Head On Collision of Two Penn Central Freight Trains

Executive Summary
At 5:27 a.m., on March 12, 1972, Penn Central freight train UY—328 (Extra 7095 East) collided head on with Penn Central freight train S-82 (Extra 7828 West) at Herndon, Pa. Train UY—328 consisted of a two—unit diesel locomotive, 104 cars loaded with coal, and a caboose; train S—82 consisted of a two—unit locomotive, 103 cars, and a caboose. Three of the four locomotive units were destroyed and the other was heavily damaged in the accident. The engineer and head brakeman on both trains were killed.

Probable Cause
The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of this accident was the failure of the crew to stop train UY-328 on the siding, in violation of the signal indication. As a result, train UY—328 moved onto the main track immediately in front of train S-82. It could not be determined why the engineer of train UY-328 failed to stop his train on the siding. Among several possibilities, the Board considers it most probable that the engineer and head brakeman had fallen asleep and had failed to see the stop aspect displayed by the signal which directs the movement of trains from the siding onto the main track.

Recommendation:
TO THE FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION (FRA), IN COOPERATION WITH THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN RAILROADS: Develop a fail-safe device to stop a train in the event that the engineer becomes incapacitated by sickness or death, or falls asleep. Regulations should be promulgated to require installation, use, and maintenance of such a device. (Superseded by R-84-31)

Recommendation:
THE NTSB RECOMMENDS THAT THE FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION: INCLUDE IN ITS PRESENT INVESTIGATION OF THE SAFETY OF LOCOMOTIVE-CONTROL COMPARTMENTS A STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS THAT COULD DISTRACT CREWS FROM THEIR DUTIES OR CAUSE THEM TO FALL ASLEEP AT THE CONTROLS. REGULATIONS SHOULD BE PROMULGATED TO CORRECT ANY UNDESIRABLE CONDITIONS DISCLOSED.

Recommendation:
THE NTSB RECOMMENDS THAT THE FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION: PROMULGATE REGULATIONS TO REQUIRE THAT A RAILROAD EQUIPPED WITH RADIO COMMUNICATION FACILITIES INSTALL RADIOS IN APPROPRIATE PARTS OF TRAINS AND MAINTAIN THEM IN OPERATING CONDITION, UNLESS ALL PERSONNEL INVOLVED ARE NOTIFIED TO THE CONTRARY BY APPROPRIATE RAILROAD PROCEDURES, SUCH AS A TRAIN ORDER OR GENERAL ORDER.

Recommendation:
THE NTSB RECOMMENDS THAT THE FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION: IN THE PROMULGATION OF REGULATIONS GOVERNING RAILROAD OPERATING RULES, WHERE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFE OPERATION OF THE TRAIN IS ASSIGNED JOINTLY TO THE ENGINEER AND THE CONDUCTOR, REQUIRE THAT THEY BE LOCATED AND INFORMED SO THAT THEY CAN MAKE QUICK, EFFECTIVE DECISIONS.

Recommendation:
THE NTSB RECOMMENDS THAT THE PENN CENTRAL TRANSPORTATION COMPANY: ESTABLISH A BACKUP COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM IN THE EVENT THAT SIGNAL INFORMATION IS NOT RECEIVED BY APPROPRIATE CREWMEMBERS