NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
Public Meeting of April 10, 2018
(Information subject to editing)

Collision of Two Southwestern Railroad Freight Trains
Roswell, New Mexico
April 28, 2015
NTSB/RAR-18-04

This is a synopsis from the National Transportation Safety Board's report and does not include the Board's rationale for the conclusions, probable cause, and safety recommendations. NTSB staff is currently making final revisions to the report from which the attached conclusions and safety recommendations have been extracted. The final report and pertinent safety recommendation letters will be distributed to recommendation recipients as soon as possible. The attached information is subject to further review and editing to reflect changes adopted during the Board meeting.

Executive Summary

On April 28, 2015, at 6:23 a.m. mountain daylight time, a westbound Southwestern Railroad freight train with nine locomotives and 79 cars collided with Southwestern's Roswell Local standing freight train. The striking train traveled through a switch that was in the reverse position at the east end of Chisum siding just south of Roswell, New Mexico. The two crewmembers on the lead locomotive of the striking train jumped before impact. The engineer died, and the conductor was seriously injured. Nine locomotives derailed from the striking train. Two locomotives and three empty hopper cars derailed from the standing train. Southwestern, which owned both trains, estimated the damage at $2.01 million. Sunrise was at 6:14 a.m. – 9 minutes before the accident; visibility was 10 miles.

The crew of the standing train had secured their train on the Chisum siding and gone off duty at 6:00 a.m.; they were not in the area at the time of the accident. The conductor of the standing train later told a manager that he had failed to line the switch for normal main track movement at the Chisum siding.

This report addresses the following safety issues:

- **Hand-thrown switches in nonsignaled territory.** Over the years, the NTSB has investigated numerous accidents that were caused after crewmembers failed to properly line switches.
- **Monitoring activity in locomotive cabs.** In-cab audio and image recorders have shown to be helpful in encouraging compliance with federal regulations and railroad rules. These recorders also provide valuable information for investigators. The engineer of the striking train tested positive for marijuana and likely used while on duty.

PROBABLE CAUSE

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the accident was that the conductor of the Roswell Local train failed to return the switch for main track movement because he was fatigued. Contributing to the accident was that the striking train crew did not perceive the misaligned switch in nonsignaled territory and stop the train before reaching it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

New Recommendation

As a result of its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board makes the following new safety recommendation:

To the Federal Railroad Administration:

1. Require railroads to develop a device or technique to eliminate the possibility of employees failing to perform critical tasks such as lining a switch, lining a derail, or ensuring cars are in the clear.

Reiterated Recommendations

As a result of its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board reiterates the following safety recommendations:

To the Federal Railroad Administration:

1. Require the installation, in all controlling locomotive cabs and cab car operating compartments of crash- and fire-protected inward- and outward-facing audio and image recorders capable of providing recordings to verify that train crew actions are in accordance with rules and procedures that are essential to safety as well as train operating condition. The devices should have a minimum 12-hour continuous recording capability with recordings that are easily accessible for review, with appropriate limitations on public release, for the investigation of accidents or for use by management in carrying out efficiency testing and systemwide performance monitoring programs. (R-10-1)
2. Require that railroads regularly review and use in-cab audio and image recordings (with appropriate limitations on public release), in conjunction with other performance data, to verify that train crew actions are in accordance with rules and procedures that are essential to safety. (R-10-2)

3. Require railroads to install, along main lines in non-signaled territory not equipped with positive train control, appropriate technology that warns approaching trains of incorrectly lined main track switches sufficiently in advance to permit stopping. (R-12-27)