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Train operator in DC crash called a hero

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WASHINGTON (AP) - The train operator killed this week in a Washington rail crash was a hero who saved lives, the Metro transit agency's general manager said Friday.

John Catoe told relatives, friends and colleagues who gathered at a Washington church that 42-year-old Jeanice McMillan of Springfield, Va., will be known as "the Metro hero."

"She was there not just doing her job," Catoe said. He predicted investigators will ultimately determine that her actions "saved lives."

Federal investigators have said there is evidence that McMillan applied an emergency brake before her train plowed into another, killing her and eight passengers. Monday's crash was the deadliest in the rail system's 33-year history.

Bishop Glen Staples of the Temple of Praise, where the service was held, said McMillan saved others by applying the brakes even as her own death was imminent.

"It takes someone of incredible courage not to lose it in the face of danger," Staples said. "She rode the brakes all the way to heaven."

Hundreds attended the memorial service at McMillan's church in southeast Washington, including D.C. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty. Many Metro employees wore their uniforms and black arm bands.

"As a city we know that we've lost a fantastic public servant," Fenty said. "She was really a leader and that is how she will be remembered."

Also Friday, agency officials said they have temporarily reassigned the superintendent of the automatic control system that is supposed to prevent train crashes. McMillan's train was operating in automatic mode, which means it was primarily controlled by a computer.

Matthew Matyuf, who led the Automatic Train Control Division, has been temporarily assigned to a "special project," Metro officials said. They would not elaborate on what that project was.

The reassignment is not an indication of any wrongdoing, spokeswoman Candace Smith said.

"It's not meant to be a negative reflection on him at all," Smith said. "It's just a precaution until the investigation is complete."

Matyuf has worked for the transit agency for more than 20 years, Smith said.

The National Transportation Safety Board said Thursday that Metro's signaling system failed to detect a test train stopped in the same place as one that was struck during this week's deadly crash.

Test results indicate the oncoming train involved in Monday's crash may have lacked information that another train was stopped on the tracks ahead. About 70 people were injured.

The NTSB has requested McMillan's cell phone records, a routine procedure to determine whether she was using it at the time of the crash. Metro officials said McMillan's phone was found inside a backpack.

A funeral service for McMillan is planned for next week in Buffalo, N.Y., her hometown.

Associated Press Writer Brian Westley contributed to this report.