Remote Control Locomotive kills railroad worker
TRAGEDY IN SAN ANTONIO: UP RCO dies while working ALONE.

Reported in the San Antonio Express-News

Locomotive kills railroad worker

By Hernán Rozemberg

San Antonio Express-News

Web Posted: 12/08/2003 12:00 AM

A Union Pacific railroad employee was struck and killed early Sunday by a locomotive he was operating via remote control — rekindling a debate over whether the devices are a technological boon or a safety hazard.

Jody Allen Herstine, 37, was using the waist-strapped remote-control device, which moves trains without the need of a conductor on board, to operate two locomotives shortly before 1 a.m. at the Union Pacific railyards on the near East Side when he was run over, said Mark Davis, a spokesman with the railroad.

Davis did not know if Herstine — a 5-year Union Pacific switchman — was hit from the front or from behind.

The National Safety Transportation Board and the Federal Railroad Administration have dispatched investigators to San Antonio to look into Herstine's death.

 Reached at their Northwest Side home, Herstine's wife, Sara, was too distraught to give an interview. The couple had been married for two months.

"He was always such a good guy, loved by everybody. He'll be missed by everyone," she said amid sobs and tears as she walked into her house.

A man who identified himself as her stepfather said Herstine had been working at railyards since he was discharged from the Navy a decade ago.

Herstine had two children from a previous marriage. His parents and three sisters live in Pittsburgh, where he was born and raised, said the stepfather, who did not want his name used.
Herstine's death is not the first time concern has been raised over the fairly new practice of remote-control locomotive conducting.

An accident here in June injured a Union Pacific engineer near Kelly/USA after the locomotive he was in was struck by another being operated by remote control.

Such occurrences have many railyard workers clamoring for an end to the remote controls, and several cities across the country have passed measures banning the technology.

The Union Pacific's Davis maintained that remote-control system has been in place in Canada for more than a decade, and data show a 50 percent reduction in railyard accidents.

In the railroad's U.S. experience with the system thus far — it was started in San Antonio about a year and a half ago — the same trend is developing, he said.

Warren Flatau, a spokesman for the FRA, noted that his agency will be releasing the results of a nationwide audit into the safety of the remote-controlled locomotives early next year.

But the leader of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, a union with 350 members in San Antonio, said although the cause of Herstine's death has yet to be determined, his union's warnings about the limitations and risks of remote-control work are becoming a reality.

Don Hahs, internat! ional president of the union, said controlling engines from the ground is dangerous. He also said the two weeks of training workers is not enough. Even worse, he added, is the practice of sending conductors out without any backup.

Davis confirmed that Herstine was working alone at the time of the accident.

"The system is designed for that. An employee working by himself in that situation is normal," Davis said.

Far from it, countered Hahs. For mere safety concerns, it should be at least a two-person operation, he insisted.

"It's a total mistake to send a switchman out by himself," he said.

"We've been saying all along that this new technology was implemented too quick and with little oversight, and it could cause accidents."

The matter is further complicated by the fact that it has spawned a fierce inter-union rivalry.

While Hahs' Brotherhood strongly opposes the new system, the United Transportation Union has embraced it.

activist Kamal Abbas
- Global Labour market gender gaps: Two steps forward, one step back
- USA Nissan workers want a union to fight for job security
- Global ILO wage reports confirms global attacks on workers

PAST POSTS

2005/05

- Test
- ROCU Website Announcement
- UTU, the Carriers’ ENEMY, EQUAL ADVERSARY, or FRIEND
- What ROCU Stands For
- Living in the Surveillance Society
- National Rail Safety Action Plan
- ROCU's Ed Michael On IBT, TDU and Rail Solidarity
- The Nature of the Problem
- Preemption Trumps Safety in the Nation's Capitol
- Unified Rail Labor Must Deal With The Railway Labor Act.
- Logistics Revolution Exposes Choke Points to Labor's Direct Action
- Brother Webb's Comments on ROCU and Bottom-Up Rail Unity

2005/04

- Rail Operating Crafts United (ROCU)
- What Every Rail Knows About Fatigue
- Potential Causes of a Recent RCL Fatality
- CEO Pay Widens Income Gap
- Shareholders Sue UP for Breach of Fiduciary Duty
- Women In The Workplace
FI rank Wilner, spokesman for the UTU, said the union signed a contract with Union Pacific two years ago accepting use of remote-control units — under condition that no jobs are lost and that proper training is given.

So far, Wilner said, he has to agree with Union Pacific's findings.

But, he noted, enough safety concerns have been raised that his shop lobbied the Senate for an investigation. That probe led to the FRA audit.

"We're extremely concerned about this fatality," Wilner said, noting that his union has between 550 and 600 members in San Antonio.

hrozemberg@express-news.net

And a report from a sister working as a UP locomotive engineer in San Antonio

To Whom It May Concern,

Today a horrible tragedy happened in San Antonio. A switchman was killed while working on an RCO job. My sources tell me that because of manpower shortages, U.P. management are forcing employees to work BY THEMSELVES on the RCO jobs. Apparently its occurring more and more often.

The worst case scenario has happened, a man is dead.

My question is, what is the FRA going to do about it? We all know that the UP will try to cover this up. We have begged the FRA to step in and help the railroad employees force the U.P. to make the safety of its transportation personnel a priority. What has happened is that crews have been subject to more field testing. Issues such as fatigue and employee safety have been ignored. As the FRA is aware, after promising in 1997 to hire more people, they did so and then quietly started to cut manpower. The U.P. was aware long before now it needed more employees. A man died today. A culmination of factors caused this horrible tragedy.....factors that we as railroad employees have begged the FRA to address.

Thanks,
Kathleen Starustka
San Antonio Engineer

8:42:15 AM # feedback []  trackback []  Google It!

© Copyright 2005 The Usual Suspect.
- IPA Explains How RLA Regulates Contract Negotiation
- NCCC Convinces UTU Intends to Eliminate Conductors and FELA
- DOT Agency Backs CSX on D.C. Hazmat Ban
- AUD, UTU, and the LMRDA
- UTU GC Delbert Strunk Assigned Impossible Mission
- False Clear Causes Wreck on BNSF
- Principles of Union Organization
- State and Local Authorities Seek to Regulate Rail Industry
- Newhires, FELA, and a Jury of our Peers
- UPRR, Jim Young, Train Velocity and Reality
- BMWE Lodge 3014 Points Out Link Between Social Security and Railroad Retirement
- NCCC Deems Bargaining Ground Rules Silly
- NCCC Walks Out On RLBC Over Ground Rules
- FRA PTC Final Rule
- Railway Carmen and Industrial Unionism
- BLET/LIRR Dispute Likely Headed for Arbitration
- What's Maiming and Killing our Nation's Railroaders?
- American Rights at Work and Obstacles to Organizing Under the RLA
- Republican's Use Audits to Punish Unions
- An aggressive audit of labor unions is only one front in Republicans' multi-pronged attack
- IBT Rail Conference and the Threat of New Technology and One-man Trains
- Gamst Reports from NTSB PTC Symposium
- FELA and your next Contract at Risk?
- BNSF Dispatchers Walk
- Calling All Grievance Gals and Guys
- TROUBLEMAKER’S HANDBOOK II
- Gamst on SOFA and the difficulties of talking to your Hogger
- Productivity at Any Cost
- Kids Love Trains’ Horns

2005/02

- How not to layoff sick
- BLE&T DIV 518 Resolution
- Webb’s Response to UTU IP
- Brother Webb asks a good question

2004/12

- Carriers’ Union Busting Sec. 6 notices
- New Technology

2004/09

- Bush proposing new tax on railroad workers

2004/08

- RESQ on the UPRR’s continuing problems - and OURS
- Former UTU IP in Transit on way to new home
- Send Section 6 Suggestions to Thompson

2004/07

- Breaking UTU News
- The UTU Pyramid of Power Turned Upside Down
- Help MAC Petition to Unseal Court Records
- Webb on UTU overtime giveback
- UTU seeking sponsors of winner-take-all Bill
- Article 74 Charges against General Chairman J. Kevin Klein UTU GO-887
- UPRR Negligent in Rail
2004/06

- Another San Antonio Train Wreck
- Argentine Privatization of Rails Fails
- Snakebites
- Choke Points help Truckers protest rising fuel costs

2004/05

- UP Management by the Data
- Retired Manager Blows Whistle on UPRR Mis-Management
- UTU MAC Caucus Strikes First Blow for Union Reform
- FELA not for sale.
- FRA Interim Report on RCOs
- FRA Certifies RCL Operations as Safe
- 5 Day RCL Wonder Involved in Portland Runaway
- National Day of Security and Frontline RR Employees
- SNOW ON THE RAILS
- Union Pacific using Management to run Locomotives with BLET blessing
- UPRR Train Accident in San Antonio upsets residents
- UTU, BLET, IBT and the AFL-CIO
- Grand Bargaining Coalition for Rail Labor in the Works
- Indy Truckers' Protest Fueled by high price of Diesel
- CN sells CANAC Inc., subsidiary to Savage Companies
- Teamsters' RISE Staff Resigns

2004/04

Crossing Accident Reporting?
- UTU Criminals attempt to blame FELA
- Little, Boyd get 2 years without parole
- Got Rail Trouble - Blame Vishwakarma
Unified Bargaining Front for Rail Labor
The Real Labor Day - May 1st
2003 LM2 for UTU and BLE
April SnakeBites
UP Stockholders Revolt
SOFA Statistics Released for January
UPRR Explains Manpower Crisis to Customers
UTU Purges DLC Roles
Another UTU International President Charged
Election Complaint To Department of Labor regarding UTU 2003 Election for International President
US Attorney Press Release on Boyd/Rookard Guilty Plea
UP Stockholder Concerned about RCL Casualty Costs
Rails oppose Minnesota heavy-truck bill
UPRR Turning Away Business
Union Pacific, UPS, Meltdown.
UTU 2003 Election Protest Continues
VP Dave Hakey charged with violation of Article 41 of UTU Constitution
BLET trainman blasts CPRS/BLET tentative agreement

2004/03

Freight-Car Congestion Is Worrying Union Pacific
Asbestos bill bad news for rail workers
Lawyers, leaders capitalize on railroad workers' injuries
"Replacement Workers" must be banned!
UTU MAC Reform Caucus grows like a weed
Legislation Proposed to Upgrade RCO Requirements
- Railroad CEO Compensation
- CAW members vote "yes" to tentative agreements
- Remote control of trains debated
- On BLE's lawsuit against UTU Local 650
- Gamst on the the Complexities of Car Handling
- Railworkers Strike Chokes Freight Traffic in Canada
- DICK DAVIDSON DECLARES AN $18+ MILLION DOLLAR BONUS FOR 2003 BUT THE REST OF THE INDUSTRY SUFFERS
- Contract Vote Could End CN Rail Strike by Friday
- Highlights of CN Owner-Operator Settlement
- CAW AND CN REACH SETTLEMENT
- CN asks strikers to go back to work
- Former UTU President Byron A. Boyd, Jr. pleads guilty
- Union bribery probe could turn attention to Houston lawyers
- Locomotive Engineers Merge into the Teamsters
- TTD Resolution Calls for an End to Locomotive Remote
- Appeal of UTU EB Boyd Decision
- Cdn Natl Rail Says Formal Talks With CAW Union Break Off
- Appeal to President Thompson regarding Trial Board's Discipline Decision of suspended President Boyd
- Request for comments on BLE/IBT merger
- Website for Info on the CN strike
- UPRR Harrassment and Excessive "Limbo Time"?
- BLET and CPRS reach tentative agreement
- Miles Mulloy on the
plight of the post-85 railroader

• UTU Reform Caucus
• Saint Paul Yard CPRS BLET Conductor sets record Straight
• Letter UTUIA Board of Directors Remove Boyd from office
• The Next Step
• One Big Union in Transportation?
• FIRST SMALL STEP IN UTU REFORM
• UTU Exec Board Letters to Boyd and Johnson
• Boyd Suspended Without Pay
• Worldwide day backs railways
• Rail worker’s asthma case called first of its kind

2004/02

• Photos of the Carrizozo Train Wreck
• Railroads Run Out of Train Crews … Again
• Supreme Court Upholds Award
• Who will stop the bleeding?
• Talks to resume in CN strike
• CAW and Canadian National Railway met for the first time since January 23
• RRESQ on UPRR New Mexico Wreck
• CAW strike
• CN Rail onSTRIKE
• Carrizizi Wreck
• UPRR Discipline Alert
• Deaths in New Mexico Train Wreck
• Boyd/Johnson Trial News
• RRESQ Informational Bulletin - Feb ’04

2004/01

• Little Pleads Guilty
• UTU Executive Board sets date for trials
• Boyd Trial On for March 22
• Little Pleads Guilty
• RRESQ
• From the Railway
Labor Act:
- Roger Griffeth on Babler's letter
- Beltpack weight claims
- Remembering Jody Herstine
- Griffeth's Campaign Speech

2003/12

- CSX RCL Accident
- RRESQ Writes FRA on San Antonio RCL Fatality
- Testimony implicates ex-official
- FRA Statistics show Rise in Overall Percentage of Yard Accidents since RCO
- Judge to Allow Amtrak Employees to Strike
- FRA Defends RCOs
- Remote Control Locomotive kills railroad worker
- Where do UTU International Officers stand?
- BLE Members Approve IBT Merger
- Maglev sets a speed record of 581 kph
- Our Railroads: A Classic Example of How Greed is Destroying our Economy and the Incomes of Working Americans
- Amtrak Workers Walk Off Job
- 43rd U.S. community passes remote control safety resolution

2003/11

- Control Chief's MU&GO
- Craft Union Conflict Railroads Workers
- Rail Workers Battle Unsafe Remote Control Technology
- Snakebites
- Blame it on the Pin Puller
- Swindled Railroad worker suit
- The Railroad Barons Are Back
- RRESQ Women Make a Difference
• UTU guilty of raiding BLE on CP Railway
• CHALLENGING CORPORATE "RIGHTS"
• NEW CHARGES FILED AGAINST CURRENT AND FORMER PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED TRANSPORTATION UNION
• N.J. CRIMINALIZES DRIVING WHILE TIRED
• UP Hits Brakes on Remote Control
• LC Responds to Brother Webb
• More indictments against UTU officials
• Brokenrail On Rail Unionism
• UP Availability Policy
• BLE national TA available
• UTU 2002 National Agreement IMPOSED on GO-386
• Webb on Lake Erie Plan,
• Managers Improperly Working as Trainmen/Switchmen
• Pens and Needles
• CN eyes eventual 35 percent cut in crews
• Jones attempts to motivate the Post85ers.
• UPRR Re-evaluates RCL Experiment?
• Local Concerns about RCOs
• DM&E A-Card Campaign
• Maladies of non-negotiation
• BLE critical of Amtrak Board nominee
• BMWE members support Teamster merger
• UTU Health-care agreement ratified
• BLE/TEX-MEX RCL Agreement
• Rising Tide?
• Box Pains
• FRA/RCL Q&A
• Switching by Wire