Texas and Pacific Work Extra 523/ Missouri Pacific Extra 1902 East, Head On Collision

Executive Summary
This report describes and analyzes a head-on collision which occurred at Taft, La., on February 21, 1973. At 3:30 a.m., westbound Texas and Pacific Work Extra 523 passed beyond its planned stopping point on an industrial siding, made an unauthorized entry onto the main track, and was struck by eastbound Missouri Pacific Extra 1902 East. The three locomotive units of Extra 1902 East, the locomotive unit of Work Extra 523, and 16 cars were derailed as a result of the collision. Three crewmembers on Extra 1902 East were killed, probably in a fire which engulfed the locomotive units; two other crewmembers were injured.

Probable Cause
The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the collision was the unauthorized intrusion of Work Extra 523 onto the main track, which resulted from the engineer's failure to brake the train in time to stop on the siding. Contributing to the collision were (1) the absence of protective devices to guard against the unplanned intrusion of a train from another track onto the main track and (2) operating practices and work patterns which did not adequately control, switching movements. The absence of crash-injury protection in the locomotive units and caboose of Extra 1902 East contributed to the fatalities and injuries.

Recommendation: THE NTSB RECOMMENDS THAT THE FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION: INCORPORATE IN THE FEDERAL REGULATIONS ON OPERATING PRACTICES REQUIREMENTS WHICH WILL GOVERN THE PHYSICAL PROTECTION THAT WILL BE PROVIDED MAIN TRACK TO GUARD AGAINST UNPLANNED AND UNAUTHORIZED MOVEMENTS ONTO THE MAIN TRACK.


Recommendation: THE NTSB RECOMMENDS THAT THE MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY: REVISE ITS OPERATING RULES AND DEFINITIONS TO CLARIFY THE REQUIREMENTS REGARDING THE USE OF LOCOMOTIVE HEADLIGHTS ON TRAINS ON OTHER TRACKS AUXILIARY TO THE MAIN TRACK, AS DIFFERENTIATED FROM SIDINGS.

Recommendation: THE NTSB RECOMMENDS THAT THE MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY: REVIEW ITS OPERATING PROCEDURES RELATING TO SWITCHING AND PROVIDE DOCUMENTED GUIDELINES TO CREWMEMBERS TO ASSIST IN THE DECISION MAKING REGARDING STOPPING DISTANCES WHEN HANDLING LARGE DRAFTS OF CARS WITHOUT TRAIN AIRBRAKES.