

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
CHICAGO, ROCK ISLAND & PACIFIC RAILWAY NEAR ARGON,
IOWA, ON APRIL 4, 1929.

July 31, 1929.

To the Commission.

On April 4, 1929, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a section motor car on the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway near Argon, Iowa, which resulted in the death of two employees and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on Sub-division 18 of the Cedar Rapids-Minnesota Division, extending between Valley Junction and Manly, Iowa, a distance of 135.5 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block signal system being in use. The accident occurred at a point 2.09 miles west of the west switch at Argon; approaching this point from either direction the track is tangent for more than 1 mile. The grade for east-bound trains is 0.4 per cent ascending at the point of accident.

Rule 12 of the rules governing the care and operation of maintenance motor cars provides:

Information regarding train movements will be obtained from dispatcher when practicable but such information will under no circumstances relieve man in charge of car from fully protecting motor car movements at all times.

During foggy and stormy weather and on curves and other obscure and dangerous places, where trains cannot be seen sufficiently in advance to remove car from track, special precaution must be taken to avoid accident, flagging when necessary.

In case of doubt, remove car from the track and know that the movement is fully protected before again attempting to operate car.

There was a dense fog at the time of the accident, which occurred at 7.17 or 7.18 a.m.

Description.

Eastbound freight train No. 914 consisted of 38 cars and a caboose, hauled by engines 2313 and 827, and was in charge of Conductor Tilzey and Enginemen Fowler and Moore. This train departed from Clear Lake Junction, the last open office, 40.3 miles from Argon, at 5.07 a.m., 6 hours and 12 minutes late, and was approaching Argon at a speed estimated to have been between 20 and 25 miles per hour when it collided with the section motor car.

The westbound section motor car involved, a Mudge car, type ES-2, weighing approximately 950 pounds, was in charge of Section Foreman Bakeman, accompanied by three section laborers. Section Foreman Bakeman received at Iowa Falls a line-up of trains showing that train No. 914 was expected to arrive at that point at 7.50 a.m. This motor car departed from that point, located 3.4 miles east of Argon, at 7 a.m., and collided with train No. 914 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 5 and 8 miles per hour.

The pilot of engine 2313 was damaged to some extent but none of the equipment of train No. 914 was derailed. The motor car was badly damaged, although it was not derailed. The two employees killed were section laborers and those injured were the section foreman and section laborer.

Summary of evidence.

Engineman Fowler, of the lead engine of train No. 914, stated that at times the fog was so dense that he could not see over a distance of from 60 to 90 feet. When he first saw the motor car it was about 90 feet distant; he immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, at which time he thought they were traveling at a speed of 20 or 25 miles per hour, and he thought the train came to a stop within a distance of 12 or 14 car-lengths. Engineman Fowler further stated that the whistle had been sounded for all stations and public crossings, as nearly as he could tell as to their location, he said he presumed that the whistle had been sounded somewhere in the vicinity of the whistling post for the crossing near which this accident occurred, although he did not see the post in the fog. At another point in his statements he said the whistle was last sounded at a point about 1 mile from where the accident occurred. He did not think that the bell was ringing at the time of the accident but thought the headlight was burning. He also stated that if the accident had not occurred, his train would have arrived at Iowa Falls at about 7.45 a.m. In a second statement made by Engineman Fowler subsequent to the investigation, he stated positively that the headlight was burning at the time of the accident and was in good condition.

The statements of Fireman Leslie, of the lead engine of train No. 914, said the whistle was sounded for a crossing about 1 mile west of the point of accident but he did not think it was sounded for the whistling post for the crossing located just east of the point of accident, the bell was not ringing and he did not think the headlight was burning. When questioned a second time in regard to the headlight, subsequent to the investigation, he stated it was burning when they left Manly, was turned off while at the siding at Flint, and was turned back on again before leaving that point, although he could not recall seeing the reflection of the light against the fog in the vicinity of the point of accident. Brakeman Boehm, of train No. 914, who was riding on the brakeman's seat on engine 2313 said the whistle was sounded for the crossing near which the accident occurred; that the headlight was burning when the train departed from Clear Lake Junction, and he thought it was burning at the time of the accident.

Engineman Moore, of the second engine of train No. 914, stated that at the time of the accident the fog was very dense and limited the vision to about one-half a car-length on a moving engine and about one or two car-lengths when standing. He estimated the speed to have been from 22 to 25 miles per hour when the air brakes were applied in emergency, but did not know whether or not the whistle signal had been sounded for the crossing near which the accident occurred. The statements of Fireman Connell, of the second engine of train No. 914, corroborated those of Engineman Moore.

Conductor Tilzey, of train No. 914, stated that after the accident he went to the head end of the train and at that time did not notice whether or not the headlight was burning, but later, on his return from telephoning, he observed that it was burning. The statements of Brakeman Burke, who was riding in the cupola of the caboose, brought out nothing additional of importance.

Section Foreman Bakeman, in charge of the motor car, stated that before departing from Iowa Falls he obtained a line-up of trains which showed that train No. 914 was expected to arrive at that point at 7.50 a.m. There had been a heavy fog, but it had cleared to some extent and the sun came out and he could see a distance of possibly a mile. He then departed on his motor car with one laborer and himself riding in the forward position and two other laborers riding backward. At a point east of Argon they encountered fog, but later it cleared and they were able to see a reasonable distance until they reached mile post 153, located 1,230 feet east of the point of accident, where the fog was very heavy. At about that time Section Foreman Bakeman said he looked at his watch and it was 7.16 a.m. and he decided that train No. 914 had not yet departed from Hampton, which

is 12.9 miles west of Argon and 16.3 miles from Iowa Falls. He was of the opinion that it would take train No. 914 about 35 or 40 minutes to travel from Hampton to Iowa Falls. He shut off the motor and drifted over a highway crossing and just after he had turned on the motor again he saw train No. 914 appear in the fog; he called a warning to the others and jumped, and just as he struck the ground he heard the sound of the collision. He estimated the speed of his motor car to have been between 5 and 8 miles per hour, and was of the opinion that an object could not have been seen in the fog at this point at a distance of more than 300 feet. The engine whistle had not been heard by him at any time, nor did he hear the engine bell ringing. The headlight was not burning, but even if it had been burning he did not think the accident could have been prevented. Section Foreman Bakeman further stated that he was familiar with the rules governing the operation of motor cars, including flagging if necessary in foggy weather, had been last examined on those rules about a year previous to the occurrence of the accident, and had received several circulars relative to the operation of motor cars, but on the other hand he said that he could not afford flag protection in work of this kind due to an insufficient number of men, at the time of the accident he was patrolling the track and he intended continuing to the west end of his section, less than 2 miles farther westward, the track being in such condition that it was necessary to go over it as soon as possible. His movements over his section had always been governed by the line-ups and he thought they could be relied upon with safety, he had never had an accident in the 12 years he had been operating a motor car.

Section Laborer Schade, who was riding beside Section Foreman Bakeman looking ahead, stated that he first saw the approaching train about four rail-lengths distant, he at once called to the others and then jumped off. He heard no whistle signal sounded nor did he hear the engine bell ringing, and he also said that the headlight was not burning, as the first thing he saw was a black object. All of the laborers on the motor car had seen the line-up, and Section Laborer Schade was of the opinion that the line-up could be depended upon. He estimated the speed of the motor car at the time of the accident to have been 6 or 8 miles per hour.

Operator Pardun, on duty at Iowa Falls on the day of the accident, stated that he received the line-up from the dispatcher at 6.12 a.m., and when the section foreman came to the office he had the line-up ready for him. He said he did not know where the section foreman was going on that day and he had no conversation that would lead the foreman to feel or believe that line-ups are absolutely correct.

Train Dispatcher Carver, on duty at the time of the accident, stated that he gave Operator Pardun the line-up for the section foreman but did not make a record of it, which was contrary to his usual practice. He further stated that on some occasions the section foreman calls him on the telephone from Argon for any additional information he may have to give him, but in this instance even if Section Foreman Bakeman had called him, he would have been unable to have given any additional information as there were no open offices between Clear Lake Junction and Iowa Falls. He had never given section foremen train orders to cover movements of motor cars, and trains receive no information concerning motor cars unless construction or some other unusual work is involved. Roadmaster Tjaden stated that he had instructed section foremen not to rely entirely on their line-ups.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of a section motor car to be removed from the main track in foggy weather, or to be protected by flag, for which Section Foreman Bakeman is responsible.

The investigation disclosed that Section Foreman Bakeman received a line-up showing the time train No. 914 was expected to arrive at Iowa Falls, and it appears that if the accident had not occurred train No. 914 would have arrived approximately at the time shown, or a few minutes earlier. Information of this character represented the condition under which the section foreman had been operating his motor car for many years. In this particular case the motor car encountered fog, and the rules governing the operation of motor cars provide that in foggy weather special precautions must be taken, flagging when necessary. Knowing that a train must be near, Section Foreman Bakeman should have taken particular care strictly to observe the rules, instead of continuing at a moderate speed under weather conditions which made it impossible to move the motor car from the track when the approaching train finally became visible.

The statements of the various witnesses were conflicting as to whether a whistle signal was sounded by the lead engineman of train No. 914 for the highway grade crossing located near the point of accident, apparently the bell was not ringing, and there is a conflict in the statements as to whether the headlight was burning. On the latter point, however, the section foreman stated that even if it had been burning he did not think it would have prevented the accident. As to the whistle and bell it is a question, of course, as to whether he would have heard them, assuming that both of them were used.

All of the employees involved were experienced men and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.