



SAFETY BULLETIN

2023-03

SUBJECT: Train Collision Involving a Mis-Aligned Switch – Dark Territory

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is currently investigating a train collision in dark territory (non-signaled) with no PTC overlay that occurred on April 16, 2023, after a train operating at speed encountered a switch improperly lined into a yard track, which was occupied by a stationary train. The incident resulted in the derailment of three locomotives and twelve grain cars, with both members of the crew sustaining serious injuries.

Although FRA's investigation into this incident is ongoing, FRA emphasizes the importance of ensuring safe operations of hand-operated main track switches by:

- Conducting proper training, periodic oversight, and adherence to railroad operating rule requirements for hand-operated, main track switches.
- Ensuring that the switches are visually verified to be properly lined for the intended route, and if uncertainty arises, conducting a double check as needed.
- Ensuring clear and concise verbal communication among all crewmembers to confirm the position of the switch before leaving the location where any hand-operated main track switch was operated.
- Releasing the limits of main track authority in non-signaled territory only after reporting to the train dispatcher that all hand-operated main track switches have been restored to their normal positions and locked. Exceptions can be made if the train dispatcher directs otherwise, and the necessary protection is provided.
- Guarding against complacency derived from repetitive task performance by using multiple methods or tools to validate safety critical tasks are complete.
- Encouraging employees to, when in doubt about switch positions, take the safe course and reverify the position of the switch before releasing track authority.

The purpose of this Safety Bulletin, which is informal in nature, is to ensure the railroad industry, including railroad employees and contractors, are aware of this recent incident that resulted in injuries to employees and to recommend that railroads brief their employees and contractors about the circumstances of the incident. As FRA completes its investigation, it may take additional actions with respect to this incident.

FRA requests that railroads review this Safety Bulletin with employees and contractors to increase awareness of hand-operated main track switches in non-signaled territory. FRA also reminds railroads of the need to ensure all individuals involved in operating hand-operated, main track switches are properly trained and qualified on how to conduct those operations safely.

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