

R-258

# NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: April 21, 1980

-----  
 Forwarded to:  
 -----  
 Mr. W.J. Taylor  
 President and Chief Executive Officer  
 Illinois Central Gulf Railroad Company  
 233 North Michigan Avenue  
 Chicago, Illinois 60601  
 -----

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

R-80-17 through -19

At 9:05 p.m., c.s.t., on October 12, 1979, northbound Amtrak passenger train No. 392 was traveling at 58.5 mph on track No. 4 at Harvey, Illinois. Illinois Central Gulf Freight Train No. 51 was waiting on track No. 3 to crossover to track No. 4 after train No. 392 went north. The switchtender on duty at Harvey had aligned the crossover switch on track No. 4 seconds before train No. 392 arrived. Train No. 392 entered the crossover and struck train No. 51. The engineer and head brakeman on board train No. 51 were killed, and all 6 crewmembers and 38 passengers on board train No. 392 were injured.

During the investigation, the Safety Board discovered that the train director, who was 4.5 miles away, relayed instructions to the switchtender through the yardmaster. This practice developed after the portable radio used to transmit instructions was changed to a smaller, lightweight type with a transmission range of approximately 2 miles and because the switchtender worked in the yard and was not always near his telephone. It was a violation of ICG instructions to involve a third party to establish a block for a movement against the flow of traffic. Local supervisors on the ICG knew about the practice and the reason for its existence, but they made no provision for communication between the train director and the switchtender, other than the telephone.

The engineer on train No. 51 shouted a warning on channel 1 of the radio moments before train No. 392 arrived. It is probable that the switchtender did not switch to channel 1 after using it earlier on channel 2, and thus, he did not hear the warning. However, ICG rules do not specify a particular channel that the switchtender should monitor.

Even though the switchtender made many switching errors on the only other day he worked this assignment and also failed to maintain the log of train movements, it went undetected by the supervision responsible for the activities of the switchtender. The trainmasters were not monitoring the activities of the switchtenders or their compliance with rules.

2796B

NAR-80-3

On December 18, 1979, the Safety Board recommended that the ICG provide a system to prevent the inadvertent misalignment of switches in advance of a train at the Harvey yard; restrict speeds through the area of the Harvey crossovers until this protection is provided; and provide sufficient training in the specific rules that apply to switchtenders.

As a further result of its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad Company:

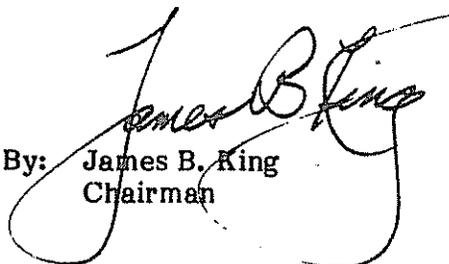
Install a system that will ensure that the switchtender at Harvey and the train director can have direct communication when necessary for the movement of trains through the Harvey area. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-80-17)

When radios with multiple channels are used in train operations by employees who must use several channels, issue instructions that identify the channel the employee must monitor for receiving instructions. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-80-18)

Instruct supervisors to monitor the activities of the employees performing the switchtender duties at Harvey for fitness and ability to perform those duties of the assignment. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-80-19)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.

By: James B. King  
Chairman

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "James B. King". The signature is written over the typed name and title.