

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: January 25, 1976

Forwarded to:

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

} SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

} R-76-1 through 5

On May 30, 1975, two Texas and Pacific Railway freight trains collided at Meeker, Louisiana. Extra 551 West had stopped on the single main track at Meeker to perform switching in an industrial plant. Extra 3311 West passed an "approach" signal and a "low" signal at 50 mph without reducing speed and entered the block occupied by Extra 551 West.

The engineer apparently saw the standing train when it was about 1,700 feet in front of him and applied the brakes in emergency. Extra 3311 West hit the rear of Extra 551 West at a speed of about 30 mph. The conductor of Extra 551 West, who was near the caboose, and the engineer and front brakeman of Extra 3311 West were killed.

This accident illustrated five areas in which corrective action is warranted:

(1) The Safety Board could not determine why the engineer failed to obey the signal indications. The Safety Board believes that since the front brakeman was a relatively new employee he probably lacked the training and experience necessary to recognize the dangers of the situation, and therefore also failed to control the train.

This accident again points out the need for a backup system to control the train in accordance with signal indications when the engineer fails to do so; dependence upon another employee is not adequate.

(2) The siding at Meeker is equipped with spring switches. To provide additional protection for operation over the switches, the carrier required that crewmembers operate the switches to determine if they are in proper position for movement at any time a signal protecting the

switches displays "stop-and-proceed." To eliminate the need for testing the switches, the carrier installed a white lunar light on the signal to indicate when the switch was lined for the main track. The white lunar light changes the signal from "stop-and-proceed" to "low," which establishes two different aspects for an occupied block on the same portion of railroad.

(3) The carrier's operating rules make the conductor primarily responsible for the safety of the train. However, since the conductor rides in the caboose, he probably cannot see the signals, and consequently cannot determine if the train is being operated properly. Since he is responsible for the train's operation, he either should be located in a controlling position or provided with the necessary equipment to carry out his responsibility.

(4) The carrier's radio rules did not require a responder properly to identify himself contrary to Federal Communication Commission (FCC) regulations. Other irregularities, such as failure of sender to identify himself properly, were disclosed that if not corrected could lead to confusion and eventually to an accident.

(5) After the accident, the air brake systems on the undamaged equipment of Extra 3311 West were tested. Test results indicate that 20 cars had either inoperative brakes or pistons that have traveled 12 inches. This condition reduced the train's braking capability about 16 percent.

To correct the above deficiencies, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Railroad Administration:

1. Expedite the final rulemaking procedures with respect to Radio Standards and Procedures as set forth in proposed Part 220, FRA Docket No. RSOR-5. (Recommendation R-76-1)
(Class II, Priority Followup)

2. Require that Texas and Pacific Railway employees comply with FCC regulations pertaining to radio operation.
(Recommendation R-76-2) (Class III, Long-Term Followup)


3. Promulgate regulations to require an adequate backup system for mainline freight trains that will insure that a train is controlled as required by the signal system in the event that the engineer fails to do so. (Recommendation R-76-3)
(Class III, Long-Term Followup)

(3)

4. Expedite the final rulemaking procedures with respect to "Stop and Proceed Procedures", as set forth in proposed Part 217.17, FRA Docket No. RSOR-2. These rules prescribe the aspect that must be displayed by each automatic block signal when the block is occupied by a train or when the signal circuit is interrupted by an open switch, broken rail, or track obstruction, and the procedures which must be followed when trains proceed into the block. (Recommendation R-76-4) (Class II, Priority Followup)

5. Enforce regulations that pertain to the maintenance of train braking systems. (Recommendation R-76-5) (Class II, Priority Followup)

REED, Acting Chairman, McADAMS, THAYER, BURGESS, and HALEY, MEMBERS, concurred in the above recommendations.

By:  John H. Reed
Acting Chairman

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