Feds investigating death of MARTA contractor

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By David Wickert

The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the death of a contractor on a MARTA rail line earlier this week.

On Sunday night Robert Smith of Griffin, 38, was working on a rail line near Medical Center Station when he was struck by a northbound train. Smith, an employee of Cleveland Electric Co., was in his work vehicle at the time.

MARTA has declined to provide details of the accident, citing its ongoing investigation. On Friday MARTA confirmed the National Transportation Safety Board is also investigating the incident.

MARTA spokeswoman Stephany Fisher said the agency is cooperating with the NTSB investigation.

Rudjard M. Hayes, an attorney for Smith’s family, told Channel 2 Action News’ Nicole Carr that Smith’s death was “a horrible, horrible tragedy.”

He said Smith’s family is “very confused about what happened and want answers about what happened.” He welcomed the NTSB investigation.

“The downside of that is that they’re notoriously slow and they don’t give a lot of information very readily, but the upside is that they will do a thorough investigation and we’re glad that they’re involved in that,” Hayes said.
The NTSB is an independent federal agency that investigates every civil aviation accident in the country, as well as significant accidents on the nation’s railroads, highways, waters and pipelines.

In April the agency found that the Georgia Department of Transportation’s decision to store combustible material beneath I-85 contributed to the fire that destroyed a section of the highway in Buckhead last year.

The NTSB also investigated the deaths of three MARTA workers who died in two separate incidents in 2000.

In the first incident, one worker was killed and another injured when they were struck by a train as they inspected a section of track near Avondale Station.

In the other, a father and son - both MARTA contractors - died after they were struck by a train while repairing ceiling tiles at Lennox Station. MARTA later paid their family a $10.5 million settlement.