



WMSC Finding Requiring WMATA to propose Corrective Action Plan

October 20, 2020

Overview: Following a Red Line train pull apart on October 9, 2020 between Union Station and NoMa-Gallaudet U Station, the 6000 Series rail cars involved in the event were moved to Brentwood Rail Yard, and Metrorail Safety Department (SAFE) personnel conducted an initial examination. The coupler assemblies involved in the pull apart were later moved to Greenbelt Rail Yard Major Repair and Overhaul facility for further review.

On October 10, when WMSC, SAFE and other investigative personnel arrived at Greenbelt Rail Yard to inspect and evaluate the coupler assemblies, investigators found that the coupler assemblies had been manipulated between the time the rail cars had been stored in the Brentwood Yard and the time investigators had arrived to conduct their examination.

The WMSC was later told and saw evidence that, at the direction of supervision, a bolt was manipulated outside of the safety event investigation process. Among other evidence, the torque stripe on the bolt had moved clockwise, indicating that the bolt had been tightened. Any such manipulation of evidence related to a safety event investigation is prohibited by Metrorail Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) 800-01.

The WMSC has raised similar concerns before regarding the integrity of evidence related to safety event investigations, including in the recently published Rail Operations Control Center (ROCC) Audit Report and in recently adopted safety event investigation report W-0042 regarding an August 15, 2019 collision on Largo Town Center Tail Track, Track 2.

In the ROCC Audit, the WMSC found that ROCC managers were not providing complete information such as audio recordings, and that SAFE was obtaining information through only ROCC employees.

In the Largo Town Center Tail Track collision, an individual train operator attempted to decouple the accident vehicles without permission, thereby disturbing the scene.

These examples demonstrate that from the frontline worker involved in a safety event up to the level of department leaders, Metrorail employees are not properly trained on and familiarized with their basic responsibilities related to safety event investigations. This has led to violations of SOP 800-01 that have compromised the integrity of the investigative process and the reliability of lessons learned.

A holistic Safety Management System approach requires not only sufficient and current written policies, but also proper training for the people responsible for implementing those policies. It also requires a robust investigation process with integrity to ensure maximum learning from safety events.

Finding: Metrorail puts the integrity of safety event investigations at risk by not following procedures requiring proper chain of custody and control of evidence as outlined in SOP 800-01 and Policy/Instruction 10.4/1, not following procedures requiring direct access for investigators to all information, recordings and other evidence that is potentially relevant to the investigation, and not fully training all personnel on the steps they are required to take when a safety event occurs.

Minimum required corrective action: Metrorail must provide initial and ongoing refresher training to ensure each Metrorail employee and all relevant contractors understand their roles and responsibilities as those relate to safety event investigations. Metrorail may also consider any necessary policy changes required to ensure all proper steps are followed to protect the integrity of all investigations.

Pursuant to the WMSC Program Standard, Metrorail has 30 days to propose a corrective action plan.