

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD AT WEST PHILADELPHIA, PA., OF
NOVEMBER 12, 1929.

February 30, 1930.

To the Commission:

On November 12, 1929, there was a side collision between an express train and an empty passenger-equipment train on the Pennsylvania Railroad at West Philadelphia, Pa., resulting in the death of one employee

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Philadelphia Terminal Division, in the West Philadelphia passenger train yard, between "K" tower and "N" tower, just west of a switchman's station, known as station W. P. 7, at which point tracks 4 and 17 converge. "I" tower is located about 1,900 feet from the West Philadelphia Station, outbound, while "K" tower is located about 2,300 feet beyond, station W. P. 7 is located about 1,050 feet east of "K" tower, in the vicinity of Spring Garden Street bridge.

Approaching the switch, outbound, at which tracks 4 and 17 converge, track 4 curves gradually to the left; track 17 parallels track 4 on the left, but is not immediately adjacent thereto, being separated therefrom by two other tracks until reaching a point a short distance beyond Spring Garden Street bridge, where the two other tracks end, and track 17 then curves first to the right and then to the left, converging with track 4 just west of station W. P. 7.

Movements within the yard are made subject to the book of operating rules, time-table and special instructions, such movements are also under the direction of a yardmaster. Movements from the yard to the main track, or vice versa, are under the control of the towermen at "K" tower and "I" tower, with a switchman stationed between these two towers at W. P. 7, who operates hand-thrown switches, such a switch being in use at the point where tracks 4 and 17 converge, the normal position of this switch is lined for track 17, it being a trailing-point switch for the movements involved. Outbound trains departing on track 17 are given signal to proceed after the towerman at "N" tower notifies the towerman at "K" tower

and receives information that the route is clear. Under special instructions issued on August 13, 1929, a movement must not be made from track 4 to track 17 without first obtaining permission from the switchman at W. P. 7, who must get his authority from the towerman at "K" tower. Under the rules, trains moving on yard tracks, but not operated under block signal rules or train orders, must run prepared to stop within range of vision, unless tracks are known to be clear and switches properly set.

The weather was slightly foggy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 1.20 a.m.

Description

Shifting engine 564, headed east, was coupled to the west end of 10 mixed passenger equipment cars, empty, and in charge of Conductor Huey and Engineman Fogarty. This train moved outbound, making a back-up movement on track 4, and was brought to a stop with the engine fouling the switch at which tracks 4 and 17 converge. While standing at this point, preparatory to making a reverse movement to Broad Street station, engine 564 was struck on its right side by train No. 91.

Outbound first-class express train No. 91 consisted of 19 express cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 3755, and was in charge of Conductor Hiller and Engineman Yeater. This train departed from the West Philadelphia station at 1.17 a.m., 22 minutes late, and collided with shifting engine 564 while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 3 and 12 miles per hour.

Both engines were slightly damaged. The employee killed was the engineman of engine 564.

Summary of evidence

Fireman McFarland, of engine 564, stated that the back-up movement on track 4 was made at a speed not to exceed 15 miles per hour, when in the vicinity of the switch, Engineman Fogarty told him that the switch was lined for track 17 and he made a heavy air brake application. Fireman McFarland stood up on the seat box, but could not see the switch, and then his train came to a sudden stop, fouling the switch and causing him to lose his balance. Engineman Fogarty immediately sounded the engine whistle and shouted a warning of danger, following which the collision occurred. Fireman McFarland further stated that he did not see or hear train No. 91 prior to the collision, as he was on the opposite side of the engine cab, the air brakes had been tested and the headlight was burning properly.

Conductor Huey, of engine 564, stated that he was riding at the rear end of his train while the back-up movement was being made on track 4, at a speed not to exceed 3 miles per hour. Approaching the switch the air brakes went into emergency and he got off to see what the trouble was, on account of the haze he could not see his own engine. At about this time the engine of train No. 91 passed him on track 17, following which he heard a blast sounded on the engine whistle, then the air brakes applied in emergency on train No. 91, and the conductor ran the length of his train, as he thought his own engine might have fouled the switch. Conductor Huey said that there was nothing he could have done to prevent the accident. He said that he had never worked with Engineman Fogarty before, but that the engineman told him that he was qualified. Conductor Huey advanced the opinion that the switch was fouled by reason of the fact that Engineman Fogarty, although qualified to work in this yard apparently was not thoroughly familiar with the physical characteristics at this point.

Engineman Yeater, of train No. 91, stated that he was proceeding under "caution, slow speed" signal indications, and that the speed of his train was about 12 miles per hour, after passing under Spring Garden Street bridge and hearing his fireman call the indication of a signal located near "K" tower, he opened the throttle, increasing the speed slightly, but on hearing a shrill blast sounded on an engine whistle he immediately shut off steam and applied the air brakes in emergency, then the collision occurred, at which time he estimated the speed to have been about 3 miles per hour. Engineman Yeater did not see engine 564 prior to the collision, account of the curvature. The air brakes were tested and worked properly, he had the headlight burning dimly on his engine. Engineman Yeater further stated that he saw cars standing on track 4, but did not think that they extended beyond the fouling point of the switch, saying that had he been given proper warning that such was the case he could have brought his train to a stop without incident. He was thoroughly familiar with conditions in this vicinity and realized that he was in no way relieved from the duty of operating his own train prepared to stop within range of vision unless the tracks are known to be clear.

Fireman Thompson, of train No. 91, stated that after his engine passed under Spring Garden Street bridge he called the signal in the vicinity of "K" tower, which displayed a "caution, slow speed" indication, and resumed work on his fire, he then heard the blast of an engine whistle, following which the collision occurred. He estimated the speed to have been not more than 12 miles per hour. He was unaware that the switch was fouled by engine 564.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by shifting engine 564 fouling a switch, for which Engineman Fogarty is responsible, and by the failure of Engineman Yeater, of train No. 91, to operate his train under proper control on a yard track

Why Engineman Fogarty, of engine 564, failed to bring the draft of cars to a stop before his engine fouled the switch, at the time the back-up movement was made on track 4, is not known, as he was killed in the accident. Engineman Yeater, of train No. 91, saw the draft of cars standing on track 4 as his train approached the switch on track 17, and he should have realized that there was a possibility of that train extending beyond the fouling point. As it was, however, he could not see the switch on account of the curvature and the first he knew of anything wrong was on hearing an engine whistle signal, although he immediately shut off steam and applied the air brakes in emergency it was then too late to avert the accident.

Engineman Fogarty entered the service as fireman, on August 4, 1916, and was made engineman on May 14, 1923. Engineman Yeater entered the service as fireman on December 12, 1900, and was made engineman on October 13, 1915. At the time of the accident none of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.