

[FE-13-98](#) (document link)

SUMMARY FOR FE-13-98:
SELECTED AND POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

SELECTED FACTORS

Railroad: Union Pacific Railroad Company
Location: Small, Texas
Region: Region 5

Month: May
Date: 05/12/98
Time: 8:45 p.m. CST

Data for Fatally Injured Employee(s)

UP Freight Train MFWWC-11

Engineer

51 years old

34 years of service

Last rules training: March 1998

Last safety training: Unknown

Last physical: Unknown

Conductor

26 years old

1 year, 7 months of service

Last rules training: October 1996

Last safety training: Unknown

Last physical: September 1996

Data for all Employees (Craft, Positions, Activity)

Craft: Transportation

Positions:

UP Freight Train MFWWC-11

Engineer

Conductor

UP Freight Train LKR38-12

Engineer

Conductor

Brakeman

Contractor Van Driver

SUMMARY FOR FE-13-98 CONTINUED

SELECTED FACTORS CONTINUED

Activity: UP's MFWWC-11 Crew was being transported by contractor van after having been relieved of duty.

POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

EVENT

An Engineer, Conductor, and Contractor Van Driver were fatally injured during a highway-rail grade crossing collision.

PCF No. 1

The incident occurred when the van, which was transporting the off-duty railroad personnel, collided with a train at a highway-rail grade crossing.

PCF No. 2

The Van Driver failed to stop at the STOP sign at the crossing. Texas law required that drivers stop no closer than 15 feet or no farther than 50 feet from the nearest rail of the railroad tracks when a STOP sign or other official traffic control device requiring a stop was present.

PCF No. 3

Visibility may have been a factor since it was dark and the grade crossing had only passive warning devices. Because adequate artificial lighting was unavailable (no street lights), the driver may not have seen the STOP sign. In addition, the investigation did not reveal whether or not the train's headlights were on at the time of the accident.

REPORT: FE-13-98

RAILROAD: Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP)

LOCATION: Small, Texas

DATE & TIME: May 12, 1998, 8:45 p.m., CST

PROBABLE CAUSE: An off-duty Engineer and Conductor were being transported by a Contractor Van Driver, after having been relieved of duty, when the van collided with a train at a highway-rail grade crossing, fatally injuring all three.

EMPLOYEES:

Occupation:	Engineer	Occupation:	Conductor
Age:	51 Years	Age:	26 Years
Length of Service:	34 Years	Length of Service:	1 Year, 7 Months
Last Rules Training:	March 27, 1998	Last Rules Training:	Oct. 24, 1996
Last Safety Training:	Unknown	Last Safety Training:	Unknown
Last Physical Exam:	Unknown	Last Physical Exam:	Sept. 19, 1996

CIRCUMSTANCES PRIOR TO THE ACCIDENT

UP Freight Train MFWWC-11

A 2-person crew consisting of an Engineer and Conductor reported for duty at 9:30 a.m. on the day of the accident at Toyah, Texas to operate UP Freight Train MFWWC-11. The crew members operated their train to Small, Texas where they were instructed by signal indication to enter the siding and remain there until relieved from duty. They were instructed to remain on their train until a relief crew arrived. After a brief conversation with the crew members who were taking over control of their train, the two relieved crew members boarded the contract van and departed from Small Siding en route to El Paso, Texas.

UP Local Freight Train LKR38-12

A 3-person crew consisting of an Engineer, Conductor, and Brakeman reported for duty at 1:30 p.m. on the day of the accident at El Paso, Texas to operate UP Local Freight Train LKR38-12. Train LKR38-12 was a local freight train which provided daily service to industries on the Valentine Subdivision between El Paso and Sierra Blanca, Texas. The crew operated its train, consisting of two

locomotives and six cars, to an industry track near Sierra Blanca and shoved their entire train onto it. After changing control of the locomotives from the east unit to the west unit, the crew members proceeded with only their two locomotives to Lasca Siding where they met four trains and later continued westward. They were passing a standing train located on Small siding prior to where the collision occurred.

The single main track at the location of the collision ran east and west with a siding track beginning 700 feet east of a highway-rail grade crossing. The maximum authorized speed was 70 mph at this location. Passive warning devices at the highway-rail grade crossing comprised cross bucks and STOP signs only.

Lasca Road began north of Interstate 10 and ran north/northwest for approximately five miles. The road then made a sharp right turn and ran east approximately 150 feet from the railroad and parallel for 0.4 miles. Approximately 275 feet from the crossing, the road had a small curve to the northwest. Approximately 200 feet from the crossing, there was a cattle guard. The road continued another 35 feet from the crossing and made a sharp turn to a north/south direction, then turned to east/west about 50 feet after crossing the track.

The crossing surface was 27 feet wide and consisted of a wood plank surface. The DOT/AAR Inventory Number was 742 892A. From the south rail of the crossing, the distance to the cross buck was 59 feet. The STOP sign was 10.5 feet from the nearest point on the south rail.

At the time of the collision, weather conditions were clear with a temperature of 65° F.

THE ACCIDENT

Westward Train LKR38-12, a 2-unit light locomotive consist, was operating on the main track in partial dynamic braking at a speed of 67 mph (maximum authorized speed was 70 mph). The Engineer was sounding his whistle and the locomotive warning bell was operating when the crew members observed a passenger van approaching the Lasca Road highway-rail grade crossing at a slow rate of speed. All crew members thought the van was going to stop for the STOP sign. The van failed to stop for the sign and proceeded across the tracks in front of the train; however, the crew thought the van could still get across in time. Prior to the impending impact, the Engineer initiated full dynamic braking and leaned over beside the console to avoid injury from possible flying debris.

The van was operating west/north on Lasca Road at a speed of approximately 5 mph. It appeared that the van never attempted to stop before crossing the tracks. The van was operated by a Contract Employee of the van service, the Conductor was in the front passenger seat, and the Engineer was in the first seat behind the Driver and passenger.

The right front of the locomotive struck the right rear of the van. The side of the van separated from the top, the back of the two front seats broke off, and the Driver and Conductor were ejected through the opening of the rear side door or through the separation between the top and side of the van body. The Engineer was ejected with the seat of the van through the side door and over the van.

An Investigator from the Texas Department of Public Safety in El Paso was notified at 8:58 p.m. and arrived at the scene at 9:28 p.m. The three vehicle occupants were pronounced dead at the scene and transported to the El Paso Mortuary.

POST-ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

The post-accident investigation did not disclose any exceptions to the condition of the highway-rail grade crossing. Also, no exceptions were taken to the locomotives involved in the collision by the Engineer or following an inspection by UP mechanical personnel in El Paso, Texas.

The van was a 1997 Dodge, owned and operated by the contracted van service. On May 12, the Driver of the van worked from 2 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. and was called on duty for this trip at 5:45 p.m. The Driver worked from 2:20 p.m. to 4:17 p.m. the day before the accident. The Driver had received Operation Lifesaver training and the contractor's training manual and course. The crew that was transported from El Paso to Small stated that the van was operating properly and took no exceptions to the actions of the Driver. The crew believed the Driver was operating safely. The Driver's side air bag deployed as intended. The radio was off and the air conditioner was on with the fan on low speed when the van was inspected after the collision. A witness to the collision stated that the tail lights illuminated on the van as it was going over the crossing. The headlights of the van were on when the two crew members of the standing train arrived at the scene.

No post-accident toxicological testing was performed on the three van occupants.

Texas Transportation Code 545.252

ALL VEHICLES TO STOP AT CERTAIN RAILROAD GRADE CROSSINGS.

- (a) The Texas Department of Transportation or a local authority, with respect to a highway in its jurisdiction, may:
 - (1) Designate a railroad grade crossing as particularly dangerous; or
 - (2) Erect a STOP sign or other official traffic-control device at the grade crossing.
- (b) An operator approaching a STOP sign or other official traffic-control device that requires a stop and that is erected under Subsection (a) shall stop not closer than 15 feet nor farther than 50 feet from the nearest rail of the railroad tracks and may proceed only with due care.