

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: April 7, 1976

Forwarded to:

Honorable Asaph H. Hall  
Administrator  
Federal Railroad Administration  
400 Seventh Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-76-10 through R-76-12

On July 5, 1975, an Alaska Railroad freight train, Extra 1502 South, collided with the rear of passenger train No. 5, which had stopped just south of Hurricane, Alaska, to permit the passengers to view Mt. McKinley. All cars of the passenger train and the first four locomotive units of the freight train were derailed. Sixty-two persons were injured and one of the injured subsequently died.

No. 5 had stopped at Hurricane, 2.2 miles north of the point of the collision, and had departed at 3:41 p.m., 6 minutes later than its scheduled departure time of 3:35 p.m. The crew did not throw off lighted fuses to protect the rear of the train as it departed from Hurricane and moved southward to the mountain-viewing stop. The train had stopped for about 1 minute at the mountain stop and had just started to move southward when the collision occurred at 3:46 p.m.

The crew of Extra 1502 South had been instructed by the train dispatcher to copy a train order by radio at Hurricane. Even though the operating rules required the train to be stopped when a crewmember copied a train order, Extra 1502 South was not stopped at Hurricane.

The engineer of Extra 1502 South was copying the train order when No. 5 first became visible to the crewmembers on the locomotive, about 3,000 feet north of No. 5. The speed of Extra 1502 South at this time was 40 mph, which was in excess of the maximum permitted speed of 35 mph. The engineer applied the brakes slightly but the speed was not reduced. The train continued to move southward to about 1,500 feet north of No. 5, where the engineer applied the brakes in emergency. Then he immediately placed the independent brake valve in the full-application position and depressed the release bail. This action released the emergency application of the

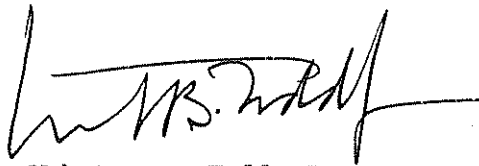
brakes on the five locomotive units. The lead locomotive unit of Extra 1502 South had a 24 RL braking system which permits an automatic brake application on the locomotive to be released by depressing the independent brake valve handle in any position.

This accident appears to be the culmination of a series of rule violations and poor practices. There is no doubt that the engineer and front brakeman of Extra 1502 South saw No. 5 in sufficient time to have stopped their train by regular means, despite its improper speed, but the preoccupation of the engineer with copying the train order permitted the train to move to a point where an emergency application was required to stop the train short of the collision. The emergency application still should have stopped the train short of the collision, but the improper release of the locomotive emergency brake negated this possibility.

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

1. Institute procedures on the Alaska Railroad to insure consistent compliance with operating rules. (R-76-10) (Class II, Priority Followup)
2. Revise the Alaska Railroad operating rules so that they explicitly state the actions required to provide safe operation. (R-76-11) (Class II, Priority Followup)
3. Require all railroads to modify the 24 RL independent brake valves to eliminate future unwanted release of locomotive brakes. (R-76-12) (Class II, Priority Followup)

TODD, Chairman, McADAMS, THAYER, BURGESS, and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.



By: Webster B. Todd, Jr.  
Chairman