



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D. C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

LOG E-608

Date: September 30, 1988

In reply refer to: R-88-71 through -73

Mr. W. Graham Claytor, Jr.
Chairman and President
National Railroad Passenger Corporation
400 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

About 3:15 p.m. on August 5, 1988, National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) passenger train 1007 (The Empire Builder) en route from Chicago, Illinois, to Seattle, Washington, derailed while operating on the tracks of the Burlington Northern Railroad, near Saco, Montana. The train consisted of 2 locomotive units and 12 cars, including 2 sleeper cars. The engineer stated that he saw a sun kink in the rails ahead while traveling about 79 mph. The ambient temperature at the time was 96° F. Although the engineer applied the train brakes, the train could not be stopped before 10 cars derailed: 5 cars came to rest on their sides, 1 car was listing 45°, and the 4 remaining cars derailed but remained upright and in line. Of the 368 passengers and crewmembers aboard the train, 166 persons were injured. Four persons were admitted to hospitals in critical condition, and several others were admitted in serious condition.

The preliminary findings of the ongoing investigation indicate that rescue workers experienced difficulties, which were exacerbated by the remoteness of the accident site, while evacuating occupants from the derailed cars. Serious problems were encountered because of the lack of provisions for emergency exit from windows in sleeper compartments used by handicapped passengers and the lack of instructions for opening windows for the purpose of an emergency exit. In one instance, an 84-year-old woman, who had been designated as a handicapped person, was trapped inside a lower-level compartment of an overturned sleeper car. Tools were used to force open the compartment's steel door to gain access to the woman who was extricated 1 to 2 hours after the accident.

Currently, Amtrak designates lower-level end sleeper compartments for use by handicapped passengers with a placard marked with the capital letter "H" on the compartment entry door. These compartments are equipped with special provisions for handicapped passengers. Although red pull handles, which permit the windows to be removed from inside the compartment for an emergency exit, had been installed on the windows on the upper-level sleeper compartments of train 1007, the

Safety Board's preliminary findings indicate that the windows on the lower-level compartments were not equipped with red pull handles. Further, the handicapped compartments were not placarded with the universal handicapped facilities symbol to indicate to passengers or rescuers that these compartments may be occupied by handicapped persons. Finally, neither the upper- nor lower-level compartment windows were provided with instruction placards instructing rescue workers how to remove the windows from the outside.

As a result of its investigation of a fire onboard an Amtrak passenger train in Gibson, California, on June 23, 1982,¹ the Safety Board recommended that Amtrak:

R-83-64

Provide an emergency escape window exit in each sleeping compartment as well as in all passenger car hallways.

Amtrak has advised the Safety Board that it is in the process of installing these windows. However, Safety Board investigators learned during this investigation that, through oversights, Amtrak did not install the interior emergency exit window feature in lower-level end sleeper compartments at the time these types of windows were installed in the other sleeping compartments. Also, instructional placards for removing upper- and lower-level windows were not installed on the cars' exteriors. Further, Amtrak informed Safety Board investigators that the installation of these lower-level emergency windows and upper- and lower-level placards could take as long as 2 years. The Safety Board considers 2 years to be excessive and believes that passengers should not occupy lower-level end sleeper compartments that are not equipped with emergency exit windows or the appropriate placards with instructions for removing the exit windows from inside and from outside the compartment. This recommendation has been held in an "Open--Acceptable Action" status pending Amtrak's completion of the installation of emergency exit windows in all sleeper compartments. Based on the new information that this work could take up to 2 years, the Safety Board has reclassified Safety Recommendation R-83-64 as "Open--Unacceptable Action," reiterates Safety Recommendation R-83-64, and urges Amtrak to expedite installation of the emergency escape windows.

The Amtrak onboard service attendant who was assigned to the sleeper car that contained the handicapped, elderly woman was seriously injured and was not able to tell rescue personnel that the woman was trapped inside the compartment. Fortunately, the woman's family was able to direct rescuers to her compartment. Rescue workers were at a great disadvantage in not knowing that Amtrak had designated the lower-level compartments for handicapped passengers.

The Safety Board believes that in an emergency, all passengers should be able to be quickly located and removed from their compartments. Since most handicapped passengers probably cannot escape without assistance, the Safety Board believes that, to assist postaccident rescue procedures, the doors and windows of compartments that are occupied by handicapped passengers should be identified by the universal handicapped facilities symbol.

¹Railroad Accident Report--*Fire Onboard Amtrak Passenger Train No. 11, Coast Starlight, Gibson, California, June 23, 1982* (NTSB/RAR-83/03).

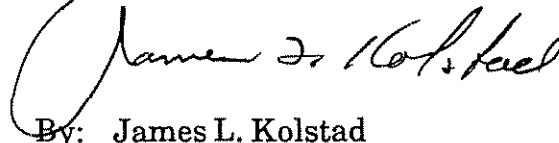
Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the National Railroad Passenger Corporation:

Install placards that show instructions for removal of sleeper car compartment windows from inside and outside the compartments. (Class I, Urgent Action) (R-88-71)

Immediately affix a placard with the universal handicapped facilities symbol on doors and windows of sleeper compartments designated for occupancy by handicapped passengers. (Class I, Urgent Action) (R-88-72)

Prohibit the use of all sleeper compartments that are not equipped with emergency exit windows. (Class I, Urgent Action) (R-88-73)

KOLSTAD, Acting Chairman, and BURNETT, LAUBER, NALL, and DICKINSON, Members, concurred in these recommendations.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James L. Kolstad". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

By: James L. Kolstad
Acting Chairman