

INV. 311

JANUARY 14, 1916.

**IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE WABASH RAILWAY, NEAR MORRIS, IND.,
NOV. 26, 1915.**

On November 26, 1915, there was a rear-end collision between two westbound freight trains on the Wabash Railway, near Morris, Ind., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 2 employees. After investigation, the Chief of the Division of Safety submits the following report:

The Fourth District of the Detroit Division of the Wabash Railway, upon which this accident occurred, is a single-track line extending from Montpelier, Ohio, to Chicago, Ill., a distance of 175 miles. The movement of trains is governed by time-table, train orders, and a manual block signal system, train orders being transmitted by telegraph.

The point of the accident is located about 1-3/4 miles west of the station at Morris. Beginning at the station and proceeding westward, the track is tangent for about 1200 feet, followed by a one degree 40 minute curve to the left of 1,500 feet; the track is then tangent for about 1-1/4 miles to the point of accident. Approaching this point from the east there is a grade of 0.6% descending westward for about 1/2 miles.

A bulletin order dated April 1, 1915, and with which the crews were familiar, restricted the speed of freight trains to 20 miles per hour between Crocker and Westville, the former being 5.7 miles east of, and the latter 7.6 miles west of Morris.

Westbound freight train No. 1st 95, at the time of the

accident consisted of engine 2091, 9 loaded, 18 empty cars and a caboose, having a tonnage of 844 tons. It was in charge of Conductor Little and Engineer Fletcher, and left Montpelier, Ohio, at 7:25 p.m., November 25th. The train passed Westville, the last block station east of the point of accident, at 2:50 a.m., and when at a point about 1-3/4 miles west of Morris, and while running at speed of about 18 miles per hour, it was struck by train No. 95.

Westbound freight train No. 95 at the time of the accident consisted of engine 2036, 37 loaded cars and a caboose, having a tonnage of 1,150 tons. It was in charge of Conductor Ulrey and Engineer Gould and left Montpelier at 8:15 p.m. At Westville the train received a caution card reading:

"Conductor and enginemen No. 95 will proceed cautiously from Westville to Crocker expecting to find 1st 95 ahead."

The train passed Westville at 3:02 a.m., without stopping, and collided with 1st 95 at about 3:18 a.m.

As a result of the collision the caboose and two rear cars of 1st 95 were demolished and the two cars following were derailed. The engine and tender of No. 95 were derailed but remained upright, assuming a V-shape, the locomotive headed toward the northwest and the tender toward the southwest. The tank of the engine partially telescoped the first car. The nine cars following were derailed, five of which were practically destroyed. At the time of the accident there was a strong wind blowing from the southwest which blew smoke and steam down the right side of the train. The weather was cloudy with occasional showers.

Engineman Fletcher of train 1st 95 stated that as his train passed Westville he looked back and saw the light from the

marker and the deck lamps on the caboose; at the top of the hill before reaching Morris he shut off steam and drifted past the station at Morris; just a few moments before the accident occurred the fireman opened the blow-off cock on the left side of the engine and the escaping steam was blowing back along the right side of the train, which prevented him from seeing the rear of his train. He is unable to say whether or not the steam would obscure the rear from the view of a train following. He stated that at the time the accident occurred his train was running at a speed of about 18 miles per hour. Shortly after the accident, while in conversation with Engineer Gould, of 24 95, Engineer Gould said that he "did not see the rear of 1st 95," he "just got a flash of red light and was into them." He also stated that shortly after the accident the fireman looked at his watch and it was then 3:18 a.m.

Fireman Bechtol, of train 1st 95, stated that train 1st 95 did not stop at any point after leaving Westville until after the accident occurred, and that at no time between these points was the speed less than fifteen miles per hour. He stated that he saw a green light on the rear of his train as it rounded the curve at Morris. He estimates the speed of his train to have been about 18 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Brakeman O'Connor, of train 1st 95, stated that he was riding on the engine passing the stations at Westville and Morris, and when passing these stations he saw the green marker light on the rear; he again saw the marker lights when on the curve just west of Morris. He estimates the speed to have been between 15 and 20 miles per hour.

Operator Keesling at Westville stated that when train 1st 95 passed his station he noticed both markers and the light on the cupola were burning. He further stated that 2d 95 passed his station at a speed of 10 or 12 miles per hour, without stopping, and that he delivered a clearance card and a caution card to a member of the crew on both the engine and caboose.

Engineman Gould, of train 2d 95, stated that at Magee, he was given a caution card stating that train 1st 95 was in the block; his train passed Westville about 8:01 a.m. at which point the speed was reduced to about 10 miles per hour ^{in order} to get a caution card, on account of train 1st 95 being in the block. He stated that when he reached the west end of the passing track at Morris he looked at his watch and it was then 8:17 a.m.; he realized that he was running slightly faster than 20 miles per hour; however, as he was not using steam he did not deem it wise to apply the brakes unless it was necessary to do so. He said that approaching the point of accident he was sitting on the engineman's seat, looking through a peep-hole in the window, but that the wind was blowing the smoke and steam down so badly as to obscure his vision part of the time. Engineman Gould stated that the first he saw of 1st 95 was when his headlight shone on the door of 95's caboose; he made an attempt to apply the brakes, but the collision occurred before he could reach the brake valve. Engineman Gould further stated that both of the cab windows on his side of the engine were open, also, that while rounding the curve just west of Morris he saw the fireman looking ahead. He stated that his engine was equipped with an oil headlight, but scarcely at any time by its aid

could he see ahead; he did not see any red markers on the rear of 1st 95 and does not believe the markers were burning.

Fireman Beard stated that passing Westville, the speed of the train was reduced to 15 or 20 miles per hour while the head brakeman caught the caution card; as the train rounded the curve west of Morris he saw both switch lights and after coming onto the straight track he looked ahead, but saw nothing of 1st 95; he then began to shake down the fire; nothing was said to him by the engineman relative to looking out for 1st No. 95. Fireman Beard also stated that the weather conditions were not such as would prevent the rear of 1st 95 from being seen. He stated that on his side of the cab the front window was closed and the side window was slightly open.

Brakeman Casebeer of 2nd 95 stated that approaching Morris he saw both switch lights, and as the train neared the west switch he stepped to the right side of the engine and stood behind the engineman; after entering on the tangent track he looked ahead from between the engine and tender, but saw nothing of 1st 95, however; at that time his view was not very good; he had not looked ahead for two or three minutes prior to the time of the collision.

Conductor Ulrey, of 3d 95, stated that after entering the straight track west of Morris the speed of the train was slightly increased, and he is of the opinion that at the time of the accident the speed of his train was slightly over 20 miles per hour. Conductor Ulrey also stated he could have reduced the speed of the train from the caboose by applying the air brakes, but considers it a bad practice while descending a grade.

Flagman Harde, of train No 95, stated that after passing Morris the speed of the train began to increase and shortly afterward the conductor remarked: "He would hate to have to pull the air on him the way the train had been acting."

This accident was caused by the failure of engineman Gould to properly control the speed of train No 95, while running in an occupied block, as authorized by a caution card.

Rule 50 of Telegraph Block System Rules reads in part:

"Responsibility for colliding with trains in a block, when caution card is given, will rest with train receiving and moving under such restriction."

Under this rule Engineman Gould should have maintained a diligent lookout for train No 95, and if the weather or other conditions were such as to obscure his vision the speed of his train should have been reduced accordingly.

It will also be noted that the speed of freight trains in this territory is restricted to 20 miles per hour by a special bulletin of long standing, and with which all members of the crew were admittedly familiar, and which, according to their knowledge, they were violating at the time the accident occurred. For this violation Conductor Ulrey and Engineman Gould are equally responsible.

The investigation of this accident discloses that in making the run from Benton to Morris, a distance of 64 miles, train No 95 was given caution cards at four, out of six block stations, and permitted to enter the block occupied by train No 95.

Rule No. 1, of Supplement to Rule for Telegraph Block System, reads as follows:

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"The province of the block system is to insure safety by preventing trains from entering blocks that are not clear and superintendents will see that this principle is not deviated from except to prevent excessive delays."

When a block system is operated in such a manner as to fail to accomplish the purpose for which it is designed it is a block system in name only.

Supplemental Rule 6 to Telegraph Block Rule is as follows:

"Trains must come to a full stop before receiving caution cards or permissive cards."

This investigation develops that this rule is not being observed, of which the operating officials should have been cognizant.

Rules and regulations which are not intended to be obeyed have no place in the operating code of any railroad, and a habitual disregard for such rules cannot but fail to weaken the respect of employees for all rules and eventually lead to accidents such as this.