



Approved: February 20, 2024

Preliminary Report RRD24FR007

This information is preliminary and subject to change.

Norfolk Southern Railway Employee Fatality

Decatur, Alabama

January 31, 2024

On January 31, 2024, about 4:15 p.m., the engineer of Norfolk Southern Railway (NS) train A08AA31 (train A08) was fatally injured while performing switching operations when the lead locomotive he was operating was struck by a rolling block of railcars from train A80AA31 (train A80) in Decatur Yard in Decatur, Alabama.¹ The locomotive was occupying the lead track at the west end of the yard and shoving railcars onto yard track 10 when 35 railcars of train A80 rolled west along yard track 7 from the east end of the yard.² (See figure.) The 35 railcars fouled the lead track and raked along the side of the lead locomotive, striking the engineer's operating cab.³ The impact caused severe damage to the locomotive's cab. The brakeman of train A08 found the engineer about 65 feet from the point of impact between yard tracks 7 and 8.⁴ The engineer was transported to a hospital, where he was pronounced deceased. NS estimated damages to equipment to be about \$61,500. Visibility conditions at the time of the accident were daylight and clear; the weather was 48°F with no precipitation.

¹ (a) All times in this report are local times. (b) *Switching* is moving rail equipment from one track to another track or to different positions on the same track and does not constitute a train movement.

² (a) A *lead track* connects one or more yard tracks to other yard tracks. (b) *Shoving* is the process of pushing railcars from the rear with a locomotive. Shoving movements are frequently used in switching operations.

³ *Fouling* a track means the placement of an individual or equipment in such proximity to a track that the individual or equipment could be struck by a moving train or on-track equipment.

⁴ A *brakeman* is a railroad worker who assists with train and yard operations.

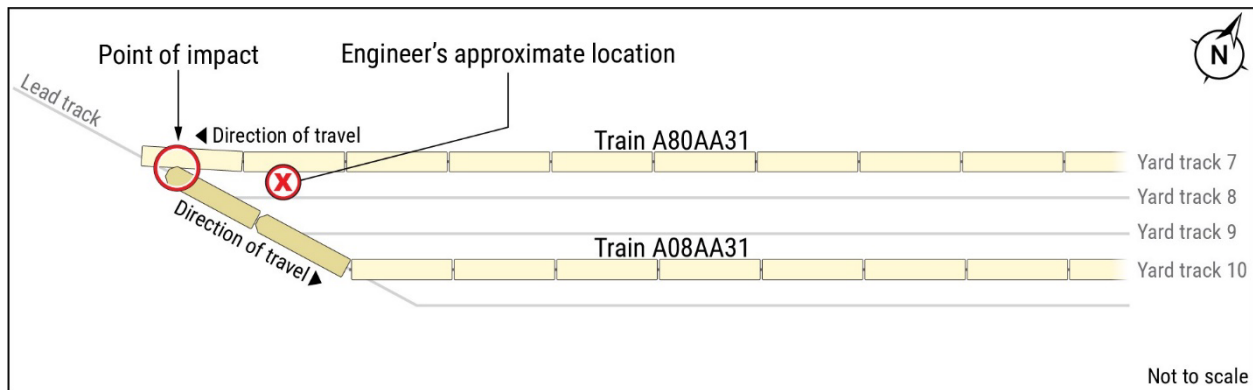


Figure. Overhead diagram of the accident.

On the day of the accident, two NS crews were performing switching operations in Decatur Yard. The crew of train A80 was operating at the east end of the yard and the crew of train A08 was operating at the west end of the yard.

The crew of train A80 consisted of an engineer, a conductor, and a conductor trainee. Shortly before the accident, the crew picked up a block of railcars from yard track 7, leaving 35 railcars behind. The crew of train A08 consisted of an engineer, a conductor, and a brakeman. At the time of the accident, the crew of train A08 was using 2 locomotives to shove 18 railcars from the lead track onto yard track 10. Immediately before the accident, the brakeman saw the 35 railcars of train A80 rolling west toward the lead track. The brakeman radioed the engineer to warn him about the rolling block of railcars. The engineer heard the brakeman's warning and continued the shoving movement in an attempt to avoid the approaching railcars, but was unable to clear the lead track. The 35 railcars rolled about 900 feet and struck the lead locomotive about 30 seconds after the brakeman's warning.

While on scene, National Transportation Safety Board investigators inspected the tracks, examined the involved equipment, conducted sight distance observations, reviewed data from locomotive event recorders, reviewed recordings of radio communications, conducted a reenactment of the accident, and completed interviews.

The National Transportation Safety Board's investigation is ongoing. Future investigative activities will focus on the securement of unattended equipment in Decatur Yard and NS's safety training for switching operations.

As a result of this accident, on February 2, 2024, NS issued a "Serious Incident Notice" advising employees to conduct job briefings to evaluate hazards, review

hand brake requirements for unattended on-track equipment, and follow safety instructions during switching operations. On February 14, 2024, the Federal Railroad Administration issued "Safety Bulletin 2024-01 (Revised): Employee Fatality—Securement of Rolling Equipment," advising railroads to provide adequate training on the importance of securing rolling equipment and advising railroad employees to comply with the rules and procedures for securing rolling equipment.⁵

Parties to the investigation include the Federal Railroad Administration; NS; the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers; and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen.

⁵ The full text of the Safety Bulletin is accessible at: <https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/safety-bulletin-2024-01-revised-employee-fatality-securement-rolling-equipment>.