

# SANTA ANA POLICE DEPARTMENT

DAVID VALENTIN · CHIEF OF POLICE

## TRAINING BULLETIN

*"Education promotes professional and responsive law enforcement"*

### Obstructions on Railroad Tracks

#### Purpose

The purpose of this training bulletin is to inform personnel of the proper procedures for dealing with emergencies involving railroad tracks and trains within our City.

#### Introduction

The miles of railroad tracks crisscrossing Santa Ana are heavily traveled by slow moving freight trains and switching operations as well as high speed Amtrak and Metrolink commuter trains. The tracks cross dozens of roadways and are in very close proximity to high density apartment complexes and busy commercial areas. These and other factors occasionally combine to produce a situation which, if not handled properly, could result in a major catastrophe. Some incidents which are likely to require immediate action are train vs. vehicle collisions or stalled vehicles on road crossings, and train vs. pedestrian collisions or debris on the tracks along the rail right of way.

#### Recommended Procedures

Upon arrival at the scene of any problem involving railroad tracks the following steps should be taken:

1. **Evaluate the situation.** Can it be handled quickly without other resources, or will tow trucks, fire fighting/rescue equipment or railroad personnel be needed to correct the problem?
2. **Notify the railroad dispatcher.** If the problem can't be corrected immediately, advise Communications personnel to call the appropriate railroad dispatcher. In addition to information regarding the nature of the problem, the dispatcher will need the precise location of the blockage and if possible, an estimate of the time needed to clear the tracks.
3. **Secure the scene.** As with any crime or collision scene, the area around the affected tracks must be kept clear of onlookers and vehicles. Bystanders should not be allowed within 150' of the scene and vehicles (including responding emergency equipment) must not be allowed within 10' of the tracks. These precautions are necessary to avoid further tragedy in the event that a train can't be warned to stop prior to reaching the obstruction.

4. **Set flares.** In cases where an obstruction presents a serious threat to rail traffic, flares should be set on the tracks at least 2 miles from the blockage in both directions. The flares should be placed between the rails and not on the wooden ties, in a location which allows train crews to see them for as long a distance as possible i.e. a long stretch of straight track. If staffing permits, Department personnel should remain with the flares until told by the officer in charge of the scene to extinguish them and allow rail traffic to resume. Persons so assigned are also responsible for giving advance warning to officers at the scene of the incident if an oncoming train is unable to stop at their location.

#### A. Factors to be Considered:

Flares on railroad tracks are an absolute stop signal to train crews. Upon seeing this signal they will make an "*emergency brake application*" whether they are aware of the nature of the problem or not. Such a brake application is very abrupt and can be hazardous to passengers and crew. It can also cause serious damage to the train and tracks, and even result in derailment. **The use of flares to stop trains is reserved for those situations which are likely to have equal or worse results should a train fail to stop prior to arriving at the problem area.**

Railroads are controlled by regional dispatchers whose areas of responsibility cover several states. Since they are not located in California, the location of a problem must be given precisely. The best means of doing this is to advise them of the nearest milepost number. Milepost markers are located alongside the tracks as well as on at least one of the crossing protection devices at each road crossing. Also located on the crossing signals and arms are Federal Railway Administration (F.R.A.) numbers. An F.R.A. number will begin with two digits followed by a dash, three more digits, another dash, and finally a letter i.e. 26-740-E. If unable to locate a milepost or F.R.A. number, advise dispatch of the major streets which actually cross the tracks on either side of the affected area.

The handling officer or on scene supervisor is in complete control of the scene and has the authority to hold a train until an investigation is completed or the problem is rectified. You must remember, however, that any delay can affect rail traffic for hundreds or even thousands of miles. Enough resources must be assigned to handle an incident in an efficient, thorough, and expeditious manner so that normal rail traffic can resume as quickly as possible.

Railroad police will respond to assist if requested, but will not take over a scene. If federal railroad authorities determine a delay is unreasonable or unnecessary, federal agents may be sent to seize control of the scene and reopen the tracks to train traffic. Needless to say, such a situation is to be avoided as it would have a very negative effect on the working relationship we have with other agencies as well as being a great embarrassment to the Department and the City.

Unless you have absolute personal knowledge to the contrary, all railroad tracks are to be considered active with the assumption that a high speed train could come at any time. It is also prudent to be alert for the presence of hazardous materials whenever approaching a train collision or derailment. Immediately obtain information regarding such materials from the train crew and pass it on to dispatch so that Fire Department Haz-Mat crews can be alerted and appropriate measures can be taken quickly to minimize the danger to responding personnel and civilians in the area.

## B. Reopening the Scene:

Upon completion of an investigation or removal of an obstruction from the tracks the following steps should be taken.

1. **Advise Communications.** Have them report any suspected or observed damage to the tracks if railroad personnel are not on scene.
2. **Extinguish flares.** Only the on scene supervisor or handling officer may authorize the opening of the tracks. Personnel maintaining the flares must extinguish them, or if the flares were left unattended, personnel must be sent to do so. Railroad personnel are forbidden from removing flares which they had not set up themselves. After stopping for unattended flares, the train will remain stationary until somebody in authority removes the flares or until they burn out. The train will then proceed at a restricted speed for one mile before resuming normal operations.

## Summary

With the miles of heavily used railroad tracks within the city limits, collisions and obstructions of the rails are not uncommon. These situations must be dealt with quickly and efficiently to avert further tragedy or unnecessary delay to rail traffic.

Responding officers must evaluate the situation, have Communications alert the railroad dispatcher, request appropriate assistance from within the agency as well as from outside resources, and secure the scene to prevent further loss of life or property. Hazardous materials protocols must be implemented as soon as the presence of such a danger is determined.

*Flares are to be set to stop trains only in extreme cases since their use can result in serious consequences. If used, flares should be monitored, and then must be extinguished by department personnel only when ordered to do so by the on scene supervisor or handling officer.*

**Acknowledgment:** This training bulletin was prepared by Officer Frank Finn with the assistance of Special Agent Rudy Sanchez of the Santa Fe Railway Police Department and reference material from Fresno P.D. training bulletin 14 September 1994 "Safety on Or Near Railroad Tracks", 1/97.

**Reviewed By:** Cpl. Finn

**Revision Date:** February 2005