Beat: Local

NEW YORK-METRO-NORTH TRAIN CRASH

INVESTIGATION UNDERWAY

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USPA NEWS - A Metro-North commuter train slammed into an S.U.V. on the tracks Tuesday evening, killing the driver and several train passengers. When a crowded commuter train slammed into a car on the tracks on Tuesday night, it dislodged the electrified third rail.

Combined with gasoline from the vehicle, it created a deadly inferno, federal investigators said at a news conference Wednesday evening.
“The entire interior of the first rail car was burned out,“ said Robert L. Sumwalt, a member of the National Transportation Safety Board.
The result was the most deadly accident in the history of the Metro-North Railroad, with six people killed and more than a dozen injured after the collision in Valhalla, in Westchester County.
Even as investigators worked to understand why a car became stranded on the tracks, Mr. Sumwalt offered some explanation for why the accident was so deadly.
He said the train plowed the car 1,000 feet down the tracks and, as it went along, tore up 400 feet of electrified rail.

That rail, he said, first penetrated the car “behind and below the driver´s seat“ and exited the car by the right rear tire. It then pierced the train, breaking up in 80-foot segments. At least one of those segments penetrated the second rail car.
But he said many questions remained unanswered. Specifically, he said, in these types of accidents, train passengers are rarely killed.“Usually it is not endangering the occupants of the train,“ he said. “We intend to find out what makes this accident different.“
Mr. Sumwalt said it also remained unclear why the S.U.V. was on the tracks, noting that investigators would continue to look into whether any warning signals malfunctioned.

The driver of the vehicle was identified as Ellen Brody, a 49-year-old mother of three children who lived in Greenburgh.Rick Hope, who was in the car directly behind Ms. Brody´s Mercedes S.U.V., said her car was stopped on the road just before the tracks but in front of the crossing arm. He watched as the red lights began to flash, warning bells rang and the crossing arm came down on the back of her car.
“As soon as I see the gate go down, I back up,“ Mr. Hope said outside his Yorktown Heights home on Wednesday evening. “I say, “˜She´s going to back up as soon as she sees what´s going on.'“
But instead, Ms. Brody calmly got out of her car. She walked around the back, pushed up against the guardrail, and found it wedged firmly in place.

Mr. Hope said he began to panic, knowing a train would plow through in seconds. He said he motioned with his hands at Ms. Brody to come toward him. Knowing his headlights were on, possibly blocking her from seeing him, he backed his car up more, thinking she might copy his behavior.
Instead she walked back to the driver´s seat and climbed in. There was a pause, as if she were buckling her seat belt.
She drove forward. “It was just instantaneous,“ he said. “She was gone.“

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:
United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com