



PRELIMINARY REPORT
RAILROAD
CSX Transportation
Roadway Maintenance Machine Operator Fatality

Wartrace, Tennessee
March 12, 2018
RRD18FR004

The information in this report is preliminary and will be either supplemented or corrected during the course of the investigation.

On March 12, 2018, about 2:15 p.m. eastern daylight time, a CSX Transportation (CSX) equipment operator was fatally injured while working with a CSX ballast regulator (roadway maintenance machine) on the main track near milepost OOJ-57.50.¹ The accident occurred near Wartrace, Tennessee, on the CSX Chattanooga Subdivision. At the time of the accident, the temperature was about 46°F, wind was 22 mph with gusts up to 32 mph, and the sky was clear.



Figure. Photograph of the ballast regulator at the accident site. The area where the operator was trapped is circled. (Photograph provided by the Federal Railroad Administration.)

¹ Although Wartrace, Tennessee, is in the central time zone, CSX operates on eastern time throughout its system. Therefore, eastern daylight time is used throughout this report.

The ballast regulator was a part of the CSX 5XS3 (S3) Surfacing Team. The S3 Surfacing Team is a system-production work group that consists of about eight roadway maintenance machines, and 20 employees including: machine operators, vehicle operators, and laborers. The task assigned to the S3 Surfacing Team on the day of the accident was to surface track between milepost OOJ-55.0 and milepost OOJ-58.0.

The S3 Surfacing Team went on duty at about 8:00 a.m. on the day of the accident at their lodging location in Monteagle, Tennessee. Because of snow in the area, the S3 Surfacing Teams's travel to the work location was delayed. The operator who died had 39 years of railroad experience and had been operating this type of equipment for more than 7 years.

A CSX manager was traveling in the area when he saw the operator climbing into the regulator cab. Shortly thereafter, he heard a radio transmission from the operator reporting a problem with a proximity switch on the ballast regulator. The operator added that he had temporarily addressed the issue, but further repairs would be needed. The manager drove toward the ballast regulator to assist the operator. When the manager arrived at the ballast regulator, he saw the operator under the east regulator wing. The manager then radioed the other S3 team members to assist. One of the employees phoned 911 at about 2:19 p.m.

During interviews, National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigators asked about the positions of the regulator controls, as they were found after the accident. The CSX employees who responded said that the change of direction control was in the reverse position, the service brake was applied, and the engine throttle was on. NTSB investigators verified that the with the controls set in this configuration, the ballast regulator would move with no operator in the cab.

Parties to the investigation are the Federal Railroad Administration, CSX, and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees.²

² The Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes spells the word "Employes" in its name with one e. Therefore, we are using that spelling in this report.