

REPORT: FE-25-97

RAILROAD: Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP)

LOCATION: Elko, Nevada

DATE, TIME: Aug. 15, 1997, 3:30 a.m., PST

PROBABLE CAUSE:

The Switchman entered between his consist and the 3-car cut to adjust the coupler drawhead and was pinned between the cars by the unexpected return movement of the 3-car cut.

EMPLOYEE:	Craft.....	Transportation
	Activity.....	Switching
	Occupation.....	Switchman
	Age.....	53 years
	Length of Service.....	28 years
	Last Rules Training.....	Sept. 3, 1996
	Last Safety Training.....	Aug. 23, 1996
	Last Physical Examination.....	Aug. 8, 1990

Circumstances Prior to the Accident

On Aug. 14, 1997, at 11:59 p.m. (PDT), the Switchman reported for duty on Yard Job No. YEL-52, at the UP's Elko Yard office (milepost 669). The Crew comprised an Engineer, Switch Foreman (Foreman), and Switchman. The Switchman was observed by fellow employees and appeared to be fit for duty. All three Crew Members were regularly assigned to this job and had 16 hours rest prior to going on duty. Between 11:59 p.m. and the time of the event, the Crew performed yard switching, coupling up cars on yard tracks, and making up trains.

Prior to the event, the Switchman was instructed by the Foreman to go to Track No. 11 and be ready to couple up the cars on that track after the Foreman and Engineer had completed switching on the other tracks. During this time, the Engineer and Foreman were switching cars on Tracks Nos. 6, 5, and 11.

After the Foreman and Engineer completed these moves, the Foreman contacted the Switchman

by radio and asked if he was ready to stretch Track No. 11 to determine if all the cars were coupled together. The Switchman said he was ready, and the track was stretched. The Switchman then noticed that another coupling had to be made about five or six cars from the rear of the cut. The Switchman walked up and made that coupling. After discussing some switching movements over the radio, the Switchman was instructed by the Foreman to stay on Track No. 11 until the cars were coupled. Then the Switchman would walk over to Track No. 4 and make sure those cars were coupled together. The Switchman responded over the radio that it would be no problem and at that point, the Foreman turned over control of the movements to the Switchman on Track No. 11.

The Foreman walked over to check the cars in Track No. 4 against his switch list. While at Track No. 4, the Foreman realized that the Switchman was not making any moves on Track No. 11, so he tried to contact him on the radio with no response. He then contacted the Engineer, who tried to contact the Switchman with no response. At that point, the Foreman told the Engineer that he was going back to check on the Switchman. The Foreman got in a van used by the Switch Crews and drove back to Track No. 11, where he saw the Switchman's lantern lying between the rails on Track No. 11.

Weather conditions at the time of the accident included a clear, dark sky, and a temperature of 65° F.

The Accident

The Foreman found the Switchman crushed between two cars. He immediately notified the Engineer, who contacted the proper authorities. The two locomotives and 27 cars were not moving when the Switchman was found by the Foreman.

The Elko Police and Fire Departments were called and arrived on the scene at about 4:10 a.m. The Coroner, who was notified and arrived at about 5 a.m., pronounced the Switchman dead at about 5:15 a.m.

The railroad reported no damage to equipment as a result of this event.

(Please see the attached two diagrams of Elko Yard to better visualize the accident scene and chain of events that led up to the fatality.)

Post-Accident Investigation

The Switchman was familiar with this yard, having performed duties as a Conductor in the past. The Switchman had been a Conductor for over 20 years and had bid on the Switchman's job in the yard following the merger of UP and Southern Pacific Railroad. This was his second time on this particular shift in the yard.

The investigation revealed that when the coupling was attempted six cars from the rear of the

cut, the last three cars, which were not coupled at the time due to misaligned couplers, rolled away freely and stopped approximately 140 feet from the Switchman's position. The Switchman then attempted to adjust the coupler on this car prior to coupling the last three cars, which had rolled away. During this time, the Switchman did not notice the 3-car cut rolling back toward his location.

Toxicological testing of the deceased was performed under the authority of 49 CFR Part 219 Subpart C, with negative results. Testing procedures by the railroad were not followed. The Crew failed to complete FRA F6180.73, failed to insure samples were collected in a timely manner, failed to make the kit immediately available, and failed to follow prescribed procedures in completing form FRA F6180.74. FRA investigators indicated they would cite violations against the carrier.

Inspection of track and equipment revealed no evidence of conditions that could have caused or contributed to the cause of the accident. The two drawbars involved in the accident indicated that they needed to be oiled and were very hard to move. The 24-hour inspection reports on both locomotives were in compliance.

The event recorder print-out for both locomotives, UP 3946 and UP 3646, indicated that the speed varied between 0 and 4 mph. The track had about ½ of 1.0 percent grade in both directions, meeting in the middle of the track. The track was clear of obstacles and provided good footing.

To: A. COVELL

ED COMBS

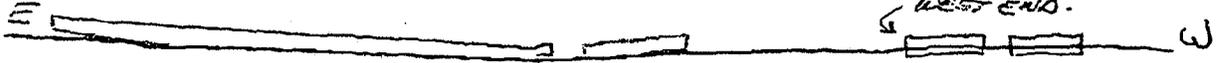
ARRIVED ON SITE: 0935

ELKO, NEVADA
YARD SWITCHER

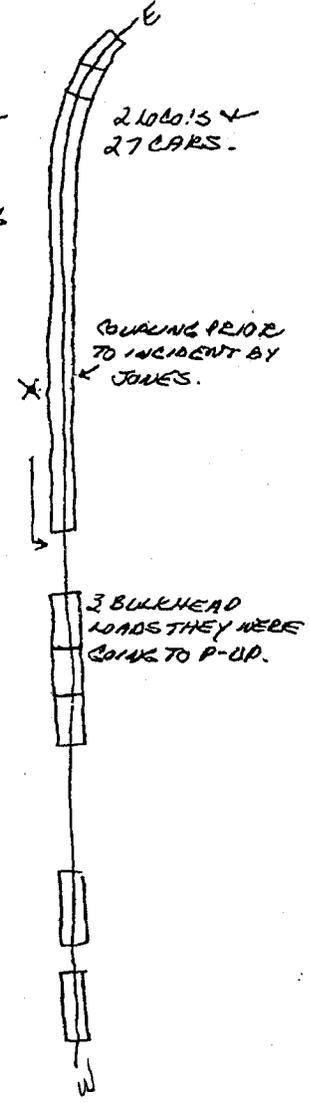
IF
TRACK #1 SLIGHT GRADE BOTH DIRECTIONS

LOC'S 4 & 7 CARS

CARS TIED DOWN
WEST END.



POSSIBLE CAUSE AT THIS TIME IS THAT AFTER MAKING
FIRST COUPLING, JONES WALKED BACK TO REAR OF CUT &
STEPPED INSIDE RAIL TO ADJUST COUPLERS. THE
ASSUMPTION IS THAT WHEN MAKING THE FIRST COUPLING
THE 3 BULKHEAD FLATS WERE KNOCKED WEST ABOUT 3
CARS ON A SLIGHT GRADE & WHEN JONES STEPPED
BETWEEN RAIL THE BULKHEAD CARS ROLLED BACK
EAST COUPLING JONES UP.



DATE: 8-15-97 TIME: 3:30 AM (PT)

WEATHER: DARK, CLEAR, 70°

JOB: YEL-52 (UP 3946-3646) RADIO'S WORKING
TAPES SENT SLL WILL GET COPY.

REMAINS TESTED. (JAMES F. JONES - 54 YRS OLD)

OFFICER ON SLEEVES: NORM HOLMS, UP, MOP

MP LOCATION - 669.0

OFFICERS AT ELKO: S. LEWIS, TED LEWIS, A. HOLMES,
M. R. R. AND, BILL COLSBURY

EMER: R. D. BLACK

FOREMAN: V. U. BOWER

TYPE OPERATION: BUR-6.28 TT: ST ITEM 2 #7

ADDITIONAL INFO TO FOLLOW.

10	08/15 15:25	919164986540	---	S	00'00"00	000	159	BUSY
DATE TIME	TO/FROM	MODE	MIN/SEC	PGS	CMD#	STATUS		

MTD ELKO

ELK RAILROAD
AUGUST 15, 1997

TRUCK NO. 11 TRUCK TO GRADE BOTH WAYS

