

[FE-17-98](#) (document link)

SUMMARY FOR FE-17-98:
SELECTED AND POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

SELECTED FACTORS

Railroad: Central of Georgia Railroad (merged with Norfolk Southern Railroad)

Location: Hapeville, Georgia

Region: Region 3

Month: June

Date: 06/05/98

Time: 6:40 a.m., EST

Data for Fatally Injured Employee(s)

Yard Foreman

48 years old

27 years of service

Last rules training: February 1998

Last safety training: May 1998

Last physical: October 1982

Data for all Employees (Craft, Positions, Activity)

Craft: Transportation

Positions:

Job GE-44

Engineer

Switchman

Yard Foreman

Switchman working nearby

Activity: Switching

SUMMARY FOR FE-17-98 CONTINUED

POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

EVENT

A Yard Foreman was fatally injured when crushed between two boxcars during a switching operation.

PCF No. 1

The incident occurred when the Yard Foreman entered between the two boxcars to adjust the couplers when it was not safe to do so. Railroad operating rules prohibited standing on the track in front of closely approaching equipment or stepping between coupled moving cars or engines for any reason.

PCF No. 2

The coupler to one of the boxcars was apparently problematic, which caused the boxcars' couplers to mismatch and the end platforms on the boxcars to close to a clearance of only 4 3/4 inches. The Yard Foreman had adjusted the coupler on two occasions prior to the incident. Right before the collision, he told the Engineer, "The Drawhead has a dip and wants to slide...ease on back...slack off, slack off."

PCF No. 3

The Crew did not comply with railroad operating rules which required crews, prior to coupling to cars on curves or in switches, to make sure that couplers matched. Rules also required carefully controlled speed and special precautions when coupling to cushion-underframe cars, as in this case.

REPORT: FE-17-98

RAILROAD: Central of Georgia Railroad (CGA)

LOCATION: Hapeville, Georgia

DATE & TIME: June 5, 1998, 6:40 a.m., EST

PROBABLE CAUSE: The Yard Foreman was fatally injured when he entered between two boxcars, attempting to adjust the couplers when it was not safe to do so.

EMPLOYEE:

Occupation:	Yard Foreman
Age:	48 Years
Length of Service:	27 Years
Last Rules Training:	Feb. 15, 1998
Last Safety Training:	May 27, 1998
Last Physical Examination:	Oct. 5, 1982

CIRCUMSTANCES PRIOR TO THE ACCIDENT

On the day prior to the accident, the crew of Job GE-44 went on duty at 11:59 p.m. at the Central of Georgia Railroad (Norfolk Southern), Industry Yard, East Point, Georgia, after completing the required off-duty period. The 3-person crew, comprising an Engineer, Switchman and Yard Foreman, was assigned to perform switching duties at Industry Yard and Hapeville, Georgia.

At Hapeville, located 3.1 miles south of East Point, the main track extended from north to south, with a pass track and three auxiliary tracks located west of and parallel to the main track. Westward from the pass track, they were designated as the runaround, long band mill, and short band mill tracks. On the north end of the yard, a lead track extended southwest from the pass track to the short band mill track, a dead-end track. From the lead track, the long band mill track extended from a 7-degree, left-hand turnout (No. 10 switch), southward. On the south end of the yard, a lead track extended northwest from the pass track to the long band mill track.

On the day of the accident, the crew of Job GE-44 performed switching at Industry Yard and subsequently operated inbound Train 197 to Hapeville. The train contained time-sensitive cars for the Ford Motor Company Assembly Plant at Hapeville.

GE-44 arrived at Hapeville with three locomotives and 43 cars and proceeded southward through the lead track to the runaround track, where the crew set out 29 cars and held onto 14 cars. The crew then pulled southward through the runaround and lead track, cleared the south switch to the pass track, and then shoved northward on the pass track and set out five cars.

The GE-44 crew then returned to the runaround track, picked up boxcar GTW 126763, pulled southward to clear the switch, and then shoved northward on the long band mill track with ten cars. The Engineer was seated at the controls of the locomotive on the west side of the cab, with the short hood facing southward. The Switchman boarded the locomotive at the south switch to the band mill track and remained in the locomotive cab. The Yard Foreman was located on the east side of the track, about 20 feet north of the north switch to the long band mill track. He was protecting the shoving move to a coupling with boxcar NW 868497, which was standing on the lead track. The crew intended to couple the north car in the shoving movement, GTW 126763, to the standing boxcar, NW 868497, cut off from the two boxcars, and let another yard job move the cars to the Ford Motor Company Assembly Plant, adjacent to the yard.

The weather was cloudy, with a temperature of 70° F.

THE ACCIDENT

About 6:35 a.m., GE-44 shoved northward on the long band mill track, with the Yard Foreman controlling the movement via radio. The north or tenth car in the shoving move was boxcar GTW 126763, which was moving through the 7-degree turnout. The Yard Foreman stopped the movement just prior to coupling and radioed the Engineer, saying "Adjusting, hold what you got." The Yard Foreman then told the Engineer, "Bump it 44, bump it," then, "Wait a second, wait a second, that will do 44, slack off, didn't make it, wait a second." About 30 seconds later, the Engineer asked "Alright 44, you are going back that way?" and the Yard Foreman replied, "Draw head has a dip and wants to slide, ease on back, ok 44, ease on back that way, easy, ten to a coupling." About 6:40 a.m., the Engineer shoved northward and then heard the Yard Foreman say in a muffled voice over the radio, "Slack off, slack off."

A Switchman working nearby heard the Yard Foreman's distressed call over the radio and stepped around the adjacent track and saw the Yard Foreman standing upright, on the outside of the east rail, pinned between the two boxcars. The couplers had mismatched and the end platforms on the boxcars closed to a clearance of four and three fourths inches. The Switchman also radioed the Engineer to slack off. As the cars pulled apart, he saw the Yard Foreman fall to the ground on the east side of the track.

An ambulance transported the Yard Foreman to South Fulton Medical Center, East Point, Georgia, where it arrived at 7:10 a.m. The Yard Foreman was pronounced dead at 7:52 a.m.

POST-ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

Inspection of boxcars GTW 126763 and NW 868497 disclosed no apparent defects that either caused or contributed to the accident. The center-of-car cushioning device on boxcar NW 868497 was to have been sent for testing; however, during disassembly, the hydraulic fluid was lost, which made it difficult to determine if the device had been functioning as intended.

There were no witnesses to the accident. The north car in the shoving movement, GTW 126763, was moving through the 7-degree turnout of the long band mill track during the previous unsuccessful attempts to couple the two cars. The Yard Foreman adjusted the coupler on two occasions and on one occasion told the Engineer that the "Drawhead has a dip and wants to slide...."

At the time of the accident, the Yard Foreman positioned himself between the "B" end of GTW 126763 and the "A" end of NW 868497, during an attempt to couple the two cars.

Postmortem toxicology tests were negative for drugs and alcohol.

APPLICABLE RULES

Norfolk Southern Operating Rules

GR-14. Employees must not stand on the track in front of closely approaching equipment or step between coupled moving cars or engines for any reason. They must not step between or immediately in front of standing cars or engines unless necessary in the performance of duty, and then only after arranging for protection against the equipment being coupled to or moved.

Employees must not go between cars and/or engines to adjust a drawbar unless the equipment is separated by at least 25 feet....

103(I) ...When necessary to couple to cars on curves or in switches, it must be known that couplers match, and coupling speed must be controlled to avoid bypassed couplers or jackknifing. Special care is needed when coupling to cushion-underframe or long cars.