

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

BNSF TRAIN DERAILMENT AND COLLISION *
CASSELTON, NORTH DAKOTA *
DECEMBER 30, 2013 *

* Docket No. DCA-14-MR-004

* * * * *

Interview of: TODD DUTCHUK

Holiday Inn
Fargo, North Dakota

Wednesday,
January 1, 2014

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: MICHAEL HILLER
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL HILLER, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

RAYMOND LINDSEY
MICHAEL BUCHHOLTZ
Operating Practices
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

KEVIN WILDE, General Director
System Safety
BNSF Railway

B.J. SHILLINGSTAD
UTU Transportation Safety Team
SMART/UTU

DANIEL KENNER
Safety Task Force
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and
Trainmen (BLET)

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Todd Dutchuk:

By Mr. Hiller

5

I N T E R V I E W

(12:00 p.m.)

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3 MR. HILLER: All right. Good afternoon. It is 12:00
4 p.m., Wednesday, January 1st, 2014. My name is Michael Hiller,
5 H-i-l-l-e-r. I am the Railroad Group investigator for accident
6 number DCA-14-MR-004. And today we are in the room speaking to --
7 I'm sorry, could you --

8 MR. DUTCHUK: Todd --

9 MR. HILLER: Todd.

10 MR. DUTCHUK: Dutchuk, D-u-t-c-h-u-k, signal maintainer.

11 MR. HILLER: Signal maintainer for the?

12 MR. DUTCHUK: BNSF Railway.

13 MR. HILLER: BNSF Railway. Okay.

14 So, today we are in Fargo, North Dakota, at the Holiday
15 Inn interviewing, and we are going to talk a little bit about some
16 observations that were made by the Signal maintainer. So, in the
17 room today I have with me, starting with Kevin --

18 MR. WILDE: Kevin Wilde, W-i-l-d-e, BNSF Railway,
19 Safety.

20 MR. KENNER: Dan Kenner, K-e-n-n-e-r, B-L-E-T.

21 MR. SHILLINGSTAD: B.J. Shillingstad,
22 S-h-i-l-l-i-n-g-s-t-a-d, SMART Union.

23 MR. LINDSEY: Raymond Lindsey, L-i-n-d-s-e-y, FRA
24 Operating Practices.

25 MR. BUCHHOLTZ: Michael Buchholtz, B-u-c-h-h-o-l-t-z,

1 FRA Operating Practices.

2 MR. HILLER: All right. Thank you, gentlemen.

3 INTERVIEW OF TODD DUTCHUK

4 BY MR. HILLER:

5 Q. So, Todd, what I'd like you to do is start from the
6 beginning of your day. Describe to us how you came on duty, what
7 your assignment was for the day, and walk us up to the point where
8 you made your observations. So, please begin.

9 A. My day started at 8:15 at my house as I was coming off
10 hours of service. So I started at 8:15, and I was going to head
11 over to the signal shop in Casselton at the First Avenue North.
12 And I checked my computer, and I had a pending call waiting for me
13 to go to Wheatland -- or between KO Junction and Double Track
14 Magnolia, on the Jamestown Subdivision. So, I went there and got
15 a track warrant and worked for an hour or two. And then after
16 that, I went to KO Junction. A track inspector called me and said
17 there was some material from the heaters laying out there. So I
18 went there and got a track and time on main 2 for about 20
19 minutes.

20 And then it was nearing noon. From 12 p.m., I went to
21 the signal shop in Casselton to catch up on some paperwork and
22 payroll. And I was probably there for about an hour, hour and 45
23 minutes maybe, till about 1:45 or so. And then I went to the CAT
24 Center Control Point because I was going to check on the switch
25 heaters there. And I was parked on the north side of main 1, just

1 west of the west crossover switch. My vehicle was facing an
2 easterly direction and I was approximately, probably maybe 100 to
3 200 feet off the ballast line on the roadway --

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. -- facing east. And what I observed -- I was getting
6 ready to call someone and I was firing up my computer because I
7 wanted to see if I could get track and time to check on these
8 heaters, you know, at the control point. So, I was looking
9 downward and all of a sudden the train -- the westbound grain
10 train came -- was coming through the plant. I couldn't tell how
11 fast it was going, but all of a sudden I look up and I noticed the
12 fiberglass switch heater covers that cover the switch, that cover
13 the ductwork to keep the switch clean, I noticed they were
14 starting to peel and roll towards the west, from east to west.
15 And I couldn't see what was peeling them, because they were -- all
16 I could see was the covers, the black covers. I couldn't see what
17 was actually peeling them.

18 And my first response was, put my vehicle in drive and
19 head away, head to the east, because in the past I've -- you know,
20 when you start dragging material -- I wanted to get away, and I
21 didn't know if it was something big or not. And it was big enough
22 to go down and start pulling that covers off, so I put it in drive
23 and I started driving to the east.

24 And I got on the radio, and I don't know the exact time
25 -- I believe it was between 14:05 and 14:10, somewhere in there,

1 but I'm not positive. But I got on the radio to the train crew
2 and I didn't even have -- I don't think I even had their ID at
3 that point, but I called the westbound train and I said I think
4 you're dragging something. And I don't even remember at this
5 point if they responded to me or not. It seems like it was
6 shortly after that that it all -- that they dropped air and I
7 heard -- I was listening to the radio because I couldn't even see
8 the derailment because it was behind me, but I -- as I was driving
9 I felt -- I think I might have felt them drop air, and they're on
10 the radio and they said, we've lost air. And at that point I was
11 still listening to the radio, and then I was going to drive -- I
12 was driving to the east so I could get on the highway that
13 parallels the tracks, Highway 10, and head back west towards the
14 front of the train.

15 And as I was heading out, I heard the train -- one train
16 -- I didn't know there was a second train at that point yet, and
17 all I heard was a train crew say, we have a fire, and they're
18 pretty panicky on the radio. And I said, they have a fire. We
19 have to get out of here. And I couldn't even believe why they
20 were still on the radio -- I was just like, get out, you know what
21 I mean? I'm heading that way and -- it was wild.

22 But I got out on -- towards the highway, and I called
23 911. And I'm not sure exactly what time it was, but I looked at
24 my -- I called the dispatcher at about 1415 or 1416, but I'm sure
25 I called 911 a little bit before that and told them. And it was a

1 few minutes and there was a sheriff out on the highway.

2 And there was also a crew hauler. I stopped and talked
3 to the gentlemen in the crew hauler or like an Explorer, and he
4 must have been working with the grain train or something. Then he
5 come back and he was -- I don't even know his name, but he said he
6 was going to head back to the west to help the crew or something.

7 And I called the dispatcher, because the sheriff wanted
8 us to disconnect the cars. So I was trying -- you know, I wasn't
9 getting much on the radio, and so I got the dispatcher on the
10 phone and he called the train crew. I didn't even know there was
11 a second train crew, or which train crew went and unbuckled the
12 remaining oil cars to move it away.

13 But as far as seeing anything more than that, that's
14 about all I saw. I didn't actually see the train derail, you
15 know. Where I was at, the train was still on the tracks. And
16 when it come by me it was on the tracks, but I did see the
17 material -- something peeling it. I didn't see any wheels or
18 anything, you know. It wasn't really shaking yet or anything, but
19 it was dragging something. And that's about all I saw.

20 Q. Thanks, Todd. A question: So you're sitting north side
21 of main 1 and you're right near the switch heater --

22 A. Pretty close to it, yes.

23 Q. Pretty close?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Okay. So I think, as I recall being out there, there's

1 a sort of a small little side road there --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. -- and maybe about 25 feet of snow pack before you get
4 to the switch, something like that?

5 A. Something like that probably.

6 Q. Okay. So --

7 A. It doesn't look the same right now because it's all
8 bulldozed over, but --

9 Q. I know.

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. But the -- when you arrived there, you were -- you had
12 called for track and time so you could go do --

13 A. I haven't called yet. I was just going to fire up my
14 computer, and I didn't even have my computer up, so I didn't know
15 what trains were in the area --

16 Q. Right.

17 A. -- but I had the TMDS, I didn't have it -- I don't know,
18 we lose signal a lot, so you have to --

19 Q. TMDS is what?

20 A. Smart Mobile Client.

21 Q. Okay. So, it's like --

22 A. That's what I get my authority with.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. So I don't even call the dispatcher. I just click on
25 this control point for this amount of time and then I tag --

1 there's a text, you text them.

2 Q. Okay. So at that point there was no train, correct?

3 A. When I arrived there, there was no train --

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. -- direction.

6 Q. Okay. And of course, the train that --

7 A. There may have been one lined up -- I mean, he hadn't
8 arrived yet. I mean, I didn't look down the tracks to see either
9 direction. I just kind of came in and turned around and, you
10 know, monitored the radio, and I was going to get my computer up
11 and running. I don't -- I didn't even look at the tracks or
12 anything, you know, so --

13 Q. Did you see the train approaching?

14 A. I didn't see the engine. You know, I mean I was looking
15 down. I don't even know if I saw the engine because my truck
16 radio was -- you know, everything's loud in your truck and, you
17 know, you're doing something and I just kind of looked up and --
18 he didn't make a lot of noise right away coming into the plant.
19 But I was sitting there and, you know, as the train was passing, I
20 noticed. I don't know how long after it entered the plant or
21 anything, you know. I wasn't really paying attention until I
22 started seeing that material starting to break away from the
23 track, you know. Then I was thinking about myself and I got to
24 get out of here; I don't know what's going on, you know.

25 Q. Okay. Did you happen to hear a horn or anything like

1 that before the train came through?

2 A. Not really -- like a train horn?

3 Q. Yes.

4 A. No.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. And I don't know if they would have blown it or not.

7 Q. Um-hum. All right.

8 So, do you have any understanding or awareness of what
9 car in the train -- how far into the train it was to -- that was
10 dragging or that was peeling away the switch heater cover?

11 A. I would say it was in the, you know, the first half of
12 the train, you know, because of where the train stopped -- where
13 they lost air, and there were still cars parked, you know --

14 Q. And I'm going to ask this, did you notice a car number
15 or anything like that, or the type of car that was dragging and
16 peeling away?

17 A. I didn't notice that.

18 Q. A color?

19 A. I didn't notice. I noticed the cars -- once the trains
20 came to -- stopped and I got back in there, you know, I noticed
21 that it was -- there was grain cars. But when I got to the
22 highway, I didn't know if it was a grain car, it was like a mixed
23 train, you know. Because I could see oil cars and grain cars and
24 I'm looking from a ways away, so I didn't know. You know, I was
25 pretty confused as to what was even happening myself, as to

1 whether there was -- I mean, it took a while before it even sunk
2 into me that there was two trains, you know.

3 Q. Um-hum.

4 A. I thought there was -- initially I thought there was one
5 train. And, you know, I might have thought it was a grain train,
6 you know, at first, but I don't know. I thought when I called the
7 train, I thought I just called westbound. I might have said
8 westbound grain train or westbound train; I'm not even positive
9 what I said anymore on the radio, but --

10 MR. HILLER: Okay. That's all the questions I have.
11 Kevin?

12 MR. WILDE: I don't have any, Todd. Thank you.

13 MR. HILLER: Sounds good.

14 MR. SHILLINGSTAD: None from me.

15 MR. LINDSEY: Nothing.

16 MR. BUCHHOLTZ: No, sir. Thank you.

17 MR. HILLER: All right. Thanks.

18 No further questions here. Then concludes this
19 interview and the time is 12:16.

20 Thank you Todd.

21 MR. DUTCHUK: All right.

22 (Whereupon, at 12:16 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: BNSF TRAIN DERAILMENT AND COLLISION
 CASSELTON, NORTH DAKOTA
 DECEMBER 30, 2013
 Interview of Todd Dutchuk

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-14-MR-004

PLACE: Fargo, North Dakota

DATE: January 1, 2014

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.

Anne Gunn
Transcriber