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BNSF Railway Employee Fatality

Denver, CO

February 9, 2022

On February 9, 2022, about 10:57 a.m. local time, a BNSF Railway (BNSF) remote control operator (RCO) helper was killed when he fell from the front of a locomotive on Track 116 while switching railroad freight cars in the BNSF Globeville Yard in Denver, Colorado.¹ The BNSF crew consisted of an RCO foreman and an RCO helper. The weather was 45°F with a south-by-southeast wind at 15 mph and no precipitation.

The equipment being operated consisted of a remote control locomotive, a conventional locomotive, and 21 freight cars. The BNSF crew arrived at Globeville Yard about 7:00 a.m. to begin work. The crew was to gather assigned freight cars in the yard and spot the cars at various industries in the area.² The RCO foreman and RCO helper each had one operator control unit (OCU).³

In a postaccident interview with investigators, the RCO foreman stated that before the accident he was using his OCU to couple the locomotives and freight cars on Track 116. The RCO foreman then transferred control of his OCU to the RCO helper. The RCO helper brought the locomotives and freight cars forward with his OCU so he could board the front locomotive stairs. He then used the OCU to move the locomotives and freight cars out of Track 116 for the next switching move. After the RCO helper climbed the stairs of the locomotive to the front center platform, the equipment began to move, and he fell from the front of the locomotive. ([See figure.](#)) Preliminary information from the leading locomotive's event recorder showed that about four seconds later, the OCU's tilt

¹ (a) All times in this report are local time unless otherwise noted. (b) *Switching* consists of moving cars from one track to another track or to different positions on the same track.

² To *spot* means to place a rail car in a specific location.

³ An *operator control unit* (OCU) is a handheld device that enables a train operator to control the train. Only one OCU can control the train at a time.

timeout feature (designed to detect whether the operator is not in a vertical position and may be in danger) initiated an emergency application of the train's air brakes.

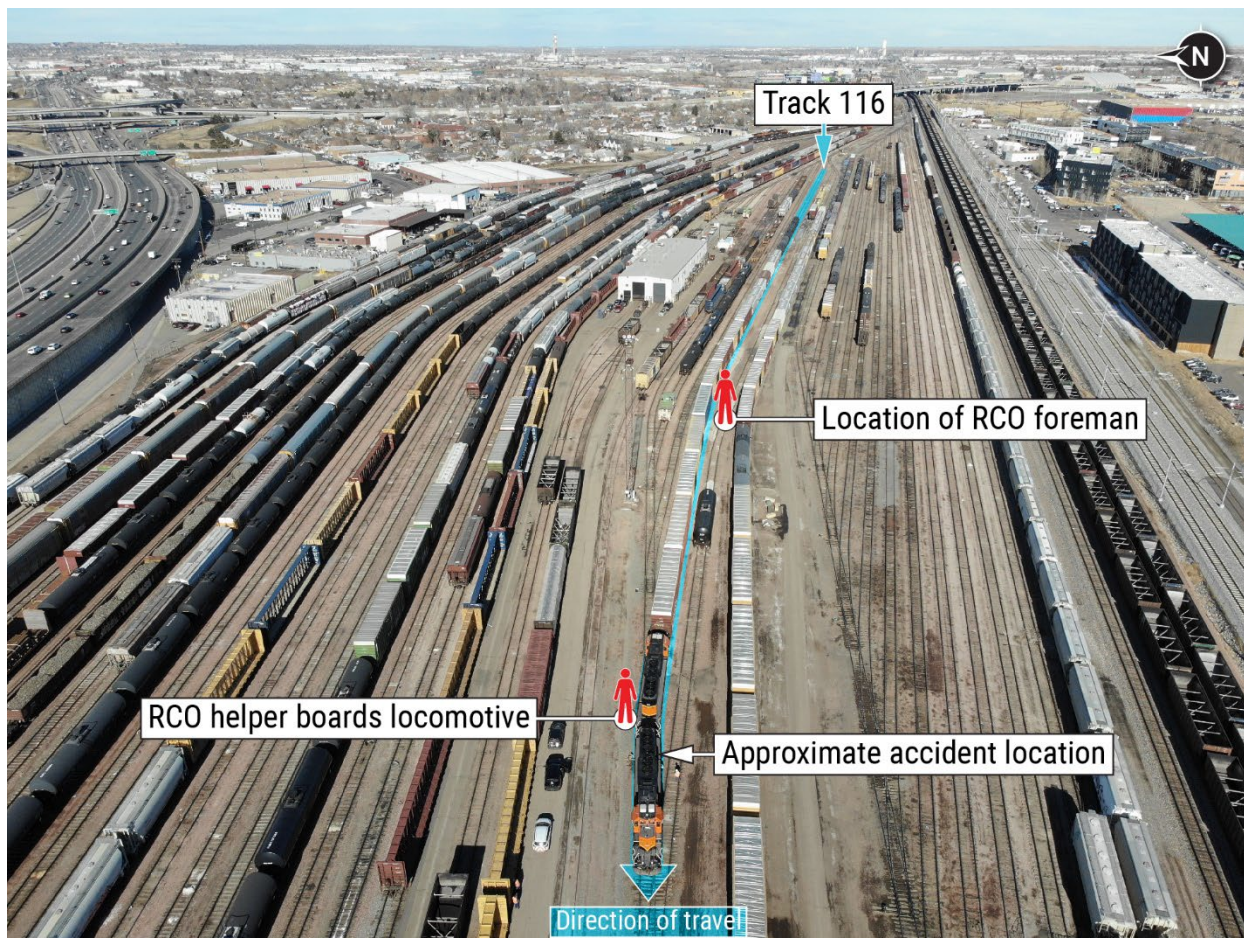


Figure. BNSF Globeville Yard in Denver with equipment in its postaccident position.

While on scene, National Transportation Safety Board investigators conducted interviews and inspections of the rail equipment and track; requested track and engineering, operational, and mechanical records from BNSF; and reviewed yard surveillance footage and recorder data obtained from the locomotive and remote control locomotive equipment. A preliminary review of yard surveillance video indicated slack action in the train consist during the train's movement.⁴

The National Transportation Safety Board investigation is ongoing. Future investigative activity will focus on the operating rules of the railroad, the mechanical condition of the train, and internal and external oversight of BNSF's operational and

⁴ *Slack action* is the free movement of a railcar before it transmits motion and energy to an adjoining coupled car.

testing program. Locomotive image recorder data has been secured and sent to the National Transportation Safety Board's laboratory in Washington, DC, for further evaluation.

Parties to the investigation include the Federal Railroad Administration, BNSF, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, SMART Transportation Division, and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees.⁵

⁵ The Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division spells the word "Employees" in its name with only one e.