

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of:

*

*

BNSF RAILWAY ROADWAY WORKER

*

FATALITIES IN EDMONTON, SOUTH

*

Accident No.: DCA17FR004

DAKOTA ON JANUARY 17, 2017

*

*

* * * * *

Interview of: JAMES KORECKY

Sunday,
January 22, 2017

APPEARANCES:

CY GURA, Rail Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

ADAM MILLER, General Director, Maintenance
BNSF Railway

I N D E XITEMPAGE

Interview of James Korecky:

By Mr. Gura

4

I N T E R V I E W

(7:53 a.m.)

1
2
3 MR. GURA: My name is Cy Gura, and this interview is being
4 conducted on January 22nd, 2017 at approximately 7:53 a.m. with
5 the witness, Mr. Jim Korecky, in regards with the incident that
6 occurred on January 17th, 2017, at 10:09 Mountain Standard Time,
7 near Edgemont, South Dakota.

8 The purpose of the investigation is to increase safety, not
9 to assign fault, blame or liability. The NTSB cannot offer any
10 guarantee of confidentiality or immunity from legal certificate
11 actions. The transcript or summary of the interview will go into
12 the public docket. And the interviewee can have representative of
13 his choice.

14 Jim, do you have a representative with you here today?

15 MR. KORECKY: No, I do not.

16 MR. GURA: Okay. Thank you.

17 My name, for the record, is Cy, C-y, Gura, G-u-r-a,
18 investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board.

19 Please identify yourself, and spell your last names.

20 MR. KORECKY: James Korecky, K-o-r-e-c-k-y, witness.

21 MR. MILLER: Adam Miller, M-i-l-l-e-r, General Director,
22 Maintenance, BNSF.

INTERVIEW OF JAMES KORECKY

23
24 BY MR. GURA:

25 Q. Jim, if you would, just tell me, on the day of the incident,

1 Tuesday, first thing in the morning, tell me when you came to
2 work, what you did, what you heard, and your interaction with the
3 track department.

4 A. Okay. I got into the office about 5:30. Got there to brief
5 with a train crew that was going to be moving some cars stored off
6 the Deadwood Y. We were late getting a full crew, so I think it
7 was about 6:15 before we got the full crew. But briefed with them
8 on the moves that they were going to be making. They headed out,
9 got started, around 6:30. I went back to my office to take care
10 of some other business.

11 Somewhere around 7:30 or 8:00, Tony Erickson had gone out to
12 check on the crew to see how they were doing with their moves with
13 the cars in the Deadwood Y. He called back to the office where
14 myself and Shad Sowers were, and said that the guys were -- that
15 crew was still working with the -- that train crew was still
16 working with the switch, they were having difficulties with the
17 snow and ice.

18 So at that time, Shad and I got into his vehicle. Shad
19 called the roadmaster, Chuck Olsen, left him a voicemail, and we
20 went out there to see what was going on. When we got out there,
21 the crew, the train crew had already -- had managed to operate the
22 switch, and they had their locomotive onto the west leg of the Y.
23 So they had gotten on; they were in the process of lining the
24 switch back to the main. So they were complete with that.

25 So Shad and I went to look at the rest of their path, the Y

1 switch where the two legs of the Y came together. That one just
2 had some normal snow in it. Shad and I swept that out. And so,
3 try and clear ahead of the movement a little bit. And then we
4 went to check the crossings to make sure they weren't too packed
5 with snow or ice so that the locomotive wheel flanges had a path
6 to travel. First one looked to be in decent shape. The train
7 crew came back, made a joint there, started charging air-released
8 brakes.

9 Shad and I took Mike Smeltzer, the foreman of that job, with
10 us back to the first private crossing, the next joint to be made.
11 When we got there, we noted that it had already been swept out so
12 the rails were clear and there wouldn't be an issue there. We
13 went to the next joint. That one had some snow on it, another
14 private crossing, but nobody had been driving over it so it wasn't
15 hard packed or anything. So we cleaned that one out, but not a
16 big issue.

17 At some point in there, while we were putting together the
18 joints on the train at the two private crossings, track inspector
19 Rodney Huber pulled up, and we talked with him about what we were
20 doing and talked about another move that was going on at the same
21 time with the crew of the Butte local that was going to be putting
22 a car into the city track and industry track switch off the other
23 main, but -- another switch that hadn't been used in a while, so
24 we said that one probably needed attention too.

25 Rodney told us that section was on their way, they were going

1 to be out here, and identified that, you know, while neither of
2 these crossings were too bad, the next public crossing, a county
3 road about a mile into the Deadwood Y, last I'd seen, it was kind
4 of packed in with snow from a snowplow.

5 So Rodney left us then. We left. It was just -- Shad and I
6 got back into his vehicle and went to look at that second public
7 crossing, the last crossing, to put the train together on. We got
8 out there, saw that it was more than we were going to be able to
9 just take care of with a switch broom. I told Shad to try calling
10 Chuck Olsen again and I'd get started, and I told him to go find a
11 shovel, because we were just using a broom at this point.

12 So I got started with clearing some of the snow and ice out
13 of that one. It was a while, I'd say 20 minutes or more, before
14 Shad came back, said he hadn't been able to get in touch with
15 Chuck Olsen. We found out later he was in a meeting, I guess.
16 But Shad did find a shovel and a pinch bar, so we started working
17 with that, with those tools.

18 A few minutes later, two members of the maintenance of way
19 section crew pulled up in the section truck, and we talked with
20 them about what we were doing. They told us that the frontend
21 loader was on his way out, but he'd gotten delayed by a train on a
22 crossing when he was coming out. So he was coming around, but it
23 was going to take a few minutes.

24 The four of us continued with the work with the hand tools.
25 At some point we saw the frontend loader coming up the highway

1 towards us so we kind of just waited until he got in place,
2 because there wasn't much point in us doing it with shovels if we
3 were going to have a frontend loader there. So they completed
4 clearing the crossing. At some point in there, Mike Smeltzer, we
5 saw him walking along the road up towards us, so I sent Shad to go
6 grab him in the vehicle and bring him back so he could make the
7 joint.

8 We talked with the -- while we were there, talked with the
9 maintenance of way section guys some more. I specifically recall
10 talking with Mr. Lessert, told him what we were doing, what had
11 been going on. I told him that from what I'd been told, the train
12 crew had broken a couple switch brooms trying to clear out the
13 west leg Y switch onto the main. So I said, well, they got it,
14 but he said that they were going to go take a look at it and then,
15 after that, they were going to head over to the city track that I
16 mentioned earlier, the other industry track. So told them okay,
17 it sounds good.

18 We got the -- the loader left, the other two members of the
19 maintenance crew loaded up in their truck and left. Put the train
20 back to a joint. We went to the rear of the cut of cars, because
21 there was a -- I recall there was a handbrake on the rear of the
22 cars. Once we had air coming back all the way through the train,
23 the three of us got back into Shad's vehicle and headed for the --
24 towards the Edgemont depot. Because I had ordered a PTI van,
25 contract van to assist this crew, so I hadn't seen them yet and so

1 Shad and I were out here driving, giving rides. But found out
2 that van was back at the depot, so we were going to drop off
3 Mr. Smeltzer with the van.

4 And then once Shad talked with the engineer of our job on the
5 -- pulling the cars out of the Deadwood Y and he said his air was
6 coming up and he was getting ready -- Shad told him, you know,
7 once he thought he was getting to where his air was going to be,
8 call the dispatcher and get authority to come out on the main,
9 because at this time they'd given up their authority to be on the
10 main once they cleared in, because we knew it was going to be a
11 while to get it all together and get the air.

12 When we pulled up to the west highway crossing, across from
13 the Edgemont depot, there was a eastbound coal load on main 2 that
14 was just starting to depart. We decided just to wait rather than
15 go out and around, because it was going to be a few minutes before
16 our train was ready to move anyway. While we were sitting there
17 waiting for that train to clear, we saw a westbound coal empty
18 coming, but again decided just to wait rather than to out and
19 around, so we'd wait for the first train to clear, wait for the
20 second train to clear.

21 While we were waiting, I was on the phone with one of my
22 customers. I don't remember whether I called him or he called me,
23 but I remember the -- looked at the timestamp from that, that was
24 10:08 when I called him. So I was on the phone with that customer
25 when we noticed the westbound coal empty released -- or went into

1 emergency, heard the air hissing out. I think Shad went to the
2 road channel. We had been on the yard channel working with our
3 crew, so he went to the road channel on his radio to see if they
4 called out emergency. And I was only hearing parts of it because
5 I was on the phone, but them saying they thought they hit
6 somebody.

7 We turned around, went back out there, or went -- turned back
8 around and went back out around to go see what had happened. We
9 were going to drop off Mr. Smeltzer at his locomotive, figuring
10 there was no reason -- if somebody had been hit, there was no
11 reason to introduce more people to that. But he identified
12 himself as a former Navy corpsman, said he could help. So we kept
13 -- we took him up there with us.

14 We got up there, saw one body face down near the West Lake
15 switch. Went up to him. Smeltzer thought he had a pulse, asked
16 for help to roll him over. We went to roll him over, saw the
17 wound to his head, and Smeltzer said never mind, there's nothing
18 there. So we rolled him back to where he was.

19 Then I heard somebody saying there's a second guy, there's
20 another guy underneath the train, which was further west, under --
21 over near the section truck is where they indicated. So I ran up
22 there. Mike Smeltzer looked -- he looked at him, he said no,
23 there's -- he's gone. It appeared he had amputations below the
24 knees and wasn't moving or anything. His wrist, his left wrist
25 was exposed, so I reached down to feel for a pulse on that. No

1 pulse. His skin was cold. I felt for a pulse on his neck,
2 nothing there.

3 The other two people on the scene at that time were Will
4 Roberts, the conductor of the train, he'd come running back, and
5 the surviving member of the maintenance of way crew was at his
6 truck.

7 I asked them if they'd called 911, and they said yes. And so
8 I was just kind of waiting for responders to show up and
9 everything else, trying to keep people's emotions in check, and --

10 Q. That's about it?

11 A. That's about it, I think, unless you have any questions.

12 Q. No, I don't have any questions.

13 MR. GURA: How about you, Adam?

14 MR. MILLER: No questions. Thanks, Jim.

15 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: BNSF RAILWAY ROADWAY WORKER
 FATALITIES IN EDGEMONT, SOUTH
 DAKOTA ON JANUARY 17, 2017
 Interview of James Korecky

ACCIDENT NUMBER: DCA17FR004

PLACE:

DATE: January 22, 2017

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.

Karen Coen Brooks
Transcriber