

http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci_24355810/bart-tragedy-authorities-identify-workers-killed-tracks-walnut

WALNUT CREEK -- A BART train that struck and killed two workers who were inspecting rail lines Saturday afternoon was being operated by a trainee, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

The train, which struck the two workers just before 2 p.m. Saturday on a portion of the line between the Walnut Creek and Pleasant Hill BART stations, was being operated by a trainee under a training supervisor, according to NTSB Investigator in Charge Jim Southworth.

The train was traveling at 60-75 mph before the crash, Southworth said. A horn was sounded before the collision and an emergency stop was initiated, though it was not clear if the stop was initiated before or after the workers were struck.

The men were identified earlier Monday as 58-year-old Christopher Sheppard, a BART employee, and 66-year-old Laurence Daniels, a rail consultant.

The pair were seasoned railroad men, according to friends and neighbors, and have more than 60 years combined experienced in their field.

"It is so shocking to have heard that he was one of those killed," Jim Boggan of Fair Oaks said of his longtime neighbor, Daniels. "You just wonder how could that possible happen to an experienced railroad man and an engineer who paid attention to details."

A BART manager operating a four-car train headed for Concord along the Pittsburg-Bay Point line hit the two men at a 1:55 p.m. Saturday, the second day of a worker strike that has closed the rail system to hundreds of thousands of daily riders. The workers were on the track near Jones Road in Walnut Creek to inspect a reported "dip" in the rail, officials said.

The train was returning from the Richmond rail yard, where the manager had delivered some vandalized cars to be cleaned up. BART officials said Saturday that the manager was an "experienced" train operator.

Southworth of NTSB said six people were inside the four-car train: two trainees, a trainer and several maintenance workers. None of the six people on board were injured.

NTSB investigators spent more than 8 hours interviewing four employees Monday, including the driver, his supervisor and a dispatcher.

Investigators examined the signal systems and inspected mechanical equipment Monday, but did not release details of those inspections. A video showing the cab of the train is being shipped to NTSB's headquarters in Washington D.C. for analysis, Southworth said.

Daniels, a longtime Fair Oaks residents who recently moved to Oakland, was a BART contractor who started his own firm in 1994, according to friends and his online biography. His work as a track designer took him from Portland, Ore., to Baltimore, to Singapore.

"The absolute engineer," George Calderon said of his neighbor. "It would definitely show in his face. You could tell he was very devoted to his job. The rail system was in his blood."

Daniels' family to declined to comment Sunday and Monday. No one answered the door or phone at Sheppard's Hayward home Monday.

Sheppard started his railroad industry career in 1977 with Amtrak, and joined BART in 2011. His LinkedIn profile says he was a senior track inspector for BART.

Dozens of BART employees -- some carrying picket signs -- gathered at vigils in Oakland and Walnut Creek to mourn the loss of Daniels and Sheppard. Multiple speakers in Walnut Creek said the deaths could have been prevented and said the tragedy underscores the unions' earlier cries for worker safety, voiced during contract negotiations.

Nucion Avent, a BART foreworker, said he vaguely knew Sheppard from work but still considered him family.

"We're all still one big family, from management all the way down," Avent said at a vigil held for the men on Sunday night. "Right now we're a little dysfunctional, hopefully we can get through this."

Daniels' neighbor Irma Valencia started to tear up on Monday when informed that he had been killed. She was walking her dog on Daniels' street in the Sibley neighborhood high up in the Oakland Hills.

"Oh my goodness," she said. "He was just a very friendly, caring man; always had a smile. He'd be working in his yard and would always spend time talking to us. I know he was a very dedicated worker."

Valencia recalled that during the last BART strike Daniels "worked into the wee hours to help maintain the tracks."

The men are the seventh and eighth BART workers to die on the job in the transit agency's 41-year history. The last BART worker killed while on duty was James Strickland, 44, who was killed on Oct. 14, 2008, as he was inspecting track on the same line near Oak Grove Road in Concord.

Staff writer Matt Artz contributed to this report.