

Washington, DC subway disaster kills one, injures 84

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A woman died and 84 people were injured in Washington, DC Monday afternoon after an electrical malfunction filled a subway train with thick smoke. At the time of writing, at least two people are hospitalized in critical condition.

Black smoke began bellowing out of the subway tracks shortly before 3:30 PM near the L'Enfant metro station, a central stop in Washington, DC. According to National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator Michael Flanigan, an unknown object made contact with the electrified third rail of the metro track, causing an electrical arc that produced the smoke.

The electrical problem stopped a yellow-line train in the smoke-filled tunnel, leaving passengers trapped for more than 40 minutes. In numerous pictures and videos taken during the incident and posted online, passengers can be seen coughing and struggling to breathe. Many riders were panicked, screaming, "We're going to die in here!"

One woman fell unconscious and three passengers struggled for twenty minutes to revive her. It is unknown if she is the woman who was later declared dead. Another man had a seizure as those around him called for medical assistance.

Passenger Jonathan Rogers told NBC News that train riders waited forty minutes inside the train before help came and an evacuation started. He said, "It just kind of felt like, 'Why were we trapped on that train that long? All we did was sit there and wait. Forty minutes seems like a long time.'"

The train itself was only 800 feet away from the platform at the time of the incident. The electrical arc producing the smoke was 1,100 feet further on, deeper into the tunnel, according to Flanigan.

Details are still emerging about what caused the electrical arc and why the evacuation process took so

long. The NTSB could take months to investigate the incident and produce a report.

Eugene Jones, the current chief of D.C. Fire and Emergency Medical Services, told the *Washington Post* that firefighters waited to rescue passengers because they were unsure if the electrical rail had been turned off.

The train operator reportedly told passengers to stay low and wait to be rescued, but many people panicked and tried to force open doors. One passenger, John, told local news station *Fox 5* "people were upset because there was no help coming to get us out of there. We were on there for a good 40 to 45 minutes; they seemed to have most of their focus on moving the train instead of getting us help or getting us off the train."

Overall 200 people were evacuated from the station platform. Twelve people were treated at the hospital and then released; six were admitted for more serious conditions. Officials announced Tuesday afternoon that the woman who died was Carol Glover, a 61-year-old contract employee working for the federal government. A neighbor described her to the local *WUSA 9 news* as "a vibrant woman, dedicated mother and loving person."

The DC Metro system has a history of accidents and underfunding. In 2009 a crash on the DC Metro system killed nine people and injured dozens. During the investigation into the crash, the NTSB revealed that it had previously recommended that the model of railcars involved in the wreck were in need of serious improvement or should be phased out of service. The *Washington Post* reported at the time that the transit authority's response was that "retrofitting was deemed too expensive for the cash-strapped system..." The train responsible for the head-on collision was two months late in having its brakes replaced and assessed.

In October of 2013, a worker performing routine maintenance on the metro system was killed by an explosion. Several of his colleagues were also seriously injured. Due to the government shutdown, an investigation into the incident was hampered. In 2010, two workers were also killed while performing maintenance on the metro railway near the Rockville Metro station in Maryland.

In a December 2014 article, the *Washington Post* described the DC Metro's 2015 budget as "exceptionally tight." The article quoted metro officials who warned that expenses were increasing and without raising prices it was difficult to fund the system. The 40-page 2015 budget plan announced by the Metro's board included a section titled "More Aggressive Cost Cutting Needed If Funding Is Not Available" which primarily outlined plans for cutting service if funding fell through. The DC Metro is the third busiest subway system in the United States.

Nationwide, the US transit system is in need of massive repairs and refurbishing. America's Society of Civil Engineers released a report in 2013 that rated America's public transit system at a "D" level. The report summarized, "many transit agencies are struggling to maintain aging and obsolete fleets and facilities amid an economic downturn that has reduced their funding, forcing service cuts and fare increases."



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