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Students investigate the simulated derailment in the Metro Red Line Division 20 yards. Half those attending the class were Metro employees.

### Realistic Accident Re-creations Aid Class Teaching Rail Incident Investigation

- Aug. 7 mock collisions presented Red Line and Blue Line scenarios

By NED RACINE, Editor

(Aug. 13, 2008) A Metro Red Line derailment that wasn't a derailment and a Metro Blue Line collision that wasn't a collision helped rail incident investigators hone their craft last week.

A newly revised class to educate railroad workers in accident investigation, largely written by Wyman Jones, supervising engineer in Transit Systems Engineering, included several days of classroom instruction at Metro and two spectacular re-creations of rail accidents on Aug. 7.

[See myMetro>net report:](#) Metro Rail Expert Travels to South Korea to Train High-Speed Rail Officials

One re-creation, staged at a Blue Line spur track, represented a Blue Line collision with an automobile at a grade crossing. The Red Line derailment, staged at Metro Red Line Division 20, represented a heavy-rail accident in a confined area, under a bridge.

Re-creation,  
staged at a  
Blue Line spur



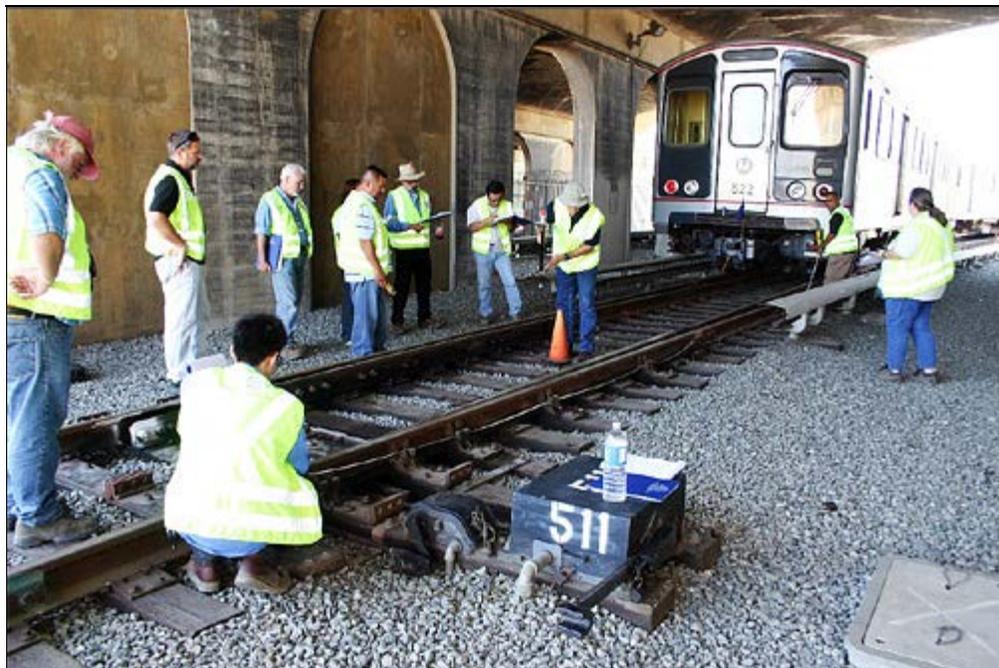
track, represents a Blue Line collision with an automobile at a grade crossing. Non-Revenue Division 4 supplied the damaged vehicle.

In the interest of a realistic exercise, Tom Jasmin, Gold Line manager, had a working grade crossing constructed at the spur track, including functioning warning lights.

Jasmin, who coordinated the week-long program, also simulated skid marks on the spur track rail and scattered sand where the emergency brake would have been thrown. (Trains release sand to help traction when an emergency brake is activated.)

"We wanted to put in a little bit of everything," Jasmin added, in a bit of understatement. "We made it as realistic as possible without [actually] hitting a car." How realistic? Passersby seeing the mock accident asked if their help was needed.

A number of Metro departments contributed to this realism, according to Jasmin, including Signals, Track, Rail Fleet Services and Non-Revenue Operations (which supplied the damaged car used at the spur track).



Student rail-incident investigators gather evidence at the site of a simulated heavy-rail derailment. The train was placed under a bridge to give students the experience of conducting an investigation in a confined area.

Presented under the auspices of the Transportation Safety Institute (TSI), an arm of the federal Department of Transportation, the re-creations offered students a rare opportunity to observe two rail accidents.

"The students got their hands dirty with heavy and light rail," said Dave Schlesinger, course manager, TSI. Schlesinger, also one of the course instructors, couldn't recall a rail incident investigation class that featured two simulated accidents.

Although Metro employees made up half the class of 26, attendees also included students from Seattle and rail oversight agencies throughout California and other states.

After having gathered evidence from the "accident" sites and drawn their conclusions, participants presented the findings of their field incident investigations to Mike Cannell, general manager, Rail Operations.

Schlesinger, formerly a Metro employee working in Rail Fleet Services, made clear the classroom content was as crucial for future incident investigators. There they studied track, signals, power, control room technology and vehicles.

"You can't investigate what you don't understand," he explained. He stressed that the value of an investigation radiates from the incident investigated. "If you're doing your investigation properly, you're going to improve safety and efficiency and, hopefully, you're preventing a recurrence."

According to Jasmin, Metro received some immediate benefits. Three days after graduation from the class, several graduates appeared at the Aug. 11 Gold Line accident at the Del Mar station, to practice their new investigation skills. "They assisted my staff, who hadn't taken the class. It helped everyone."

The next class at Metro is an advanced class to be held Sept. 15 through 19. This is Advanced Rail Incident Investigation. Last week's class was the prerequisite.

Besides Jones and Schlesinger, other instructors were Michael Flanigon, [Federal Transit Administration](#), and Jim Tucci, a TSI consultant.