

Log R-110

# NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 19, 1977

Forwarded to:

Honorable John M. Sullivan  
 Administrator  
 Federal Railroad Administration  
 400 Seventh Street S.W.  
 Washington, D.C. 20590

### SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-77-28

On December 11, 1976, near Sikeston, Missouri, a St. Louis-San Francisco Railway Company (SL-SF) work train struck and killed one of two teenagers who were walking along the railroad. On April 2, 1977, near Neelyville, Missouri, another SL-SF work train struck and killed one of two young motorbike riders. The investigations revealed that, in both accidents, the locomotives were moving backwards at approximately 50 mph. The SL-SF locomotives are equipped with five-chime whistles with all five chimes facing forward.

The teenager who survived the December 11 accident testified that he did not hear the whistle before becoming alarmed when he saw the reflection of a headlight shining on the rail. He turned around, saw the train closely approaching, and then heard the whistle. The engineer of the train testified that he was sounding the whistle from the moment he saw the boys, a distance of approximately one-quarter of a mile.

This accident occurred on straight, level track in a rural farm area. There was little or no background noise to mask the sound of the whistle. The weather was cold and somewhat foggy with visibility limited to approximately one-half mile.

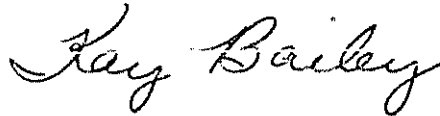
In the April 2 accident, the two boys were riding a motorbike between the main track and a siding. The boy who survived the accident testified that they did not hear the whistle at all. The engineer stated that he was blowing the whistle continuously. If they had received any previous warning by the sounding of the locomotive whistle, the accident might have been averted.

The SL-SF railroad originally had some of the chimes of the locomotive whistles facing to the rear for the purpose of recalling the flagman. In the early 1960's, when the need for flag protection was eliminated, the SL-SF remounted the whistle, with all five chimes facing forward, to provide a louder warning. When mounted in this manner, however, the effectiveness of the whistle is greatly reduced when the locomotive is moving backward.

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

Promulgate regulations which will establish minimum audible warning requirements for locomotive whistles to provide sufficient warning commensurate with the locomotive's operating speed and direction of travel. (Class II, Priority Followup) (R-77-28)

TODD, Chairman, BAILEY, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.



By: Kay Bailey  
Acting Chairman