

BNSF employee dies after train strikes him

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HEREFORD - A Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway employee died Friday morning after a company train struck him near Hereford.

Robert G. Chavez, 47, of Clovis, N.M., was pronounced dead at a railroad crossing about a mile east of Hereford, according to a Texas Department of Public Safety report.

Chavez was a BSNF trackman responsible for maintaining the company's right of way, said Joe Faust, a spokesman for the company. Chavez had worked for BSNF for 21 years, Faust said.

"Anytime you lose a close colleague in such a tragic circumstances, there is a tremendous amount of sadness," Faust said. "He was described as a good man and as a good teammate."

Chavez's death marks the second railroad death in the Texas Panhandle in the last six months. Gene Blackburn Harrison, 42, a contractor for BSNF, died Jan. 5 after a train hit him near Farm-to-Market Road 2373 and U.S. Highway 60 in Carson County.

Chavez and a BNSF foreman, whose name was not available late Friday, were working on tracks at the intersection of FM. 2943 and U.S. Highway 60, where three tracks run east and west, the report said.

Both men were bent over, working on the tracks about 9:45 when an eastbound BNSF train, headed to Amarillo from Clovis, struck Chavez. The foreman was able to apparently jump away from the train, the DPS report said.

Emergency personnel transported the foreman to Hereford Regional Hospital with minor injuries, the report said.

Witnesses told investigators that the tracks' cross guards were down and the lights were flashing before the accident. The train was thought to have been traveling about 55 mph, the report said.

Two representatives from the Federal Railroad Administration were at the scene along with another from the Texas Railroad Commission, Faust said. Faust did not know if an autopsy was requested, since the FRA is typically interested in the autopsy results from railroad accidents.

DPS and BNSF are continuing the investigation into the accident, the report said.

Faust said the company is offering grief counseling to Chavez's colleagues, the foreman who was involved in the accident, and Chavez's family.