

Witness describes fatal train-truck collision in Glade Spring

ALLIE ROBINSON | BRISTOL HERALD COURIER | | Posted: Thursday, December 6, 2012 12:30 pm

GLADE SPRING, Va. - First, he heard the train conductor blaring the whistle. Then, he heard a boom. Lastly, a screeching noise that sounded ominous.

The Norfolk Southern train hauling grain and other products screamed to a halt. By the time Junior Hayden turned toward the commotion, a tractor-trailer was in flames.

The driver of that truck, a Norfolk Southern employee who had been moving equipment around the tracks in Glade Spring's town square, was killed when the engine slammed into the truck. No other injuries were reported.

"I saw the fire on the other side of the train ... and saw the hood of the truck and the radiator," said Hayden, who was a few blocks from the tracks when the wreck happened at 4:45 p.m. Wednesday. A friend he was with called 911.

The truck driver, who was not named late Wednesday, was pulling a flatbed equipment trailer, traveling along Hemlock Street near the tracks, Glade Spring Police Interim Chief Ricky Stumbo said.

"He had stopped in an attempt to cross the narrow railroad crossing," Stumbo said.

Then the train hit the truck, striking near the cab and causing the fire. Firefighters said they heard several explosions as the flames grew. Stumbo said emergency medical personnel and police were on scene within minutes because they were already in the area. The Glade Spring and Meadowview volunteer fire departments were soon behind them.

The train finally screeched to a halt farther up the track, and did not appear to be affected by the fire, said Theresa Kingsley, deputy director of emergency management for Washington County, Va. She said the train was not carrying anything hazardous. Rail lines throughout the region were stopped to allow time to clear the wreck.

The tractor-trailer leaked fuel, which firefighters worked to mop up throughout the evening. The flatbed had been empty.

Stumbo said in the time he's worked in the town there hasn't been a wreck at this particular intersection.

Hayden said there had been at least one other wreck there, and that the intersection is a tricky one.

"That's a dangerous intersection anyway," he said. "Because it's a blind spot and there are no cross bars."

Stumbo said the Glade Spring Police Department will be the primary investigators of the crash, because although it happened near the train tracks and involved Norfolk Southern vehicles, the crash occurred on the town road. The investigation is ongoing.

“Our thoughts and prayers from the town and the community go out to the deceased person,” he said.

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