

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

TRAIN DERAILMENT NEAR NEW CASTLE, *
PENNSYLVANIA ON MAY 10, 2023 *

Accident No.: RRD23FR011

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Interview of: TERRY BECKER, Engineer on the NS C36
Norfolk Southern

Saturday,
May 13, 2023

APPEARANCES:

ZACH ZAGATA, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

RICHARD SKOLNEKOVICH, Operations Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

BRIAN FRANSEN, Coordinator, Safety Task Force
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

DON CRAINE, Superintendent, Keystone Division
Norfolk Southern Railway

ERVIN WHITE, Motive Power and Equipment Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

PAUL HULBURT, Road Foreman, Keystone Division
Norfolk Southern Railway

JARED CASSITY, Alternate National Legislative
Director/Chief of Safety
SMART Transportation Division

LARRY ROSS, Operating Practices Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(12:00 p.m.)

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3 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: All right, my name is Richard
4 Skolnekovich, I'm the NTSB group operations chair. We're
5 conducting an interview today, today is May 13th, 2023,
6 approximately noon, and we're working with Terry Becker, is that
7 correct?

8 MR. BECKER: Yeah.

9 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Who works for Norfolk Southern. The
10 interview is going to be in conjunction with the NTSB's
11 investigation of the accident in New Castle, Pennsylvania. The
12 accident reference number is RRD23FR011. The purpose of this
13 investigation is to increase safety, not assign fault or blame or
14 liability. Before we begin our interview and questions, we're
15 going to go around the room and introduce ourselves. Please spell
16 out your name and your title. I'll start off and then I'll pass
17 it off to the right. So my name is, once again, Richard
18 Skolnekovich, S-k-o-l-n-e-k-o-v-i-c-h, and I am the NTSB
19 operations chair. To my right.

20 MR. ZAGATA: Zach Zagata, Z-a-g-a-t-a, NTSB IIC.

21 MR. BECKER: Terry Becker, B-e-c-k-e-r, engineer, Norfolk
22 Southern.

23 MR. FRANSEN: Brian Fransen, F-r-a-n-s-e-n, BLET Safety Task
24 Force.

25 MR. CRAINE: Don Craine, C-r-a-i-n-e, Norfolk Southern

1 Keystone Division superintendent.

2 MR. WHITE: Ervin White, W-h-i-t-e, FRA motive power and
3 equipment inspector, IIC.

4 MR. HULBURT: Paul Hulburt, H-u-l-b-u-r-t, Norfolk Southern
5 Keystone Division road foreman.

6 MR. CASSITY: Jared Cassity, C-a-s-s-i-t-y, I'm the alternate
7 national legislative director and chief of safety for SMART
8 Transportation Division.

9 MR. ROSS: Larry Ross, R-o-s-s, FRA OP.

10 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay, thank you. All right. Today we're
11 being recorded. Do we have your permission to record this?

12 MR. BECKER: Yeah.

13 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay, great. And you understand that
14 everything here is going to be transcribed and it will be placed
15 on a public docket that at some point the public can view?

16 MR. BECKER: Yes.

17 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. So you don't have any objections to
18 any of it?

19 MR. BECKER: No.

20 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay, great.

21 INTERVIEW OF TERRY BECKER

22 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

23 Q. So what we're going to do right now, we'll just start off
24 with some background information. Can you tell me how long you've
25 been --

1 A. Working on 18 and a half years.

2 Q. Eighteen and a half. Did you spend any time as a conductor?

3 A. Yeah, from '05 to 2010 and then engineer from '10 to '12 and
4 then back to conductor '13 to '14 and then '15 to '23, pretty much
5 an engineer full time.

6 Q. Okay. And you work mostly yard and road or a mixture?

7 A. Both.

8 Q. A mixture. Where are you working at now, do you work in a
9 yard?

10 A. Youngstown, Ohio.

11 Q. Youngstown. A yard or road?

12 A. Yard.

13 Q. Okay. How long have you been on that job?

14 A. A week.

15 Q. A week. Where were you working at before then?

16 A. Youngstown.

17 Q. Okay. All right. So can you tell me about the day of the
18 hot box detector and derailment? Just tell me what you know and
19 what you heard and saw.

20 A. We were stopped at DP West Conway on our train, C36, with our
21 conductor and our CT and we faintly heard the detector critical
22 alarm and our CT asked what was that, so we explained to him the
23 possibilities of what happened and I said if anything like this
24 happens, you do a tone for a rebroadcast and when we rebroadcast
25 it, it came up as another detector at 30.5.

- 1 Q. So did you hear -- where were you at, at the time, where was
2 your crew at, at the time?
- 3 A. We were at an end of the yard --
- 4 Q. End of the yard?
- 5 A. -- in Conway, Pennsylvania.
- 6 Q. Okay. So what milepost was that right around?
- 7 A. Twenty-four.
- 8 Q. Twenty-four.
- 9 A. PC 24.
- 10 Q. Okay. So you heard the 30.5 detector?
- 11 A. We heard the 91.9 detector on a Youngstown line, faintly in
12 the distance because we were in Conway and I explained to the CT
13 to -- how we rebroadcast something and I toned up and it came up
14 30.5 --
- 15 Q. Okay.
- 16 A. -- as a no defect.
- 17 Q. So you heard 30.5, no defect?
- 18 A. Yeah. From the rebroadcast.
- 19 Q. Can I ask -- so did it broadcast twice or once?
- 20 A. No defects for 30.5 twice.
- 21 Q. Okay. Can you paraphrase what it said?
- 22 A. Rebroadcast, no defects, Track 1.
- 23 Q. Did it give a milepost or anything?
- 24 A. Thirty-dot-five.
- 25 Q. Thirty-dot-five. Did it give an axle count?

1 A. No.

2 Q. So no axle count. So just the milepost. Did it come up and
3 say critical alarm or it just said no defect?

4 A. No defect. Rebroadcast, no defects.

5 Q. Rebroadcast, no defect. So that was the last message. What
6 was the first message you heard?

7 A. Ninety-one-nine, we faintly heard the critical alarm, but we
8 couldn't make out an axle count or anything like that.

9 Q. Can you tell me what you did hear? Did you just hear
10 critical alarm?

11 A. We heard faintly on the radio critical alarm and then that's
12 when my CT asked my conductor and then we had a briefing with him
13 about what was happening, we just didn't know if -- you know, if
14 it was --

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. -- that particular train or -- and then that's when I wanted
17 to rebroadcast to show him how to do it, if it's a scenario for
18 him.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. And then that's when -- why the detector at 35 came up, I
21 can't tell you why that did.

22 Q. Got you.

23 A. Because I figure with our line, since we came off the
24 Youngstown line, but it didn't rebroadcast that one.

25 Q. Did it sound like a normal -- have you heard those messages

1 before?

2 A. Um-hum.

3 Q. Have you heard them in that area, in that -- at 91.9 or 30.5,
4 you heard messages there before?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. Did it sound similar or the same?

7 A. Um-hum. Every time I've ever heard a critical alarm, it's
8 always --

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. -- it states critical alarm.

11 Q. So the same format?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Okay. Now, the one at 30.5, did that sound normal?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Okay. And then when you did hear the critical alert, you
16 said you just heard it faintly, so it was just low in the
17 background or --

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. -- did you have a lot of static or --

20 A. Static, low, and then we started talking to -- because the CT
21 never heard something like that before --

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. -- so he was -- we were trying to explain to him what we do
24 in that situation.

25 Q. Do you have any idea about what time that was?

1 A. Oh.

2 Q. The critical alarm.

3 A. Probably after midnight.

4 Q. Okay, sometime after midnight. All right. Did you hear any
5 other conversations over the radio dealing with it, like a
6 conversation between the MTO or the crew or --

7 A. No.

8 Q. So that was about the only thing you heard?

9 A. Yeah, just the transaction.

10 Q. Did you guys pull into that yard by that time?

11 A. Um-hum.

12 Q. Okay. Okay. And then did anybody from the yard talk about
13 anything as far as like -- like the yardmaster or anything, say
14 anything about the derailment or anything like that?

15 A. He just said we were in a holding pattern and when we had our
16 power, to go back to Youngstown.

17 Q. Okay. Did he tell you why?

18 A. Uh-uh. Just said you're waiting to see what they're going to
19 do with you. We didn't know if we were going to park the power or
20 go back to Youngstown.

21 Q. What did you have in your consist, do you know just
22 generally?

23 A. Freight. Like a car count or --

24 Q. Yeah, a car count.

25 Q. A hundred and 20. I think we were like 20 by a hundred or a

1 hundred by -- no, 20 by a hundred, we were a hundred and 20 cars.

2 Q. Hundred and 20. How many units did you have?

3 A. Two.

4 Q. Two. DP or just --

5 A. No, DP.

6 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. Okay, that's all the questions that
7 I have. Zach.

8 MR. ZAGATA: Zagata, NTSB, no additional questions.

9 MR. FRANSEN: Fransen, BLET, no additional questions.

10 MR. CRAINE: Craine, NS, no questions.

11 BY MR. WHITE:

12 Q. Ervin White, FRA. So you normally run this territory. Have
13 you ever had any detector problems at 91.9 before?

14 A. Years ago, I mean, on a whole other train, a whole other
15 situation, like, but not recently, no.

16 MR. WHITE: Thank you.

17 MR. HULBURT: Hulburt, NS, no questions.

18 BY MR. CASSITY:

19 Q. Jared Cassity, SMART TD. Terry, I got a couple. When you
20 did the rebroadcast, which -- geographically speaking, which
21 detector were you physically closest to, was it 30.5 or 91.9?

22 A. It would probably be -- 30.5 would be closer.

23 Q. Okay. Were you surprised that you got the rebroadcast from
24 there?

25 A. Yes, because we came off the Youngstown line.

1 Q. Okay. But it's the same channel, the same code, all of that
2 stuff for both detectors?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay. Have you ever tried to rebroadcast from that location
5 before?

6 A. I have, for my detectors in the past, yeah.

7 Q. Have you gotten 91.9 when you did that?

8 A. No, I would always get 30.5 because I go that line, too, that
9 PC line.

10 Q. Okay. And when you said you heard a faint critical alarm,
11 was it -- did you -- did it repeat or was it just a one-time
12 critical alarm?

13 A. One time, the one time we heard it, that's it.

14 Q. So did it say critical alarm, critical alarm, critical alarm
15 or did it just say critical alarm and --

16 A. Critical alarm, and then we couldn't hear the axle count.
17 Like I said, it was faintly in the distance of the radio with the
18 static.

19 Q. Okay. And I apologize for doing this to you, I should've
20 asked it this way. Would you care to just say what you heard so
21 that I can understand it?

22 A. We heard critical alarm, critical alarm.

23 Q. Okay. But nothing else --

24 A. We didn't hear no axle count.

25 Q. Okay. Okay. And then I'm going to ask you about the train

1 size on that territory.

2 A. Okay.

3 Q. That train was 200-plus, is that a normal train on that
4 territory or --

5 A. Recently, yeah.

6 Q. Yeah. Do you take any exception or have any concerns with
7 train size on that territory?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. I do.

11 MR. CASSITY: Okay, no further questions at this time.

12 MR. ROSS: Yeah, Ross, no questions.

13 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay, Richard Skolnekovich, I have no
14 further questions. We'll go around the room one more time just to
15 see if there's any follow-on.

16 MR. ZAGATA: Zagata, NTSB, no further questions.

17 BY MR. FRANSEN:

18 Q. Fransen, BLET, I do have one follow-up, just to clarify with
19 you, Terry. So when you punch up to rebroadcast the detector,
20 when the 30.5 detector is the one that's rebroadcast and it says
21 no defects, what was the last train over that -- that wasn't
22 rebroadcasting your no defects message. Were you the last train
23 over that or would that have been --

24 A. That would've been another train because we weren't on that
25 track.

1 Q. You weren't on that track.

2 A. Uh-uh.

3 Q. That's what I was wondering. So that rebroadcast would've
4 been for -- ostensibly for the 14M, is that -- would that be the
5 last train over there?

6 A. No, because that's a different detector.

7 MR. CASSITY: No, that train didn't go over that detector.

8 MR. FRANSEN: Okay. So it never did. Okay, that's what I
9 was wondering and that was -- that had nothing to do with the
10 train that we're talking about at that detector reading. Okay.
11 No further questions.

12 MR. CRAINE: Craine, no further questions. One quick
13 comment. Terry, I just want to thank you for your testimony and
14 taking time to train a trainee on how that process works and how
15 critical it is, so I just wanted to thank you. That's all I got.

16 BY MR. WHITE:

17 Q. White, FRA, one follow-up. When you've run the Youngstown
18 line, that you had areas that you've encountered radio issues
19 before, as far as not being able to reach the dispatcher or them
20 reaching you?

21 A. Faintly, in the past, yeah.

22 MR. WHITE: Thank you.

23 MR. HULBURT: Hulburt, NS, no further questions.

24 BY MR. CASSITY:

25 Q. Jared Cassity with SMART TD, one final question. You made

1 the mention that the critical alarm didn't give an axle number.

2 A. Um-hum.

3 Q. Is that normal or does it typically give an axle number?

4 A. It typically gives you an axle count.

5 Q. Okay. In your opinion, was that a bit of an abnormal
6 message --

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. -- because it left that out?

9 A. Because we couldn't hear the full transcript of the detector.

10 MR. CASSITY: Okay, I have no further questions.

11 MR. ROSS: Yeah, Ross, no further questions.

12 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay, Richard Skolnekovich. Unless
13 there's any additional questions, we'll go ahead and conclude the
14 interview. The time is 12:12 p.m.

15 (Whereupon, at 12:12 p.m., the interview concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

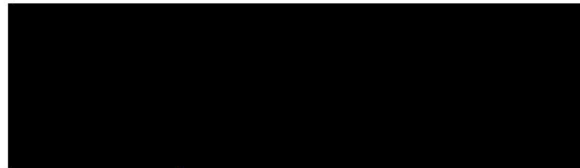
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: TRAIN DERAILMENT NEAR NEW CASTLE,
 PENNSYLVANIA ON MAY 10, 2023
 Interview of Terry Becker

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD23FR011

DATE: May 13, 2023

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.



Transcriber