

Officials say Union Pacific Railroad employee killed during switching operations

by Thomas Yazwinski

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WALLA WALLA COUNTY, Wash. - The investigation continues into the death of John Paul Schneider, at the Union Pacific rail yard early Tuesday morning in Wallula.

The 54-year-old man of Spokane Valley was killed instantly in the railroad accident, according to Walla Walla County Coroner Richard Greenwood. However, the cause of the accident is still undetermined and under investigation.

Spokesman for Union Pacific Justin Jacobs said it appears the accident happened during switching operations inside the facility. "The reality is that trains and that environment can be hazardous at times," Jacobs said. "This is just a very unfortunate incident and our goal is, and always will remain, zero incidents of this type on the railroad."

Jacobs said Union Pacific has an unrelenting focus on safety, emphasizing good communication, staying in-line-of-sight, and looking out for coworkers. "Including our Courage to Care program, where individual employees make a personal commitment," he said. "Which empowers the employees to look out for their peers and stop the line on any operation that could result in an incident."

Jacobs said Union Pacific wants every employee to go home safe, and after this incident they'll be reviewing current procedures.

"This is one area that we will absolutely look back at again, and figure out if there are things we can improve on, and or additional precautionary steps that we could've put into place," he said. "And then we'll implement that — to ultimately achieve that goal of zero."

The Coroner's office said they've ordered an autopsy to make sure there were no other medical reasons for the incident, and they are waiting for toxicology results, which could take up to three months.

UPDATE:

The completed autopsy from Walla Walla County Coroner determined the cause of death was blunt force trauma to the head, trunk and lower extremities.

However, officials said there is no suspicion that Schneider was impaired at the time of the accident.

Jacobs said this is a difficult loss for the Union Pacific community and for Schneider's family.

"Our thoughts and prayers remain with the family, friends and coworkers of the employee," he said. "This is going to be an undoubtedly difficult time, our thoughts and prayers remain with them."

ORIGINAL: -----

Authorities confirm to Action News that a Union Pacific employee was hit and killed by a train at around 5 a.m. Tuesday morning in Walla Walla County.

John Paul Schneider, 54, of Spokane Valley, WA, was killed instantly, in a railroad accident this morning, on the Union Pacific tracks, in Wallula, according to the Walla Walla County Coroner Richard Greenwood.

A representative with Union Pacific tells Action News the incident occurred near the Wallula Train Yard.

According to officials, there were no other injuries in the incident.

A spokesperson for Union Pacific released the following statement: "Our thoughts and prayers are with the family, friends and coworkers of the employee. We will provide more information when it becomes available." Investigators will likely be at the scene for several more hours to determine what happened.

We will continue to update this article with more information throughout the day.