



DCA16FR001
Norfolk Southern Corporation
February, 20, 2016
New Orleans, LA

National Transportation Safety Board

Factual Report

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Party Spokespersons

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Accident No.: DCA-16-FR-001
Location: New Orleans, Louisiana
Date: February 20, 2016
Time: 6:10 a.m. central standard time¹
Railroad: Norfolk Southern Corporation
Property Damage: None
Injuries: 0
Fatalities: 1
Type of Accident: Train strike resulting in employee fatality

Synopsis

On February 20, 2016, at approximately 6:10 a.m., Norfolk Southern (NS) Train #298 struck and fatally injured a NS Terminal Trainmaster (trainmaster) on main track #2 at milepost 186 of the NE Subdivision, Alabama Division.

At the time of the accident, the trainmaster may have been placing shunt straps on the field running rail of track #2 to perform an efficiency test on the train ²

The accident occurred during a time when visibility was impacted by time of day (dawn) and low-lying fog.

Accident

According to initial statements made by the crew of NS train #298, as the train approached on main track #2 at milepost 186.8, the engineer observed a yellow object in the gage of the track about 5 car lengths ahead and initiated an emergency brake application. The engineer further stated to FRA inspectors that it appeared that the trainmaster was lying face down across the east rail of

¹ All times in this report are recorded in central standard time.

² *Shunting* involves making an electrical connection between the two running rails to simulate the presence of a train, typically with a cable. Shunting causes the signal system to display stop indications to trains approaching the area where shunts are applied.

track #2. The engineer stated he did not have time to blow the horn from when he noticed the trainmaster fouling the tracks until the time the strike took place. The trainmaster was found wearing a safety vest, and a hand lantern, eye protection, shunting straps, radio, and company cell phone were also found at the scene. According to the NS Terminal Superintendent the speed of the train before impact was 58 mph.

The fatally injured trainmaster was a junior level (B-3) manager 26 years of age, who started working at the New Orleans NS facility in October 2015. He was a recent graduate of NS's management trainee program. His first position with NS was trainmaster and he was assigned and qualified under Part 217 (Railroad Operating Rules) as of October 2015. He was also qualified under NS Operating Rules as of December 2014. According to the FRA inspectors, under the Division Superintendent's guidance and instructions, all B-3 managers were not to conduct main line banner tests without the presence of a senior level manager. According to the Terminal Superintendent the banner that would have been used for a banner test was still in the employee's vehicle at the time of the accident.

According to the Terminal Supervisor, the fatally injured employee participated in a morning call at the Oliver Yard Office at 5:15 a.m. During this call the employee did not disclose to the Yardmaster or Trainmaster his intention to go to the accident location. Around 5:38 a.m. the employee left the yard. The employee's shift which started at 6:00 p.m. on Friday, February 19, 2016 was scheduled to end at 6:00 a.m. the date of the accident.

It is approximately a 15-minute drive from the yard to the accident location. The employee parked his company vehicle on the public street adjacent to the right of way (ROW). Access to

the ROW from the street is gained by walking up a levee, jumping a fence, and stepping down onto railroad property.

According to the FRA, the location where the accident occurred is 1,404 feet north of the south facing signal at Lakefront. According to the Terminal Superintendent, this signal is known in NS terminology as CP “Lakefront”, it is a new signal installation that was activated on December 2, 2015. He also stated that he is aware that other employees including himself have conducted efficiency tests at this location.

Operations

Two main tracks are located at the location of the accident. The maximum authorized speed is 60 mph. Train movements are governed by signal indications of a traffic control system. Operating through the accident location daily is a minimum of 12 trains including 2 Amtrak trains. The striking train, #298 is the first scheduled northbound train of the morning departing the terminal every morning at approximately 5:40 a.m. This is then followed by an Amtrak train that passes through the accident location around 7:30 a.m. The next northbound scheduled freight train is not until the late afternoon. The crew of Train #298 consisted of an engineer and conductor on locomotive #8783.

Operating Rules

Operating instructions governing employees and train movements of the Norfolk Southern Railway Company include the Operating Rules, effective January 1, 2015. Also governing train movements is the Alabama Division Timetable Number 1, effective August 4, 2008. Several Operations Bulletins are also in effect, which govern train movements.

Weather

The weather at the time of the accident was foggy and mist with skies obscured. The station model for New Orleans indicated wind calm, and a temperature of 62° Fahrenheit (F). Visibility was reported at ¼ mile in dense fog. The National Weather Service (NWS) New Orleans/Baton Rouge Weather Forecast Office (WSO) issued a Dense Fog Advisory for the area after 4:00 a.m. and was valid until 9:00 a.m.



Photo of railroad employees at accident scene, heavy fog is present.

NS Requirements for efficiency testing

Federal regulations contained in 49 C.F.R. Part 217 require that Norfolk Southern have a program to periodically conduct operational tests and inspections to determine the extent of compliance with its code of operating rules, timetables, and timetable special instructions.

Norfolk Southern's primary operational testing program is called RP-1, Supervisor Guidelines for Conducting Efficiency Checks. The following is an overview of Norfolk Southern's RP-1 program:

1. The RP-1 is Norfolk Southern's primary program for conducting and recording federally mandated (49 C.F.R. 217.9) operational tests and inspections documenting employee compliance with railroad operating rules and instructions. Norfolk Southern's RP-1 records are electronically stored in a database, making them readily available for inspection and analysis.

2. The purpose of the RP-1 is to establish and maintain a safe and efficient work environment for all employees.

3. Rule checks are to be conducted in a fair and impartial manner and under no circumstances will the Efficiency Check Program be used as a tool for harassment.

4. The Norfolk Southern Transportation Department Efficiency Check Program contains sixteen (16) categories:
 - a. Approach/Stop Signals;
 - b. Restricted Speed;
 - c. Authorized Speed;
 - d. Switching Operations;
 - e. Train Dispatchers;
 - f. Equipment Operation, Handling and Securement;
 - g. Personal Safety;
 - h. Rule G;
 - i. Train Movement;

- j. Communications;
- k. Blue Signals;
- l. Hazardous Materials;
- m. Mandatory Directive Rules
- n. Roadway Worker Protection;
- o. On-Track Equipment; and
- p. Remote Control Operations.

5. The RP-1 provides basic guidelines and establishes minimum requirements for the quality and type of efficiency checks to be conducted when monitoring compliance with:

- a. Norfolk Southern Operating Rules;
- b. Norfolk Southern Safety and General Conduct Rules;
- c. Norfolk Southern Equipment Operation and Handling Rules;
- d. HM-1 – Hazardous Materials Rules
- e. System Timetable Instructions;
- f. HV-1 Highway Vehicle Operators Guide
- g. MSB – Mechanical Safety Bulletins

6. Each supervisor who conducts operational tests and inspections shall: (1) Be qualified on the railroad's Operating Rules (Annual Supervisor's exam); (2) be qualified on the Efficiency Check Program requirements and procedures relative to the testing the supervisor will conduct (RP-1 training); (3) receive appropriate field training from a testing supervisor/coach, as necessary

to achieve proficiency on each operational test the supervisor is authorized to conduct; and (4) conduct operational tests in accordance with the RP-1 Program.

7. Rule checks must be conducted:

- a. At various times and days of the week;
- b. On various dates;
- c. At various locations;
- d. On weekends and holidays;
- e. On safety sensitive rules; and
- f. For procedural compliance with the rules.

8. Transportation supervisors, like the trainmaster, are required to conduct and record checks on transportation employees, in accordance with the provisions of the RP-1, to ensure compliance with rules having application to their territory and to maintain safety of operations. Checks may also be conducted on any Norfolk Southern or foreign railroad employee when working or operating on Norfolk Southern tracks.

9. Trainmasters must conduct a minimum of four (4) train rides per month. For road trains, these rides must cover a minimum of fifty (50) miles unless riding with a local. Local train rides must be at least three (3) hours. Terminal train rides must be at least two (2) hours.

10. A minimum of four (4) banner tests per month are required pursuant to the RP-1. Some

Divisions of Norfolk Southern, including the Alabama Division where the trainmaster was employed, require additional banner checks as determined by the Division Superintendent. Effective February 1, 2016, the Alabama Division requires two (2) banner checks per week, which includes one yard or local per week and one (1) road train per week.

A total of 351,956 operational tests and inspections were recorded as conducted on the Alabama Division during 2015.

Management Trainee Program

The Norfolk Southern Management Training Program (“Program”) includes, in addition to a two-week orientation, technical training (at Norfolk Southern’s McDonough, GA Training Center), management/leadership training (including courses on communication skills, financial metrics, best practices management skills, conflict resolution, behavior-based safety, and people development), department rotations, and field experiences.

More specifically, during the Program, trainees receive three weeks of leadership training as well as additional training via virtual and e-learning modalities, which occur throughout the entire course of the program. The leadership training includes an initial orientation to Norfolk Southern and then focuses on core leadership expectations and behaviors at Norfolk Southern. Employee Development collaborates with each Department to outline performance standards for trainee on-the-job training. Typically, on-the-job training is broken into four (4) phases to address foundational skills and knowledge, develop familiarity, gain fluency, and build proficiency in preparation for promotion.

Each phase includes defined performance standards required to progress to the next phase of the Program. Training outside the Program depends on the nature of training, technical or leadership training. Norfolk Southern offers employee development training based on the individual's level in the organization (e.g., individual performer versus manager) and their status within that role (e.g., new to role). The focus is on developing leaders at all levels. Technical training is based on the individual's operating department and is based on Norfolk Southern and federal regulatory requirements.

Program completion is based on successfully meeting the performance standards for the trainee's assigned Department and position. The trainmaster successfully completed a twelve-month program that included conductor certification training consistent with Norfolk Southern's approved FRA Part 242 submission. The trainmaster also learned the specifics of a trainmaster position including efficiency testing.

All trainees receive a trainee manual that outlines performance standards for each phase of training. Each performance standard includes behavioral examples representative of satisfactory performance. Performance is evaluated at the end of each phase of the Program to ensure performance meets Norfolk Southern defined expectations.

A trainees' initial assignment after completion of the Program is based on their designated Division, business requirements, and geographic preference.

Post-Accident Actions

On March 4, 2016 NS released an internal Safety Alert to employees describing the preliminary facts of the accident. The Safety Alert included bulleted tips to remind employees to exercise caution around the right of way.

Please refer to the public docket for the Party Sign-Off Forms.