

Call for voice and video recorders following Via derailment

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The exact cause of a train derailment in Burlington that killed three Via Rail engineers may never be known, said Transportation Safety Board chair Wendy Tadros.

That's because there was no voice recorder to capture the final moments on Feb. 26 as Train 92 switched tracks going four times the speed limit. The ensuing derailment instantly killed engineers Ken Simmonds, 56, and Peter Snarr, 52, both of the Toronto area, and Patrick Robinson, 40, of Cornwall. Dozens of passengers were injured in the traumatic ordeal.

The derailment was front and centre Thursday when the TSB unveiled its 2012 watchlist — a blueprint for rail, aviation and marine safety recommendations gleaned from the hundreds of investigations conducted by TSB investigators.

The TSB has been calling for voice recorders in train cabs since 2003, including in its 2010 watchlist. This year's version expands that recommendation to include video recordings.

"They've worked well in the aviation industry for three decades," Tadros said, adding that they can work on trains.

After the derailment, Transportation Minister Denis Lebel referred the recorder issue to a rail advisory group, said Transport Canada spokesperson Maryse Durette, adding that a recommendation is expected within six months.

CN Rail spokesperson Jim Feeny said his company takes no issue with recording devices in train cabs. But CN also wants to use them to monitor employees.

Current legislation, however, only allows records to be used in investigations.

The TSB's Tadros also called on the rail industry to use backup safety devices for signals, because there have been an average 11 incidents a year where a rail employee "misidentified, misinterpreted or did not immediately recognize" a signal.

It's unclear whether this was a factor in the Burlington derailment, Tadros said.

But track signals were working properly that day.

Durette said the positive train control (PTC) system is designed to prevent train-on-train crashes, by overriding crew commands and enforcing safe speeds. It's in place in some United States operations, but



Train Derailment. A train derailment in Burlington in February killed three Via Rail employees in the locomotive. file photo/The Hamilton Spectator Source: The Hamilton Spectator

Canada is waiting and watching for full U.S. implementation before considering the system here.

Feeny said CN also believes this type of “backup” technology isn’t ready yet.

Via spokesperson Mylene Belanger said her company is “taking note of this list, but it’s too early to comment.”

The TSB report found some improvements on about one-third of its 2010 recommendations, including freight railways reducing the risk of destabilizing long and heavy trains by distributing power, marshalling and handling guidelines, and computer programs.

Outstanding TSB concerns also highlighted in the watchlist include marine and air safety management systems, deaths on fishing vessels, passenger trains colliding with vehicles, plane landing accidents and runway overruns, risk of collisions on runways and plane collisions with land and water.

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