

highlights

OFFICE OF SAFETY NEWS

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PRELIMINARY REPORTS ON PASSENGER TRAIN ACCIDENTS... Preliminary investigation and reports on two recent accidents involving passenger trains have been detailed and final investigation and testing of equipment is underway. On March 14, a Work Train struck the rear car on an Amtrak Metroliner near Cheverly, Maryland, derailing the car and demolishing the caboose of the Work Train. Preliminary investigation shows the probable cause to be failure of the crew members to operate the Work Train in accordance with restrictive signal indications. Four crew members on the Work Train and about nine passengers on the Metroliner sustained minor injuries in the accident. Damage is estimated at \$146,200. A collision between a Long Island Railroad passenger train and a freight at Ronkonkoma, Long Island, March 15, is also under investigation. A preliminary report on this accident, which killed one passenger, seriously injured four, and slightly injured 19 others, indicates the probable cause to be a closed cock in the train-lined brake pipe between the second and third cars on the passenger train which struck a standing freight. Amtrak's Broadway Ltd. on PC derailed outside of Youngstown, Ohio, March 18, with one killed, three injuries (serious), 46 slightly injured. Four Inspectors from Office of Safety on scene to determine cause and investigate circumstances.

HOURS OF SERVICE VIOLATION FILED... A civil case has been filed against the Santa Fe Railroad involving alleged violations of the Hours of Service Act and the concept of "designated terminal." It will be put on the Motion Calendar, which will preclude a trial since the parties have stipulated or agreed as to the facts. The case involves a question of law only. Was the intermediate point, where the crew was released, a "designated terminal" under the Act? It was not the "home" or "away-from-home" terminal for the crew involved. The Chief Counsel's office contends it was merely an intermediate point although such places meet the minimum requirements, at least for purposes of this case, and such release point is a terminal as that word is generally understood in the railroad industry. The Office of Safety and the Office of Chief Counsel are working closely together on the case.

GRADE CROSSING INVENTORY PROGRAM BEGUN... The beginning phase of a 14-month program designed to identify by number each of the country's 223,000 public grade crossings was highlighted at a public ceremony in Alexandria, Virginia, this month. The program, equally funded by FRA and the Association of American Railroads, will produce an information system upon which a comprehensive crossing safety improvement program can be planned, implemented, and evaluated. The project will begin with field tests in five states--Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Nevada, and Virginia--after which the balance of the country will be brought into the program.

NTSB REPORT RELEASED...A report on its investigation of the October 19, 1971, hazardous materials accident in Houston, Texas, has been released by the NTSB. The derailment of a Missouri Pacific freight train containing tank cars loaded with vinyl chloride caused an explosion and fire which killed a fireman and injured 50 bystanders. The Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the accident was "an unexplained emergency brake application" within the 82-car freight train. "Unequal braking of loaded and empty cars helped produce lateral forces near the fifty-second car which," the Board held, "exceeded the holding capability of the track fasteners and overturned a rail, derailing following cars. The Board said the severity of the accident was increased by (1) the abrupt, violent rupture of the tank car; (2) the "lack of adequate training, information, and documented procedures for on-scene identification and assessment of the threats to public safety;" and (3) the firemen's reliance on firefighting recommendations "which did not take into account the full range of hazards in such situations."

ALASKA RAILROAD SPUR OPENED...Under Secretary Krogh has announced the official opening of a 10-mile Alaska Railroad spur which will provide rail service to the Fairbanks International Airport. He said the new spur will "greatly facilitate movement of equipment and supplies to the oil fields on Alaska's North Slope and other northern points." Prior to the opening of the spur, freight had to be trucked to the airport after being shipped by rail to Fairbanks. Construction of the spur, begun in mid-May last year, was completed in October except for ballast to be emplaced on the last two miles this spring. However, the track is usable now at speeds of 10 m.p.h. and later will be suitable for 25 m.p.h. freight trains.

ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSES REGIONAL MEETING..."Setting and enforcing of standards is a vital part of a total safety program--but it is really only the tip of the iceberg," Administrator Ingram told inspectors gathered in Roanoke, Virginia, the week of March 12 for the first annual Eastern Regional Conference. He described the many elements which form the basis of the FRA safety program--good design of plant and equipment, careful operating practices, adequate training and sensible rule-making--and detailed on-going projects to assist the railroads toward safer operation. He also cautioned the inspectors that their maturity, judgment, and ability to impress the railroads with the importance of abiding by FRA safety requirements "will directly affect your personal performance records." Ingram said that it is vital that we make the railroads at least as safe as any other industry, and added that "Just as a captain is judged by how tautly his ship is run, so you will be graded on the improvements in safety shown on the railroads that you inspect." He also told the group that "We are cutting out the routine you now follow in making your inspections. It's so routine that the carriers can accurately predict when and where you'll show up. We think it's fine to tell a railroad the first time we're coming," he said, "but after we tell the management what's wrong, and what fixes must be made, we should go back without warning, and see whether they've done what we told them to do."

EMPLOYEE FATALITY REPORTING UNDERWAY...A new program has been initiated for the investigation by Office of Safety of each railroad employee fatality, and public reports will be issued. The first report, involving an RF&P car inspector who was struck by a moving freight car, was issued on February 22.

CALLING ALL HAMS...Ed Soper, WB4GTT, would like to contact all ham radio enthusiasts within the Office of Safety. Drop him a note at 9890 Becket Ct., Fairfax, Virginia 22030.