DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS REGULATIONS BOARD

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590

Hazardous Materials Regulations Board

[49 CFR Part 179]

[Docket No. HM-38; Notice 69-31]

TRANSPORTATION OF HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Interlocking Couplers and Restriction of Capacity of Tank Cars

The Hazardous Materials Regulations Board is considering amending Part 179 of the Hazardous Materials Regulations (1) to require interlocking couplers on all new and rebuilt tank cars transporting hazardous materials, and (2) to restrict the capacity of new and rebuilt tank cars used to transport hazardous materials.

The Board has become concerned with the increasing number of railroad accidents involving tank cars transporting hazardous materials in which the tank released its contents, either because of a puncture or because of a rupture, causing a dangerous condition. In many instances this release of hazardous materials resulted in personal injury and substantial property damage; and in two instances it resulted in multiple fatalities. According to the records compiled by the Federal Railroad Administration, since January 1, 1968, there have been 43 instances in which tank cars released their contents as the result of a rail accident. In 22 instances, evacuation of the surrounding population was undertaken as a safety measure. Although the records do not indicate the amount of property damage which resulted from these occurrences, conservative estimates indicate that the loss exceeds $15 million.

The Department is presently reviewing the design of these tank cars in an effort to determine the relationship between the capacity of tank cars and the likelihood of the release of contents in an accident. However, pending the completion of these studies, the Board believes that some action should be taken to reduce the likelihood that new or rebuilt tank cars will release their hazardous lading when involved in a rail accident. Therefore, the Board proposes to require that all tank cars built or rebuilt after June 30, 1970, that are used to transport hazardous materials, must be equipped with interlocking couplers that have been approved by the Federal Railroad Administration. These couplers should reduce the incidence of couplers disengaging in an accident and puncturing the head of a tank car. Since puncture of the tank car tank head is the primary cause of release of product, this requirement would reduce the number of head punctures in tank heads by a considerable amount. In addition, the Board proposes to limit the capacity of tank cars used to transport hazardous materials that are built after June 30, 1970, to those not over 34,500 gallons capacity or not over 263,000 pounds gross weight on rail.

If the above-referenced studies warrant, the Board will in future rulemaking actions apply these requirements and limitations and any others found to be necessary to existing tank cars used to transport hazardous materials. These and other actions will be discussed further in an advance notice of proposed rulemaking to be issued in the near future.

Interested persons are invited to give their views on this proposal. Communications should identify the docket number and be submitted in duplicate to the Secretary, Hazardous Materials Regulations Board, Department of Transportation, 400 Sixth Street SW., Washington, D.C. 20590. Communications received on or before February 10, 1970, will be considered before final action is taken on the proposal. All comments received will be available for examination by interested persons at the Office of the Secretary, Hazardous Materials Regulations Board, both before and after the closing date for comments.

In consideration of the foregoing, it is proposed to amend 49 CFR Part 179 as follows:

(A) Sections 179.13 and 179.14 would be added in the Table of Contents to read as follows:

Sec.
179.13 Tank car capacity and gross weight limitation.
179.14 Tank car couplers.

(B) Section 179.13 would be added to read as follows:

§ 179.13 Tank car capacity and gross weight limitation.

Tank cars built after June 30, 1970, must not exceed 34,500 gallon capacity or 263,000 pounds gross weight on rail.

(C) Section 179.14 would be added to read as follows:

§ 179.14 Tank car couplers.

All tank cars built or rebuilt after June 30, 1970, must be equipped with interlocking automatic couplers that will resist car telescoping and jackknifing in derailments and emergency stops and that are approved by the Federal Railroad Administrator.

This proposal is made under the authority of sections 831–835 of title 18, United States Code, and section 9 of the Department of Transportation Act (49 U.S.C. 1657).

Issued in Washington, D.C., on December 8, 1969.

R. N. WHITMAN,
Administrator,
Federal Railroad Administration.

[F.R. Doc. 69-14723; Filed, Dec. 10, 1969; 8:47 a.m.]