NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Office of Research and Engineering
Washington, DC

July 21, 2014

Medical Factual

Mary Pat McKay, MD, MPH
Chief Medical Officer

A. ACCIDENT: DCA12MR009

Location: Ellicott City, Maryland
Date: August 20, 2012
Company: CSX Transportation (CSX)
Train ID: U81318

On August 20, 2012, about 11:56 p.m. eastern daylight time (EDT), eastbound CSX Transportation (CSX) coal train U81318 consisting of two locomotives and 80 cars loaded with coal, derailed the lead 21 cars at milepost 12.9 on the CSX Old Main Line Subdivision in Ellicott City, Maryland. Six of the 21 coal cars fell into a public parking area that was about 15 feet below track level on the north side. Other loaded coal cars involved in the derailment were overturned, spilling their content along the north side of the track. Two people that were sitting on the north side of the railroad bridge at the time of the derailment sustained fatal injuries. No other injuries were reported and there was no evacuation.

B. GROUP IDENTIFICATION:

No medical group was convened.

C. DETAILS OF INVESTIGATION

1. Purpose of Study

   Describe the mechanism of injury for the two victims.

2. Methods

   Reports from the Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner including autopsy findings and toxicology reports were reviewed.

3. Results

a. Teenager #1
According to the autopsy, the cause of death for this 19 year old woman was compressional asphyxia and the manner of death was accident. No natural disease was identified on the autopsy. The record noted that the woman had been seen consuming alcoholic beverages prior to the accident.

Post mortem toxicology testing by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Maryland identified ethanol at 0.03 gm/dL in both vitreous and heart blood and at 0.04gm/dL in urine. Urine testing for drugs was negative.

b. Teenager #2
The second victim was also a 19 year old woman. According to the autopsy, the cause of death was compressional asphyxia and the manner of death was accident. No natural disease was identified on the autopsy. The record noted that she had also been seen consuming alcoholic beverages prior to the accident.

Post mortem toxicology testing was performed by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Maryland and identified ethanol in vitreous at 0.05 gm/dL, in peripheral blood at 0.08gm/dL, and in heart blood at 0.23gm/dL.

D. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Both teenagers died of compressive asphyxia. Both had been seen drinking alcoholic beverages prior to the accident and both had ethanol identified on toxicology testing.