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2 dead, dozens injured in California train collision

ANAHEIM, California (CNN) --A commuter train collided head-on Tuesday with a mile-long freight train during morning rush hour in Orange County, California, killing two people and injuring dozens of other people.

Both male victims were passengers in the Metrolink commuter train, said Jim Amormino, spokesman for the Orange County Sheriff Coroner's Office. A 59-year-old man riding in the front car, identified as Robert Kube, was pronounced dead at the scene, he said.

The other victim, 48, died at St. Jude Medical Center in Fullerton.

Autopsies were planned, Amormino said.

About 160 others were either treated at the scene or taken to hospitals, said Capt. Steve Miller of the Orange County Fire Authority. As many as 100 more people were "walking wounded," with minor injuries that did not need medical attention, he said.

Metrolink spokeswoman Sharon Gavin said about 300 people were on board the commuter train.

"We don't have all the details on this incident right now," Gavin said. "Obviously this is a very tragic and complicated situation."

The National Transportation Safety Board was on the scene to investigate the accident, she said.

The trains collided in Placentia in southern California at 8:16 a.m. PDT, just north of Anaheim Canyon Station. The commuter train was traveling south from Riverside to San Juan Capistrano.

At the time of the accident, the commuter train was stopped because the engineer had seen the freight train heading its way, said NTSB investigator Mike Flanigan. The freight train engineer saw the Metrolink and hit the brakes, but could not stop in time, he said.

"The train came to a stop," said a passenger in the first rail car. "I thought it was a normal procedure, then we felt that impact and it just kept moving us."

A makeshift triage center was set up in the gravel next to the tracks, and dozens of people sprawled on stretchers, many wearing neck braces, as emergency personnel attended to them.

Capt. Dave Taylor, a spokesman for the Placentia Police Department, said the injured were taken to at least a dozen area hospitals.

He said the Orange County Fire Authority was mobilizing its units for a training exercise at the time of the accident, enabling emergency personnel to get to the scene quickly. "We were lucky," he said.

A spokeswoman for St. Jude Medical Center in Fullerton said two people were in critical condition at the hospital and two others had moderate injuries. The hospital had activated a disaster plan, calling in additional doctors, nurses and other medical personnel, plus setting up a triage center, she said.

"This is our worst incident in our nearly 10-year history of operating the trains," said Metrolink spokesman Francisco Oaxaca.

At least 30 ambulances waited to take the injured away. Other passengers, who were not injured, boarded nearby buses to take them on to their destinations.

It was not known how fast the trains were traveling, but the commuter trains usually travel at 50 mph, Metrolink spokeswoman Gavin said.

The front car of the Metrolink train was partially crumpled and knocked half-way off the tracks, while remaining upright. The collision pushed the commuter train 370 feet back from its stopped position, NTSB Chairwoman Marion Blakey said.

If the signal for the freight train was functioning properly, she said, the Burlington should have stopped so that the commuter train could have diverted around the track. Investigators were now trying to determine whether the signal was working correctly.

Results of toxicology tests conducted on both engineers have not come back yet, Blakey said. Officials were also investigating the backgrounds and work histories of the engineers.

Metrolink has a toll-free number. Call for information about the wreck: 1-800-371-5465.

-- CNN Producer Sarah Weisfeldt contributed to this report.

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