

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE ST. JOSEPH BELT RAILWAY AT ST. JOSEPH, MO.,
ON NOVEMBER 11, 1925.

January 26, 1926.

To the Commission.

On November 11, 1925, there was a rear-end collision between a Chicago, Burlington & Quincy transfer train and a light engine of the St. Joseph Terminal Railroad on the tracks of the St. Joseph Belt Railway at St. Joseph, Mo., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation

The St. Joseph Belt Railway is engaged principally in serving the stock yards and the various packing plants adjacent thereto, it has no time-table and there are no rules governing train movements, trains from foreign railroads being governed by the rules in effect on their respective railroads.

Traffic with other railroads is interchanged in yard 1, located between Illinois and Missouri Avenues, and at the north end of this yard, adjacent to Missouri Avenue, is a yard office known as Missouri Avenue yard office. There are two lead tracks which extend northward from yard 1 to the C. B. & Q. yard, a distance of about 1,000 feet, lead track 1 being used for north or outbound movements and lead track 2 for south or inbound movements. At the time of the accident the outbound track was occupied, and the trains involved were leaving the yard on the inbound track, the accident occurring on this track at a point about 250 feet north of Missouri Avenue yard office. The grade in this vicinity is level and the track is tangent.

There was a dense fog at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 4.38 a.m.

Description

A northbound C. B. & Q. transfer train which consisted of engine 1476 and 17 cars, in charge of Engine Foreman Null and Engineman Cooper, left yard 1, according to the yard-office register, at 4.35 a.m., and stopped with the rear car a short distance north of Missouri Avenue. The engine was cut off to pick up some other cars and about four or five minutes later the rear end of the transfer was struck by light engine 4.

Northbound St. Joseph Terminal Railroad engine 4 was in charge of Engine Foreman Smith and Engineman Stevenson, it left the yard shortly after the C. B. & Q. transfer and collided with the rear end of that train north of the yard office while moving at a speed said to have been about 5 or 6 miles an hour.

None of the equipment was derailed and only slight damage was sustained by the rear end of the last car in the transfer and the front end of engine 4. The employee killed was a switchman who was riding on the front footboard of the engine.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Cooper, of the C. B. & Q. transfer, stated the engine had just coupled to the cars which were to be picked up when something struck the rear of the cut of cars which had been left on the lead track, moving them ahead about two-thirds of a car-length. Engineman Cooper further stated that as a matter of extra precaution, on account of the very dense fog, he had had a switchman precede his engine with a lighted lantern while it was picking up the additional cars and he thought it equally advisable to have protected the rear end in the same manner, although such extra precautions were not required by the rules. Fireman Karns stated that on account of the heavy fog his train had moved very slowly out of the yard, with a switchman walking ahead of the engine with a lantern. His other statements corroborated those of Engineman Cooper and brought out no additional facts of importance.

Switchman Thedinga, of the C. B. & Q. transfer, said he rode on top of the rear car in the draft of cars hauled by his engine, and said the cars had been standing from four to six minutes when the rear end was struck by the St. Joseph Terminal engine, the impact moving the cars ahead about 8 or 10 feet. It was common practice, he said for C. B. & Q. crews to stop and perform work in the vicinity of the point of accident, and as this was within yard limits he was not required to protect the rear of his train, and did not do so in this instance.

Engine Foreman Null, of the C. B. & Q. transfer, said that while in the yard office he spoke to his switchmen of the movements intended to be made, during the conversation Engine Foreman Smith and Switchman Lavell, of the St. Joseph Terminal crew, were also in the office but he did not inform them of his plans and did not know whether or not they understood from what he had said that his crew would do some switching near the north end of the lead track. Engine Foreman Null was standing near the head end of the draft of cars at the time of the collision and said the impact moved the train forward a distance of about 3/4 of a car-length, shortly after which Switchman Thedinga came forward and informed him of the accident.

Switchman Dean, of the C. B. & Q. transfer said that on account of the fog he walked ahead of engine 1476 as it moved northward on the inbound track, and after it had been cut off for the purpose of picking up some other cars he again preceded it in its various movements.

Engineman Stevenson, of St. Joseph Terminal Railroad engine 4, said that after delivering some cars to the St. Joseph Belt yard the engine returned to the Missouri Avenue yard office, the switch crew entered the office and a few minutes later they came out, boarded the front footboard of the engine and he started the engine northward, but had proceeded but a short distance, probably six car-lengths, moving at a speed of about 5 or 6 miles an hour, when the engine collided with the rear of the cut of cars standing on the lead track. Engineman Stevenson said the headlight on his engine was burning, but the fog was of such density that the light did not penetrate it to any material extent and he did not see any one at the rear of the standing cars or any lights in that vicinity. He had had no conversation with Switch Foreman Smith prior to leaving the yard office and did not know of the movements the C. B. & Q. crew were making and thought that Engine Foreman Smith should have told him about that train. He said he had occasionally found the rear of a train being protected by a flagman when working in this vicinity, but that such protection was not always afforded, and he thought that if a flagman had preceded his own engine this accident probably would not have occurred. The statements of Fireman Ellis corroborated those of Engineman Stevenson and brought out no additional facts of importance.

Engine Foreman Smith, of the St. Joseph Terminal crew, said that upon the arrival of his train at the St. Joseph Belt yard he remained at the Missouri Avenue yard office while the crew disposed of the train; while in the

office he saw a C. B. & Q. switch crew in the office and overheard some conversation between them relative to intended movements and soon thereafter that crew departed over the inbound lead track with a train of cars. A few minutes later his own crew returned to the yard office and after outlining some work to be performed the three switchmen boarded the front footboard of the engine and proceeded northward, but they had moved but a short distance when the cars of the C. B. & Q. transfer were encountered. Engine Foreman Smith thought that the rear of the standing cars should have been protected in view of the extremely heavy fog, which obscured the view to such an extent that his own engine was within 6 feet of the car with which it collided before that car was seen. The statements of Switchman McCowan practically corroborated those of Engine Foreman Smith and brought out no additional facts of importance.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of the crew of St. Joseph Terminal engine 4 to exercise the precautions required under the existing conditions, for which failure Engine Foreman Smith and Engineman Stevenson are responsible.

The collision was between ~~trains~~ of two tenant carriers and occurred on the tracks of a third carrier which had no operating rules in effect which were applicable to this case. The testimony of the members of both crews concerned was to the effect that they were governed by the rules in effect on their respective lines, this would subject the St. Joseph Terminal crew to the rules of their parent company, the Union Pacific Railroad, while the other crew would be governed by their own company's rules. Union Pacific rule 93 requires all trains and engines to move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear, and for their failure to obey this rule the crew in charge of the St. Joseph Terminal engine are at fault.

The evidence indicated that the fog was so dense as practically to obscure vision, it was so dense that the engineman of the C. B. & Q. transfer had a switchman precede his engine on foot while engaged in picking up the additional cars, and it was so dense that a Rock Island train entering the yard sent a flagman ahead with a lighted fusée, this latter occurrence having been witnessed by the engine crew of the St. Joseph Terminal engine. Under such circumstances more than the usual precautions were necessary if this engine was to be moved in safety, Engine Foreman Smith should have told Engineman Stevenson that the

C. B. & Q. train was preceding their engine, while the conditions which prompted other crews to move ahead only under flag protection should have led this crew to do likewise. Had the precautions been taken which were warranted by the situation, this accident probably would have been prevented.

The rules did not require flag protection for the rear of the C. B. & Q. transfer, but there was ample opportunity for Switchman Thedinga to have demonstrated ability to cope with an unusual situation, one which warranted the use of a little care not specifically required by the rules, he could easily have taken his position at a point a few feet in the rear of the transfer, and had he done so it is probable that the switchmen on the front end of the St. Joseph Terminal engine would have had an opportunity of jumping, if in fact the accident would not have been prevented entirely.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,
Director.