

REPORT: FE-04-97
RAILROAD: Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP)
LOCATION: Mason City, Iowa
DATE/TIME: Jan. 29, 1997 - 12:55 a.m., CST

PROBABLE CAUSE:

Failure of employees (Conductor and Engineer) to properly communicate/acknowledge, via company radio, directions involving a backing movement.

EMPLOYEE: **Craft..... Transportation**
Activity..... Switching
Occupation..... Conductor
Age..... 48 years
Length of Service..... 28 years
Last Rules Training..... March 8, 1996
Last Safety Training..... Jan. 24, 1996
Last Physical Examination..... April 9, 1987

Circumstances Prior to the Accident

On Jan. 29, 1997, the Crew of UP's Local Freight Train LTT21-29, comprising an Engineer and Conductor, went on duty at 8 a.m. CST in Blue Earth, Minnesota. Both Crew Members had received the required off-duty time prior to being called for duty (off duty on 1/28/97 at 9:10 p.m. CST).

Train LTT21-29 was operated from Blue Earth to Mason City, Iowa, without incident and arrived at Mason City at 12:40 a.m. with three locomotives (UP 5541, UP 4317, and UP 3535), all positioned with the long hood forward (southbound) and coupled to nine cars. The Crew was instructed by the Mason City Yardmaster to cut off the nine cars on the north end of Yard Track No. 1 (west side of the main track), and set out the two trailing locomotives (UPB 4317 and UP 3535) on the fueling track, which is referred to by local Crews as the Come-Out Track (east side of the main track).

The Engineer was at the controls of the Lead Locomotive UP 5541 as the Conductor made the

cut on the north end of Yard Track No. 1. The Conductor boarded the trailing locomotive and rode to the south end of Yard Track No. 1, where it rejoined the main track. The switch on the south end of Yard Track No. 1 was lined for the movement and the three locomotive consists operated southward back onto the main track. The Conductor then de-boarded the trailing locomotive (the most northward locomotive) and re-positioned the switch on the south end of Yard Track No. 1 for movement northward on the main track. The Conductor re-boarded the trailing locomotive (UP 3535) and rode the steps on the point of the shove northward toward the Come-Out Track.

The Engineer reported the switches were all properly aligned for movement onto the yard on the east side of the main track and beyond onto Yard Track No. 12. The Engineer, still aboard UP 5541 with the cab end headed north, reported he had received hand signals from the Conductor throughout the shove until they arrived at Switch 504 leading onto the Come-Out Track. At this point, the Conductor gave a hand signal for the Engineer to stop.

After the movement stopped, the Conductor de-boarded from his position on the steps of UP 3535 and walked to Switch 504, which led to the Come-Out Track. After finding Switch 504 locked out and the track Blue-Flagged, the Conductor began walking northward toward the next switch (Switch 505). The Engineer reported the locomotive consist was positioned on a slight curve, and the Conductor left his sight after a short distance.

A short time later, the Engineer heard on the company radio what he assumed to be a transmission from the Conductor which said "Come ahead, 21." The Engineer began shoving north, assuming the Conductor had arrived, and positioned the next switch (Switch 505) for movement onto what the Engineer called the "Pit Track."

The weather was clear, with light northerly winds of around 10 mph. The temperature was about 0° F, and the ground was covered by snow.

The Accident

The Engineer stated he continued to shove northward until he could see the movement was not entering the pit track at Switch 505. He then tried to radio the Conductor, saying "Where are we going, Pat?"

When he received no response, he again radioed "Hello, Pat." With still no response, the Engineer stopped the locomotive consist, put on his coat, and de-boarded the locomotive to investigate. As he walked from the locomotive, he could see the body of the Conductor under the north truck of the middle or second locomotive.

The Engineer later stated that he ran back to the controlling locomotive and called the Yardmaster on the radio. He was unsure of what he said, but remembered the Yardmaster telling him to use the emergency call buttons 911 on the radio to contact the Chief Dispatcher. The Chief Dispatcher came on the radio within 30 seconds after he did this, and the Engineer

reported the circumstances. The Chief Dispatcher called emergency response personnel, who arrived at the scene within minutes.

Please see the attached diagram of the Mason City West Yard to better visualize the accident scene and the chain of events leading up to the fatality.

Post-Accident Investigation

The Conductor was pronounced dead at the scene of the accident by the Cerro Gordo County Medical Examiner. The body was later removed and taken to North Iowa Mercy Hospital in Mason City, Iowa, where FRA mandatory toxicological tests were performed. FRA mandatory toxicological tests were also performed on the Engineer. Results of these tests were negative for both employees for the presence of drugs or alcohol.

An Officer from the Mason City Police Department started his investigation immediately following the accident. The Police Investigator indicated he was able to trace the Conductor's footprints in the snow leading from Switch 504 northward along the east side of the Come-Out Track for approximately 130 feet. The footprints then crossed over the Come-Out Track and continued northward in between the Come-Out Track and Yard Track No. 12 for approximately 40 feet, at which point they crossed onto the middle of Yard Track No. 12.

The footprints continued for a distance of approximately 12 feet to the point where the Conductor was struck from behind by the locomotive consist. The Conductor's body came to rest at a point approximately 150 feet north of the point of impact.

Railroad officials who accompanied the Police Investigator indicated all of the Conductor's footprints were facing northward. This would indicate that at no time did he stop or turn around to look toward the approaching locomotive consist.

During his interview, the Engineer of LTT21-29 indicated it was the normal practice for the Conductor to wear his ear plugs while performing switching movements. Due to the severity of his injuries, it could not be determined whether the Conductor was wearing ear protection when he was struck. The Engineer stated the Conductor had been wearing a green ball cap. The Engineer also indicated that he was not ringing the bell prior to or at the time of the accident, nor did he acknowledge the Conductor's radio transmission to "Come ahead 21" either verbally or through use of a whistle signal.

552-0014

Seiv. Int
 436-7663 P
 436-7667 F

ZTS TRK. NO. NAME	CONTRACT NO.	ZTS TRK. NO. NAME	CONTRACT NO.	ZTS TRK. NO. NAME	CONTRACT NO.
MASON CITY, IA. - DM 136-PGS 4-6, 13&26		100 MAINLINE			
001 *1 WEST YD.		501 RIP 1 TRACK			
002 *2 WEST YD.		502 RIP 2 TRACK			
003 *3 WEST YD.		503 RIP 3 TRACK			
004 *4 WEST YD.		504 COME OUT TRK			
005 *5 WEST YD.		505 PIT TRK			
006 *6 WEST YD.		799 MASON CITY BY-PRODUCTS			
007 BLUE RIBBON					
009 MAINLINE WEST YD.					
010 NEW TRK.					
011 CLASSIFICATION TRACK					
012 COAL HOUSE TRACK					
013 CLASSIFICATION TRACK					
014 NEW RAMP					
015 NIXON					

