

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
NEW YORK, CHICAGO & ST. LOUIS RAILROAD

CHICAGO, ILL.

SEPTEMBER 11, 1936

INVESTIGATION NO. 2096

SUMMARY

Railroad: New York, Chicago & St. Louis
Date: September 11, 1936.
Location: Chicago, Ill.
Kind of accident: Collision
Train involved: No. 56 : cut of cars
Engine number: 709
Consist: Engine and caboose : 15 cars
Speed: 8-10 m.p.h. : standing
Track: Tangent; 0.2 percent ascending grade
Weather: Clear and dark
Time: 12:28 a.m.
Casualties: 3 killed
Cause: Failure of members of train crew riding on front platform of caboose to maintain a proper lookout while moving on yard track.

October 9, 1936.

To the Commission:

On September 11, 1936, there was a collision between an engine shoving a caboose and a cut of standing cars on the New York, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad at Chicago, Ill., which resulted in the death of three employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred in the Calumet Yard on the Chicago Division, the yard extending between 101st and 110th Streets. Movements are governed by special instructions contained in the timetable which provides that all except first-class trains must approach and pass through yard limits under full control. Calumet Yard consists chiefly of 21 tangent tracks, numbered consecutively from north to south and ranging from 3,000 to 4,500 feet in length. The accident occurred on track 17 at a point 1,086 feet west of the east switch. From the center of the yard the grade is 0.2 percent ascending to the lead track at each end of the yard, and was 0.2 percent ascending for east-bound movements at the point of accident.

At night the yard is lighted with flood lights located at each end of the yard. There are two of these lights on a pole, spaced 4 feet apart and 61 feet above the rails, directly in line with track 14, near the south lead at the east end of the yard and a single light is located 60 feet above the rails and directly in line with track 8, at the east end of the north lead, approximately 275 feet east of the double lights.

The weather was clear and it was dark at the time of the accident, which occurred at 12:28 a.m.

Description

Train No. 56, consisting of engine 709 and caboose, in charge of Conductor Brown and Engineman Conway, departed from Stoney Island, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Calumet Yard, shortly after midnight, en route to Calumet Yard where cars for the train were to be picked up. The engine, headed east and shoving the caboose, proceeded eastward on the running tracks between the two yards, stopped at the yard office at the west end of Calumet Yard, and after the crew had received instructions from the yardmaster to proceed on track 17, the train entered that track and at a point 1,086 feet from the east switch collided with the cars that were to make up their train, while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 8 and 10 miles per hour.

The east or front end of the caboose platform was crushed and rested on the trucks with the draw bar about 2 inches above the ground, while the rear end was raised and rested on the pilot beam of the engine, with the coupler inside the smoke box. The employees killed were the head brakeman, middle brakeman and the flagman, who were on the leading platform of the caboose.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Conway stated that on arriving at the west end of Calumet Yard, Conductor Brown and Brakeman Arney went into the yard office. When Brakeman Arney came out he called "track 17" as he walked toward the front end of the caboose. The train then continued and entered track 17, proceeding at a speed of about 8 miles per hour. Engineman Conway was leaning out of the window on the right side and could see a lantern on the front end of the caboose but did not receive any signals until just before the collision, when the lantern was raised slightly, which he took to be a slow signal. He applied the independent brake and the collision followed, but he did not think that the speed had been reduced at the time of the collision. He said that the flood lights did not interfere with his vision in any way and that the air brake was in operation on the caboose.

Fireman Holden stated that on entering track 17 he saw the cars ahead on that track but he did not remember of saying anything to the engineman about them. He had just looked ahead and was about to tell the engineman that the cars were about 15 cars lengths away when the collision occurred. He estimated the speed to have been 9 or 10 miles per hour.

Conductor Brown stated that he remained at the yard office waiting for the bills. When he went down in the yard he found that his caboose had collided with the cars that were to make up his train.

Clerk Clexton, on duty at the yard office at the west end of the Calumet Yard, stated that the information he received from Assistant Yardmaster Burbach was: "No. 56, track 17, caboose and all". On the arrival of the engine and caboose of this train the conductor and two brakemen came into the office and he informed them they were to proceed on track 17, and he said nothing with reference to the cars that were to make up their train.

Assistant Yardmaster Burbach, on duty at the east end of Calumet Yard, from 4 p.m. to midnight, September 10, stated that the cars that were to make up Train No. 56 were coupled on track 17, and at about 11:45 p.m., he called the office at the west end and gave instructions for Train No. 56 to proceed on track 17.

He stated that in the case of a short train, the road engine shoves the caboose down close to the rear of the cars and cuts off. A yard engine then couples the cars to the caboose and pulls the whole train out onto the lead far enough to allow the road engine to follow and get into clear on some other track. The cars are then backed into the original track and the road engine couples onto the train. Assistant Yardmaster Burbach further stated that cars standing on tracks 15 to 18 could be seen from either end for a distance of 60 car lengths.

The statements of Assistant Yardmaster Donahue, on duty at the east end of the yard from 12 midnight to 8 a.m., brought out nothing additional of importance, except that the visibility was good and he could see from one end of the yard to the other.

Discussion

The three brakemen on the front platform of the caboose were killed in the accident; had they been keeping a proper lookout ahead they would have seen the cars in time to have given a signal to the engineman. Engineman Conway was in position to see any signals given; he saw a lantern on the caboose during the entire movement but no signal was given until just before the collision occurred. The yard was lighted with flood lights and according to the statements of witnesses cars could be seen for a distance of 60 car lengths. While the crew had been instructed to proceed on track 17, nothing had been said about their train being on this track, neither were they told that the track was clear. It appears, however, to be a common practice in this yard to make up trains in this manner and inasmuch as all except first-class trains are required to pass through yard limits under control, the train crew should have been on the lookout for any cars that might be on the track.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by the failure of the members of the train crew on the front platform of the caboose, to maintain a proper lookout while moving on a yard track.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director