. Extra 7810 West was also allowed to move from Indio to the Thousand Palms siding where it was to be held at a crossover interlocking signal for further movement in helper service after the passage of a following train. Instead of properly stopping at the crossover signal, Extra 7810 West moved past it and collided with the rear of Extra 8484 West.

1/ For more detailed information read, "Railroad Accident Report--Rear-End Collision of Southern Pacific Company Freight Trains 02-HOLAT-21 and 01-BSMFK-20, Thousand Palms, California, July 24, 1979" (NTSB-RAR-80-1).

The members of the locomotive crew of Extra 7810 West were known to have been drinking intoxicants during their layover at Yuma. A urinalysis of the engineer's urine yielded a 0.23 percent ethyl alcohol content which equates to a blood-alcohol level of 0.18 percent. No one who had been in contact with the engineer at Yuma indicated that he was concerned about any excessive use of intoxicants by the engineer.

The Safety Board found similar circumstances in the events that preceded a rear-end collision involving SP trains at Indio on June 25, 1973. At that time, the Safety Board recommended to the Federal Railroad Administration that it promulgate Federal regulations governing the use of drugs and intoxicants by employees before coming on duty. Additionally, the Safety Board recommended to SP that it establish more effective procedures to insure that employees are fit for duty. No changes were made by either addressee. As an alternative, the FRA was to rely on a labor-management program that dealt with the social problem of alcohol. It was reluctant to impose Federal regulations. The SP assured the Safety Board that its rules charge the conductor with the responsibility of insuring the fitness of a crewmember for duty and that Rule G covered the matter and provided more positive control than Federal regulations would. Nevertheless, the accident at Thousand Palms was essentially a recurrence of the Indio accident of 1973.

The conductor has the responsibility of determining a crewmember's fitness for duty, and the Safety Board believes that he should be given some support in accomplishing this task or, alternatively, that supervisory personnel not so close to the crew be given this responsibility. The Safety Board believes that it is unrealistic to assume that a crewmember will relieve a fellow crewmember if he suspects the crewmember will lose his job, except in extremely compelling circumstances.

During its investigation of the accident at Thousand Palms, the Safety Board found several elements pertaining to training and operating rules that paralleled the events at Indio. SP assured the Safety Board that it had a highly effective training and rules enforcement program. It felt the training was adequate to insure that one employee, irrespective of rank or craft, would assert himself over another when he concluded that the individual was being negligent or reckless, or he was incapacitated. SP also put emphasis on a system it began implementing shortly before the Indio accident by which employees were monitored to determine their knowledge of and compliance with the operating rules.

The random sampling technique used by the rules department of the SP to check employees knowledge of the operating rules does not insure that all employees will be contacted systematically for a rules check. Even if an employee is systematically checked, a question on several rules is no assurance he is knowledgeable on all rules and should be adjudged proficient. This is particularly important since the SP does not require a periodic rules examination. A thorough knowledge of the rules and their application would deal with some of the problems that surfaced in this accident and the one at Indio, such as employees, under stress, fail to react in the proper manner when emergency action is required. It is clear that

despite the SP's assurances and new programs, the brakeman and conductor failed to overrule the engineer of Extra 7810 West and stop the train when he failed to comply with the rules.

The Safety Board believes that SP should exercise more positive control over the intervals in which employees are re-examined on operating rules and insure that employees have a comprehensive understanding of such rules.

Therefore, as a result of its investigation of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board:

--reiterates the recommendations made to the Southern Pacific Transportation Company in 1974:

Establish more effective procedures to insure that employees comply with the operating rules such as by requiring that conductors examine crewmembers coming on duty to ascertain their apparent physical competence to perform their responsibilities. (Recommendation R-74-10)

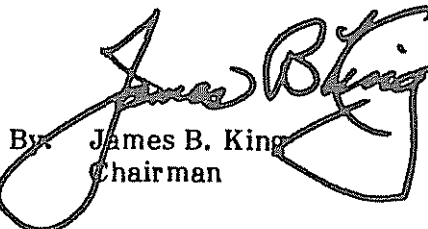
Train all new employees including brakemen in their responsibilities and duties so that they understand their responsibility to monitor the performance of other employees and to take positive action when the situation warrants. (Recommendation R-74-11)

--and recommends that the Southern Pacific Transportation Company:

In conjunction with the appropriate labor organizations, implement a system of operating rules re-examinations which will insure that all employees subject to those rules will be systematically and periodically examined. The system should insure that each employee satisfactorily exhibits his/her knowledge and understanding of the current operating rules. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-80-3)/A

Establish supervisory procedures at crew-change terminals to insure that operating department employees coming on duty are capable of complying with all pertinent operating rules. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-80-4)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in these recommendations. GOLDMAN, Member, did not participate.


By: James B. King
Chairman