BNSF rear-end train collision, April 17, 2011. NTSB Accident Number DCA-11-FR-003.

Notes of Interview

Date: April 20, 2011

Location: Red Oak Fire Department Headquarters, Red Oak, Iowa.

Personnel: Mike Flanigon (NTSB), Lorenda Ward (NTSB), Chief Rick Askey (Red Oak FD), Volunteer Fire Fighter Doug Cashatt (Red Oak FD).

Chief Askey provided a printout from Montgomery County Sheriff's 911 call center. First call was received from the engineer of the struck train at 0657. There were six additional calls received. The logs show dispatch at 0659 and ROFD personnel on scene at 0706. Four additional fire departments also responded in line with pre-existing mutual aid agreements. He noted that ROFD was completing a report on the incident response and would provide a copy to NTSB.

Chief Askey advised that first contact on-scene was with the BNSF crew of the struck train who raised the possibility that the crew on the striking coal train may have jumped off before the impact. A thorough search of the area was conducted by three different teams with no sighting.

Chief Askey described first encountering diesel fires in three areas: (1) around the front of the lead locomotive (BNSF 9159), by the second locomotive (BNSF 6133) and at one of the struck railroad cars (Herzog clip car) near the original point of collision fed by a large diesel fuel tank. He described a small leak from the fuel tank of BNSF 9159 and a much larger leak from the fuel tank on BNSF 6133. He also noted evidence of a "flash" fire on the west side of a roadway bridge that was between the point of collision and point of rest.

Chief Askey reported that it took about 2 hours to extinguish the fires. Fire suppression began at about 07:15am. Initial fire suppression was with 50 gallons of class A foam at 1.5%. A supply of class B foam arrived on scene about 30" into the response and 150 gallons were consumed at 3%. Fire suppression was complete at about 09:15am.

Chief Askey also provided a print out and electronic copies of digital images to NTSB taken during the ROFD response.

Firefighter Cashatt indicated that cooperation, communication and support from BNSF were good. Safety briefings were held at appropriate points during the course of the response and BNSF was responsive with information and resources.

Chief Askey advised that both BNSF and ROFD tried to preserve the scene and other evidence as much as possible. However, the pile up of cars and equipment on top of the BNSF locomotive 9159 was judged to be precarious and unsafe for ROFD personnel to attempt to reach the location of the crew's bodies. BNSF's contractor was tasked with removing and/or shoring up equipment to make access safe.

During removal of one of the last railroad cars from the BNSF 9159, the cab module was displaced and ended up on the south side of the locomotive. When the cab module was stabilized, entry was accomplished using hydraulic rams to open the skylight area of the cab module roof. The bodies were located at about 1609 and removal was accomplished at about 1638. Chief Askey led the recovery team and indicated that the cab roof was crushed to the top of the seats. He noted that there was open space between the floor and the seat tops. He indicated that the engineer's body was found impaled on the engineer's seat and that the conductor's body was behind the engineer's seat. The Montgomery County coroner had been on-scene earlier in the day and provided instructions for transport of the remains as autopsies were planned. Remains were transported to Ankeny, Iowa in line with the coroner's instructions.

Chief Askey advised that ROFD participated in annual training with BNSF and that he felt they were well prepared for a response to a railroad accident of this type. He noted that based on prior familiarization training he was able to shut down the diesel engine on locomotive 6133 that was still idling.

No injuries to responders were reported.

End of Notes