Inexperience, uncontrolled movement cause of CN Melville rail yard death: TSB

By David Giles Global News

Posted June 10, 2020 1:18 pm   Updated June 10, 2020 3:27 pm

More needs to be done to reduce uncontrolled movements in rail yards, the Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) said after a Canadian National Railway employee died at a Saskatchewan rail yard.

A foreman and a helper were performing switching operations at the Melville rail yard on Dec. 22, 2017, when the foreman became pinned between three moving cars and a group of stationary cars. The 26-year-old woman suffered fatal injuries.

“This was a tragic incident and CN wishes to extend its condolences to Melissa’s family, colleagues, and community. Safety is a core value at CN and it is a critical part of everything we do,” CN said in a statement to Global News.

“We learn from every event on our network to make CN a safer railroad for our employees, the public and the communities where we operate.”

In its recommendation released Wednesday, the TSB said Transport Canada needs to work with both the industry and labour representatives to identify the cause of uncontrolled movements and develop strategies to reduce their occurrences.

“Switching cars without use of air brakes in rail yards is a routine railway industry practice, but one that requires a certain degree of skill, experience and judgment to do safely,” said TSB chair Kathy Fox.

“Since 2009, there have been 185 occurrences involving switching without air and these are on an upward trend. This tells us that current defenses are not sufficient to reduce the number of uncontrolled movements.”

In Melville, TSB said switching operations were carried out by shoving cars with a remote-controlled locomotive.

Crews would then release the cars and let them roll under their own momentum to the intended track without the use of air brakes — an industry practice known as “kicking cars,” the TSB said.

On Dec. 22, 2017, an attempt was made to kick three cars up an ascending grade without enough speed and the cars lost momentum and start rolling backward down the hill, the TSB reported.

The foreman ran to the cars and climbed onto the lead car to apply the handbrake. The report said the braking efficiency was compromised and the cars did not stop or slow down.

They eventually collided corner-to-corner with a stationary group of cars, pinning the foreman.
The TSB said the limited experience of the crew likely contributed to their decision to kick the three cars up the grade without sufficient speed, although the report noted they were qualified.

Turnover in the railway industry has been extensive in the past few years and the TSB said this usually leads to the two most junior and least experienced people working in yards.

The board said it is concerned that without additional mitigation, inexperienced crew will continue to work together in yards with a commensurate risk of ongoing adverse outcomes.

“As part of this permanent and ongoing revision of our operations, CN has already modified several industry-wide operating procedures, as highlighted in the TSB’s report, to improve safety,” CN said.

“The company is supportive of the TSB’s recommendation that the regulator should work with industry and labour representatives regarding uncontrolled movements.”


Report to be released into death of CN Rail worker near Melville

The TSB said its report and video statement "details the factors in the occurrence and findings" of the December 2017 fatal incident near Melville. The report "contains one safety recommendation and one (TSB) safety concern."

Author of the article:Saskatoon StarPhoeniX

Publishing date: Jun 08, 2020  •  Last Updated 3 months ago

More than two years after the death of a Canadian National rail worker near Melville, the Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) is set to release its investigation report into the incident.

The TSB on Monday said it plans to publish its report on Wednesday and release a video statement “which details the factors in the occurrence and findings.” The report “contains one safety recommendation and one (TSB) safety concern.”

According to the Teamsters union, which represents workers at CN, the employee was a 26-year-old woman with approximately three years on the job.

According to the TSB, the fatal incident took place around 6 p.m. on Dec. 22, 2017. During the course of performing regular duties, three cars on the track “had stopped and begun to roll back uncontrolled,” the TSB said in its initial report.

The 26-year-old woman “then ran towards the uncontrolled movement, climbed aboard the leading car and attempted to apply the handbrake when the cut of three cars collided corner to
corner with the stationary train that had been stopped foul. Caught between the cars, the foreman sustained serious injuries and later succumbed to the injuries.”

According to the TSB, Class 2 investigations “are complex and involve several safety issues requiring in-depth analysis.” Class 2 investigations, the TSB said, “frequently result in recommendations” and “are generally completed within 600 days.”

The three phases of a TSB investigation involve the field phase, during which investigators examine the site and wreckage, collect information and interview witnesses; the examination and analysis phase, during which records are reviewed, components are tested and safety deficiencies are identified; and the report phase, during which a draft report is approved. After it is reviewed and approved, the report is released to the public.


**Transportation Safety Board says crew inexperience contributed to 2017 death at Sask. CN Rail yard**

*Foreman was killed after collision involving out-of-control rail cars*

David Shield · CBC News · Posted: Jun 10, 2020 1:29 PM CT | Last Updated: June 10

The Transportation Safety Board says a foreman at a CN Rail yard in Melville, Sask., had only been doing the job for five shifts before a fatal 2017 accident.

On Dec. 22, 2017, the 26-year-old woman was killed as a crew was moving cars in the yard uphill without using air brakes, a routine procedure that can be dangerous if proper procedures are not met.

The Transportation Safety Board released the final report on its investigation on Wednesday. It found that the crew was moving three loaded cars uphill without air brakes, by pushing into them with a remote-controlled locomotive.

However, the bump didn't provide the cars with enough momentum, and they ended up rolling backwards, uncontrolled.

The foreman jumped onto the lead car and tried to apply the hand brake, which did not stop the cars.

The out-of-control rail cars slammed into some parked rail cars, and the foreman was killed.

The investigator determined that the crew's limited experience contributed to the accident.

"In a perfect situation, you’d have an experienced employee working with a less-experienced employee," senior TSB investigator Glen Pilon said Wednesday.
"They would both be utilizing the remote control through the shift back and forth, depending on the move. In that way, the younger employee can gain experience."

The investigator said the procedure was difficult, and would have been safer if done by a more experienced person.

"It's quite a tricky move, especially when there's a hill," he said.

"And while she was able to perform similar moves in another area of the yard, where there was a hill, she didn't modify the way she was working."

The report also said there were communication problems between the foreman and her helper. The helper believed the foreman was performing another type of procedure to move the cars, and was not able to intervene in time.

This isn't the first time that cars have gone out of control at a rail yard across the country.

The practice of "kicking cars," or rolling them through the yard with a locomotive, resulted in about 500 instances of cars losing control over the past 10 years, the TSB says.

"It can be done effectively, it can be done safely," said Pilon.

"But there are areas where it probably shouldn't be done."

The board issued a recommendation that unions and rail companies work on the issue of uncontrolled movements of cars when they're being switched without air brakes.

Pilon said the recommendation shows the board takes the issue seriously and would like to see action.

"When this happened, we said, 'look, we have to do something,'" he said.

"It's a very serious situation."

Since the accident, CN Rail has banned the practice of kicking cars uphill.

The Transportation Safety Board cannot assign fault or assign civil or criminal liability.