



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

## Safety Recommendation

Date: October 12, 1990

In reply refer to: R-90-40

Mr. Garry Briese  
Executive Director  
International Association of Fire Chiefs  
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On February 26, 1989, CSX Transportation, Inc., freight train No. D812-26 derailed at mile post 16.1 while traveling about 43 mph over Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail) main track No. 1, near the south end of Conrail's rail yard, Akron, Ohio. Twenty-one freight cars in the train derailed, including nine tank cars filled with butane. The nine tank cars came to rest adjacent to a B.F. Goodrich Chemical Company plant, and butane released from two breached tank cars immediately caught fire. About 1,750 residents were evacuated from a 1-square-mile area. On February 28, 1989, while some of the derailed tank cars were being moved from the accident site, one tank car full of butane rolled off its trucks; as a result, about 25 families were evacuated from a second area.<sup>1</sup>

The crewmembers of freight train No. D812-26 testified at the Safety Board's public hearing on this accident that although they had never been trained on the actions to take following an emergency situation, they recognized the importance of contacting emergency response personnel immediately following a derailment and providing information regarding hazardous materials involved. Their onscene actions immediately following the derailment, however, indicate otherwise. While the traincrew quickly called and informed the dispatcher of the derailment, prudently set up signals to warn approaching trains of the derailment, and used their documents to identify the northern- and southern-most cars involved in the derailment, there appeared to be no urgency in contacting the emergency response personnel onsite and providing the necessary information regarding the contents of the tank cars involved in the derailment. The front-end crew, apparently believing that either the dispatcher or the conductor would provide the necessary information to emergency response personnel, were leaving the accident site to get a soft drink at a nearby restaurant when they encountered a local police official, who then requested that the

<sup>1</sup> National Transportation Safety Board. 1990. Derailment of a CSX Transportation freight train and fire involving butane in Akron, Ohio, February 26, 1989. Hazardous Materials Accident Report NTSB/HZM-90/02. Washington, D.C.

crewmembers meet with the fire chief. The conductor and flagman at the rear of the train were preoccupied for more than an hour attempting to prevent onlookers from approaching too closely to the burning tank cars and never did seek emergency response personnel. While the crew should make every effort to protect onlookers from the dangers of derailed tank cars, the crew should have also recognized the need to contact emergency response personnel when it became evident that emergency response agencies were onscene. The Safety Board concludes that the traincrew, contrary to company instructions, did not contact as soon as possible emergency response personnel onsite to provide them with shipping papers and vital information about hazardous materials involved in the derailment. Although the Safety Board recognizes the confusion and unpredictable situations that may arise following a hazardous materials emergency, the actions of the crew of D812-26 were not indicative of a crew that had been instructed and trained thoroughly about actions to take following an emergency involving hazardous materials.

Notwithstanding the Safety Board's concern with the actions of the traincrew following the derailment, the Safety Board believes that the emergency response personnel should have made every effort to verify the location of crewmembers and train documents on both the front-end and rear-end of the train. The conductor, who is responsible for the train documents, typically rides at the rear of the train when a caboose is used at that location. The conductor testified, however, that for the more than 1 1/2 hours he was at the rear of the train, he never came in contact with any fire department personnel. The Safety Board acknowledges that it may be difficult to determine when initially arriving at the scene of an accident whether or not the train has a caboose. Nevertheless, emergency response personnel should routinely inquire about the location of all crewmembers and onboard train documents. The Safety Board believes that the International Association of Fire Chiefs, in notifying its members of the circumstances of the accident at Akron, would be the appropriate organization to emphasize this need to local emergency response personnel.

After the fire department was confident about the information regarding hazardous materials in the derailed tank cars, onscene activities were accomplished in a timely and professional manner. These activities included the response to the tank car fires, the response to the fire at the adjacent chemical facility, and the evacuation of residents. The fire department, and the city in general, however, depended on the expertise of the railroad for the removal of the wreckage from the initial derailment site. The operations chief considered it unsafe to unload the product from the tank cars at the accident site because of the continuing fire from tank car CITX 33875 and agreed with CSX's plan to rerail the tank cars and move them to Akron Junction yard where the cars would be more permanently secured for the movement to Canton--a location with facilities where the product could then be offloaded. The railroad, however, did not discuss alternatives with the city nor did the railroad advise the city of the possible risks associated with rerailing the tank cars. Only after the second event (when the tank car rolled off its trucks while being moved after the derailment) were alternative plans and the risks associated with each course of action discussed thoroughly with city officials.

The Safety Board recognizes the limited technical resources that may be available to local communities regarding wreckage clearing operations and understands the communities' reliance on the railroad to take the appropriate course of action. For this reason, it is necessary for the railroad to discuss with the local emergency response agencies the severity of known damage to tank cars carrying hazardous materials and the dangers posed to public safety, all possible courses of actions, and any associated risks. However, it is also important that the incident commander, as the person in charge of overall activity at the scene of an accident, play an active role and search out information about the severity of known tank car damage and dangers posed, possible solutions or alternatives, and risks involved.

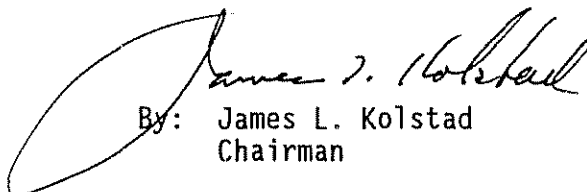
Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the International Association of Fire Chiefs:

Notify members of the International Association of Fire Chiefs about the circumstances of the accident in Akron, Ohio, on February 26, 1989, and urge them to emphasize to the appropriate emergency response personnel the need (1) to locate all crewmembers and train documents as a priority action when responding to a train accident, and (2) to search out information about the severity of known tank car damage and dangers posed, possible solutions or alternatives, and risks involved. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-90-40)

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" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations and would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation R-90-40 in your reply.

Also as a result of its investigation of this accident, the Safety Board issued safety recommendations to the CSX Transportation, Inc., the City of Akron, the Association of American Railroads, the Federal Railroad Administration, the National League of Cities, the National Association of Counties, the National Fire Protection Association, the American National Standards Institute, Inc., and the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners.

KOLSTAD, Chairman, COUGHLIN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, BURNETT, and HART, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

  
By: James L. Kolstad  
Chairman