



PRELIMINARY REPORT

RAILROAD

Union Pacific Railroad Employee Fatality in Remote-Control Locomotive Operation

Arlington, Texas
September 22, 2017
DCA17FR013

The information in this report is preliminary and will be either supplemented or corrected during the course of the investigation.

On September 22, 2017, at 11:06 a.m. central daylight time, Union Pacific Railroad (UP) train (Y-GW51R-22) derailed one boxcar in the UP Great Southwestern Yard in Arlington, Texas. The yard is located on the UP Dallas Subdivision of the UP Fort Worth Service Unit. The train was crewed by a footboard yardmaster (foreman) and a helper.¹ The train struck and killed the helper.

The train consisted of three remote-control locomotives and five empty boxcars. At the time of the accident, the locomotives were remote-controlled. The train was moving five cars into yard track 101 at 8.2 mph. The crew planned to couple eight cars that were about 700 feet from the point of derailment.

The foreman had 39 years of railroad experience at the UP Great Southwestern Yard. The helper had 19 years of railroad experience.

The helper was controlling an eastward movement while riding the rear car of the five-car train to protect the point when the remote-control locomotive initiated an emergency stop, and the man-down broadcast message was sent over the railroad radio.² The foreman was riding in the lead locomotive. When he heard the man-down broadcast, he attempted to contact the helper by radio. Receiving no response, the foreman went to the rear of the train where he found the helper between the third and fourth boxcars. The rearmost boxcar was derailed. (See figure 1.) The foreman told investigators that he immediately radioed for assistance, requesting someone call 911 for an ambulance.

¹ A footboard yardmaster is a foreman who has the additional duties of gathering paperwork and designing work for the day. This report will refer to the footboard yardmaster as the foreman on the job.

² The UP rules require the monitoring of remote-control operation radio transmissions for man-down messages transmitted by the remote-control locomotive radios. Following a man-down message transmittal, employees must follow local emergency response procedures.



Figure 1. Photo of derailed boxcar.

The weather conditions at the time of the accident were the following: wind was from the south at 9.2 mph, the visibility was 10 miles or more, and the temperature was 82°F. No precipitation had occurred in the previous 24 hours.

The two crewmembers went on duty at 6:01 a.m. on September 22, 2017, at the UP Garrett Yard office. Before leaving the yard office, the crewmembers planned the work for the day and conducted a job briefing, including a review of bulletins and the cars in the yard.

About 7:30 a.m., the helper secured the remote-control locomotive zone. This action allowed the crewmembers to pull railcars at the customer facilities. The crewmembers drove their personal automobiles from the UP Garrett Yard to the UP Great Southwestern Yard; they walked to their assigned remote-control locomotives. They serviced the three locomotives. They linked their remote-control transmitters to the RCL control unit and conducted a vigilance test on the ground. At the time of the accident, the only train moving in the yard was the accident train.