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2 SC men die in train collision, Highway 75 reopened

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By Becky Gulden - email

UNION COUNTY, NC (WBTV) - Officials have identified two South Carolina men who were killed in a train collision in Union County early Tuesday morning.

Photo Gallery



[Click here to view a photo gallery of the train wreck](#)

Two locomotives traveling northbound collided at 3:38 a.m. near the intersection of Highway 75 and South Potter Road in Mineral Springs.

The two crew members killed included the locomotive engineer and a conductor. Both were on the second train which struck a stopped train from behind.

The fatal victims have been identified as 36-year-old Greg Hadden of Greenwood, S.C., and 33-year-old Phillip Crawford Jr. of Abbeville, S.C.

The two crew members on the stopped train received minor injuries only and they were treated at the scene.

CSX Spokesman Gary Sease said investigators with the National Transportation Safety Board would be in charge of the investigation into the cause of the crash.

NTSB spokesman Peter Knudson said the full investigation could take more than a year, though preliminary findings could be released sooner.

The Federal Railroad Administration will also be investigating the accident.

Sease said officials are not sure if the collision was caused by human error or mechanical failure. Investigators will be looking at on-board cameras from both trains.

They will also be working with the train dispatch center in Florence, South Carolina, which monitors which trains are on the tracks at any given time.

The first train that was stopped on the tracks was heading from New Orleans to Hamlet, NC. It had nine freight cars and was transporting items such as concrete and scrap metal.

The second train had 12 freight cars and was traveling from Atlanta to Charlotte. Some of the cars were filled with clothing. When the trains collided, the clothing kept burning making it nearly impossible to extinguish.

The fires were completely extinguished by late Tuesday night and officials reopened Highway 75 around 2:30 a.m. on Wednesday once all fire trucks and apparatus were cleared from the road.

Sease says there were more than 4,500 gallons of diesel fuel which leaked out of second train after it collided with the stopped train. He said the fuel made the fire extremely difficult to contain.

Officials say they will be conducting soil and water containment in the immediate area to ensure the leaked fuel and water sprayed on the fire doesn't contaminate surrounding land or drinking water.

Sease said these tracks are considered "high volume" and that 15-20 trains use these tracks daily. The trains that would normally travel in this area have been re-routed onto other tracks until the wreckage is clear.

While the tracks did not sustain major damage, some minimal repair will be necessary before trains are allowed transport cargo in this area. They are bringing in 50-foot sections of replacement tracks.

Resident James Bailey says he made the first call to 911 to report the collision. Since he didn't know what was on board, the emergency dispatcher told him to leave his home immediately.

Bailey's home is so close to the tracks, he actually heard a voice coming from the rubble.

"I believe he [conductor] was trapped from the way he sounded and, evidently, he couldn't move, he was just crying out," Bailey said.

Bailey's nephew, whose first name is also James, actually climbed through the mangled mess of metal to help.

"I just heard one of the conductors screaming for help, he was in and out of consciousness and the other one was pretty calm about everything," Bailey said.

James Bailey and his nephew stayed with the injured workers until rescue crews arrived on the scene.

"I wish to express my deepest sympathy to the families and coworkers of the two CSX workers who lost their lives in this tragedy," said Mineral Springs Mayor Rick Becker.

The American Red Cross opened a temporary shelter Tuesday morning at the Mineral Springs United Methodist Church for residents living near the collision who were evacuated from their homes.

That's where we found resident Shirley Ritter who was still shaken by what happened. But this isn't the first time she's had to quickly evacuate from her home due to an emergency situation.

"I'm a survivor of Katrina, and my first instinct was, Father God, I thank you, I don't wish nothing on nobody else... I just wish whatever it is, it's a distance so we can get out of here," Ritter said.

Officials say the six families evacuated have been allowed to return home.

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