

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION  
OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE MINNEAPOLIS, ST. PAUL  
& SAULT STE. MARIE RAILWAY NEAR GILE, WIS., ON AUGUST 3,  
1922.

August 26, 1922.

To the Commission:

On August 3, 1922, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie Railway near Gile, Wis., resulting in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 9 employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on Penokee Line of the sixth District of the Chicago Division, extending between Bessemer, Mich., and Mellen, Wis., a distance of 33.3 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident the line is single-track, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred in a cut about 10 feet in depth, approximately 1,100 feet west of the station at Gile; approaching this point from the east the track is tangent for more than 4,000 feet, followed by a 4-degree curve to the right 631 feet in length, the accident occurred at the eastern end of this curve. The grade in this vicinity varies from 0.55 to 1.25 per cent ascending for westbound trains, being 0.7 per cent at the point of accident. The view is restricted to about 200 feet on account of the cut in which the track is located. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 1:45 p.m.

Description

Eastbound freight extra 2427, en route from Hoyt, Wis., to Bessemer, Mich., consisted of engine 2427, headed west, and a caboose, and was in charge of Conductor Eubanks and Engineman Kobernot. This train left Hoyt, 3.5 miles west of Gile, at 1:40 p.m., having received train order No. 39 to meet train No. 151 at Hurley, a station 6.2 miles east of Hoyt and 0.9 mile west of Ironwood. After proceeding about 3-1/4 miles from Hoyt, extra 2427 collided with train No. 151 while traveling at a speed of about 25 miles an hour.

Westbound freight train No. 151, en route from Bessemer, Mich., to Mellen, Wis., consisted of 8 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2629, and was in charge of Conductor Gallagher and Engineman Knoblauch. This train arrived

at Ironwood, the last open telegraph office, and 3.6 miles east of Gile, at 1:10 p.m. The train stopped at the water tank east of the station while the engine took water the train then pulled down and stopped with the engine about three car lengths west of the station. Two empty cars were set out, after which the engine was recoupled to the train and the train departed, as shown by the conductor's figures on the train register, at 1:25 p.m., 2 hours and 45 minutes late. This train passed Hurley without stopping and had reached a point about 1,100 feet west of the station at Gile when, while traveling at a speed of about 25 miles an hour, it collided with extra 2427.

Both engines were partially derailed and badly damaged, their cabs being completely demolished. The first car in train No. 151 was derailed and badly damaged, while the caboose of extra 2427 was only partly derailed. The employee killed was the fireman of train No. 151.

#### Summary of evidence.

At about 1:30 p.m. engine 2427 reported at Hoyt to the train dispatcher for orders. The dispatcher called Ironwood and asked Operator Phillips if train No. 151 was there and when they would be ready to go; Operator Phillips replied that they would be ready in about 10 minutes, whereupon the dispatcher told him to copy a "31" train order for them and issued order No. 39 which was repeated by Operator Phillips at 1:32 p.m. After waiting a few minutes for the crew of train No. 151 to sign the order, the dispatcher again called Operator Phillips about 1:40 p.m. and asked him where they were; Operator Phillips replied "Wait a minute", then a few minutes later came back and said that the train had gone. Train Dispatcher Stockley said that Operator Phillips did not say anything about the engine of train No. 151 having passed the train order signal and as far as he knew when he issued the order the engine was still east of the signal; had he known otherwise he would not have allowed the opposing train to leave Hoyt without first securing the signatures from train No. 151.

After taking water just east of the station, train No. 151 pulled down and stopped with the train in front of the station and the engine a short distance west of the train order signal; at this time the train order signal was in the proceed position. While the trainmen were engaged in setting out two empty cars west of the station Conductor Gallagher went into the office, registered and told Operator Phillips he had two cars to set out and they would be ready to go, to which Operator Phillips replied, according to the conductor, "You can go now for all of me"; this occurred about 1:15 or 1:17 p.m. According to Conductor Gallagher's

statement, after the engine was recoupled to the train and was ready to go he entered the leaving time on the train register as 1:25 p.m., and that is the time the train departed. Engineman Knoblauch thinks the train departed at 1:25 or 1:26 p.m. All the members of the crew of train No.151 agree that the train order signal was in the clear position when the train departed from Ironwood.

Operator Phillips, on duty at Ironwood, stated that when train No.151 arrived he was on the back station platform, but upon its arrival he went into the office and when Conductor Gallagher came in told him, "We have nothing for you" (meaning cars), he then went to his desk and began checking way-bills. After he had been at the desk a few minutes the train dispatcher called and asked him if No.151 was there and how long they would be there. He looked out the window and seeing two ore cars, knowing that it was the train of No.151, replied that they would be ready in about ten minutes as they had only a little work to do. The dispatcher then told him to copy a "31" train order, whereupon he placed his train order signal in the stop position and proceeded to copy and repeat train order No.39, it was then about 1:30 p.m. He then returned to his work with the way-bills and after a few minutes when he got up to get a drink of water he discovered that train No.151 had departed. He called Hurley and tried to have the train stopped there but it had already passed. Operator Phillips stated that when he took the order he thought that Conductor Gallagher would come back in the office again before going as he usually did, regardless of the position of the train order signal. He always understood that before a train leaves a station, if the markers have not passed the train order signal, the crew would ascertain the position of the signal before departing.

The evidence indicates that owing to the obstructed view the crew of neither train saw the opposing train approaching in time to make an application of the brakes

#### Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of Operator Phillips to deliver train order No.39 to the crew of train No 151.

Rule 219 of the Operating Rules is as follows:

"Unless otherwise directed, an operator must not repeat or give the "X" response to a train order for a train which has been cleared or of which the engine has passed his train order signal until he has obtained the signature of the conductor to the order and the engineer has been notified."

Had this rule been observed by Operator Phillips, extra 2427 would have been held at Hoyt until the conductor of train No. 151 had signed the order and the accident would not have occurred.

The evidence indicates that train No. 151 had left Ironwood before train order No. 39 was received by Operator Phillips. It is believed that Operator Phillips was relying upon Conductor Gallagher's practice of coming to the office before departing, rather than actually knowing that the train was still at his station when he accepted the train order.

This accident is the result of a man-failure in its simplest form and again calls attention to the inherent weakness of the train order method of train operation. Wherever trains are operated under this system the opportunities for failures such as this are ever present and such accidents may be expected. Had an adequate block signal system been in use on this line, the presence of the opposing train would have been disclosed and the accident would probably have been averted.

It developed during the investigation that the air brakes on the caboose of extra 2427 were cut out at the time it was coupled to the engine, and the train departed from Hoyt in this condition, making the percentage of operative brakes in this train only 66 2/3 per cent, members of the crew being aware of this condition at that time. While on account of the physical conditions existing at the point of accident the question of proper operation of the air brakes is not involved in this accident, the responsible supervising officials should immediately take steps that will insure a compliance with the air brake provision of the safety appliance law.

Operator Phillips entered the service of this railroad in May 1917, his record was clear. At the time of the accident he had been on duty 5 hours and 45 minutes, after having been off duty for 16 hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND

Chief, Bureau of Safety.