

Log 17-351
SP.20

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: January 20, 1983

Forwarded to:

Honorable Bill Clinton, Jr.
Governor of Arkansas
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-83-1 and -2

On July 9, 1982, a 4-door Cadillac sedan, carrying nine occupants, was traveling westbound on Woodland Drive in Lake View, Arkansas, approaching a railroad/highway grade crossing. The passenger car was driven onto the crossing and was struck broadside by the lead locomotive of a Missouri Pacific (MP) freight train traveling southbound. Eight of the occupants in the Cadillac were killed and one was seriously injured. None of the train crewmembers or company officials aboard the train were injured as a result of the accident. The accident occurred at a public crossing known as C.S. Woodland Drive, located 292 feet south of MP 342 on the Missouri Pacific Louisiana division line between Paragould and McGehee, Arkansas. 1/

The Operation Lifesaver program in Arkansas is centrally coordinated by the Governor's Office of Public Safety. Much of the day to day contact with the public is done by representatives of railroad companies that operate within the State. The State, through its public affairs bureaus, provides speakers and films, and disseminates information on the program to the public when requested.

MP conducted 10 "Operation Lifesaver" community meetings along the line between Jonesboro and McGehee during the week of January 24, 1982. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss grade crossing safety with the residents before opening the newly reconditioned line and to make the residents aware that more trains, moving at faster speeds, would be running over the line. MP attempted to reach the people along the line primarily concentrated in the small towns (population 10,000 and below). At that time, the MP Operation Lifesaver program did not focus much attention on reaching the sparsely populated rural farming communities where the most trackage and passive grade crossings are located and where the typical rail-highway accident in Arkansas occurs. Grade crossing accident victims often live near the grade crossing involved.

The State has recently initiated a program to reach a broader range of drivers, and is encouraging the railroad companies to work directly with individual school districts and make Operation Lifesaver presentations in the driver's education classes. This program hopefully will inform more youthful drivers about grade crossing safety. However, the program is not designed to reach drivers in the farming communities, such as Lake View, who probably would account for the majority of the exposure. The Safety Board believes that the State of Arkansas should also focus some attention on working directly

1/ For more detailed information, read Highway Accident Report--"Automobile/Missouri Pacific Railroad Freight Train Collision, Woodland Drive, Lake View, Arkansas, July 9, 1982" (NTSB-HAR-83-1).

RTR

with the key groups in the farming communities, such as farmer's cooperatives, farm bureau associations, and local officials to inform farmers and farm equipment operators of the potential hazards at passive grade crossings in rural areas.

The State of Arkansas should encourage MP and all of the other railroad companies operating within the State to expand their active near miss programs to include the reporting of all violations of grade crossing safety laws. The information compiled from the near miss program could be used by the State to notify violators and to identify other appropriate action as required. The reporting system could also identify hazardous grade crossings and provide insights on recurring problems at hazardous crossings which require attention.

The operating railroad personnel, such as engineers, trainmen, and conductors, that are actively involved in the near miss program should also be encouraged to participate in the Operation Lifesaver program. They are the people best able to relate their day to day experiences with respect to near misses and accidents. Hopefully, this will serve to further convince the local public of the importance of grade crossing safety. Information relating to near miss experiences should be shared with local officials so that they can study the crossing involved to determine what action is needed to prevent near misses and future accidents.

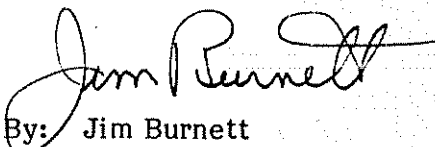
As a result of its investigation of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the State of Arkansas:

Develop a coordinated program with the railroad companies that operate within the State, to extend the Operation Lifesaver program to the rural communities where the majority of trackage and unprotected grade crossings are located by working directly with local officials, farm bureaus, and farming cooperative associations to promote grade crossing safety within rural communities. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-83-1)

Encourage all railroad companies that operate within the State to develop a near miss data system that will permit them to promptly report to the State authorities all violators of grade crossing safety laws. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-83-2)

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "... to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations." (P.L. 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, we would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendations in this letter.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and McADAMS, BURSLEY, and ENGEN, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman