

In-cab recorders urged on anniversary of Burlington VIA derailment

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Emergency crews attend the scene where a Via train derailed with passengers on board in Burlington on Feb. 26, 2012. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Nathan Denette

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) has recommended that locomotives have in-cab voice recorders, as its investigation into last February's VIA train derailment in Burlington enters its final stages.

VIA train 92, which left St. Catharines for Toronto on Feb. 26, 2012, switched tracks abruptly at Aldershot around 3:30 p.m. that day and collided with a building, causing all six-passenger cars to derail in Burlington.

Three VIA crew members in the first cab died and 45 passengers, including a Via worker, were injured.

The TSB said Monday that "voice recordings allow investigators to understand the environment in which crews operated and the decisions they made leading up to an accident."

"The lack of this information in rail investigations deprives the TSB of a key tool it needs to help make Canadians safer."

Days after the Burlington derailment, TSB's lead investigator Tom Griffith said that excess speed caused the crash. The train was travelling at around 67 mph or 108 km/h, which was more than four times the authorized speed when switching tracks.

Griffith said the train's black box — which records speed and brake pressure among other things — showed the brakes were not used before the crash. He also said the track signals appeared to be working.

In the TSB's latest update, the agency reiterated that the track structure including the No. 5 crossover was in good condition and didn't play a role in the derailment.

It also said the locomotive and passenger cars were well maintained and their mechanical condition did not play a role in the accident.

The TSB has produced an initial draft report, which is being reviewed by confidential designated reviewers. Once the TSB has reviewed their comments the final report will be released publicly, the agency said.

No release date was provided.