

# Union Pacific employee dies, major train derailment in Texas in separate accidents on the same day

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Robert Gardner, 43, was identified as the person killed in a train accident while on the job for Class I rail carrier Union Pacific (UP) in an accident Monday afternoon.

The same day Gardner died, another UP train derailed in the middle of downtown Waxahachie, a small Texas city with more than 40,000 residents. Last December, two UP workers died in a derailment in West Texas.

On Gardner's death, the company issued an incident alert that "a crew had just secured a cut of rail cars on the mainline and separation was made to shove off into an industry. While shoving back into the industry the conductor sustained fatal injuries after striking the cut of standing cars on the mainline."

"Shoving into an industry" means pushing a train of cars into a specific location within an industrial area or facility. This is often done to position the cars for loading or unloading, a process known as spotting.

An investigation into the incident is ongoing, but the incident report from the company suggests he struck a standing rail car while guiding cars into the industry yard.

Gardner appears to have been killed in the rail yard at Lone Star Feeds in Nacogdoches, where there are three industry lines separated from the main line. Pictures from the scene show that all three lines had rail cars on them and that the space between them is narrow and situated between two grain elevators.

Early reports indicate that Gardner, who had two years of experience with Union Pacific, had requested a pilot (a more experienced engineer or conductor who understands the route) to assist him but was denied. This would likely have been denied out of management's cost concerns.

Gardner's death follows two other Union Pacific deaths last year.

Last September a Union Pacific conductor died in Kenosha, Wisconsin, after falling onto a track. In July, a Union Pacific conductor, 27-year-old Justin Pender, died. According to a report by the National Transportation Safety

Board (NTSB), "the tank car he was riding during a shoving move struck the side of another train." Pender had just five months of experience with Union Pacific. Pender had also reportedly requested a pilot but was denied as well. While details are still emerging from this week's accident in Nacogdoches, the circumstances appear to be similar to Pender's fatal accident.

## Massive derailment in downtown Waxahachie

Later in the day on Monday another rail accident on a Union Pacific line resulted in a large derailment in the downtown area of a small Texas city.

A Union Pacific freight train in Waxahachie, Texas, about 30 miles south of Dallas, derailed at 11:30 p.m. local time Monday. Of the 116 cars on the train, 16 jumped the tracks, 14 of which overturned. Local officials confirmed that all derailed cars were carrying ethanol, but that none of them leaked, with no immediate danger to the public.

As of this writing the cause of the derailment has not been identified. The population of Waxahachie is over 47,000.

The accident occurred in the downtown area of Waxahachie, and the derailed cars spread wide enough to block five road intersections. Nearby local businesses and the Ellis County government center experienced delays and closures into Tuesday as crews worked to clear the site. Damage to roadways could keep some closed for several days as repairs are made.

According to City Manager Michael Scott, this is the largest train derailment in the city in living memory. "A derailment like this ... I've not seen it in 23 years," he said. "To have train cars on their sides and this many cars affected, blocking multiple intersections ... I don't recall anything of this magnitude."

This derailment comes just months after similar accidents in Texas. In October, a train carrying gravel derailed in Austin, Texas, after a rail car struck a utility pole, knocking out power and forcing a school to close down. Another train derailed in South Texas in June while carrying vinyl chloride, the same material that was set on fire during the East Palestine, Ohio, rail catastrophe. Some residents were evacuated by local authorities during the incident.

While no evacuations were required for this incident, it could have been much worse. Ethanol is highly flammable, and a derailment in the downtown area could have resulted in a major disaster. A similar incident occurred in 2023 in East Palestine, where a Norfolk Southern train carrying toxic chemicals derailed in the town. A “controlled release-and-burn,” later determined to be unnecessary, was motivated by a desire to reopen the track as soon as possible. It led to the poisoning of the entire town.

These incidents come at the same time that Class I carriers are pushing for one-person crews and attacking railroad jobs. The Association of American Railroads has requested that the Trump administration overturn a Biden-era regulation mandating two-person crews except with permission from the federal government.

Around three trains derail every day in the United States, as a consequence of decrepit infrastructure, longer trains and overwork in order for the railroads to cut costs. Attacks on jobs will ultimately lead to higher rates of injury and death on the railroad. While railroad fatalities had been decreasing for decades, between 2012 and 2023 deaths among workers, passengers and other accident victims combined increased from 669 to 995. While preliminary figures for 2024 suggest a slight decline in overall fatalities, 11 railroad workers still died as a result of workplace accidents last year.

In late 2022, just days after Congress imposed a national contract after the unions blocked strike action, Union Pacific became the first rail company to secure an agreement with the Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Union—Transportation Division (SMART-TD) union to establish a ground-based “facilitator,” which would ultimately replace train conductors and reduce crews to a single engineer.

Last year, SMART-TD announced a deal for a new “crew consist agreement” with BNSF to introduce a ground-based Road Utility Position (RUP). Workers overwhelmingly rejected the contract, while SMART bureaucrats argued contemptuously that workers should accept the deal to save at least some of their jobs once railroads become fully automated.

The pro-management bureaucracy of the railroad unions, which nearly lost control of a rebellious rank and file pushing for a national strike in 2022, is now doing

everything possible to isolate workers. Hiving off as many workers as possible into separate contracts for each craft at each railroad, the union bureaucrats intend to isolate rail crews in general, as well as the workforces at Union Pacific and Canadian Pacific Kansas City, where management is demanding even deeper concessions.

Meanwhile, they are whipping up anti-Mexican racism in order to divert attention from their own role in helping management destroy jobs and divide workers in the United States from railroaders in Mexico who work on the same continent-wide rail network.

Significantly, neither SMART nor the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) have issued statements on the death of Robert Gardner as of this writing.

The fight for safety requires the mobilization of the rank and file against both management and the sellout bureaucrats. The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee, founded in 2022 to override the sellouts of the union officials, wrote in response to the East Palestine disaster:

The sacrificing of safety to profit will only end when we control the decision-making and take it out of the hands of the Wall Street speculators and their lackeys. We must fight for workers’ control over safety and working conditions. This means much more than insisting merely that we are “stakeholders” whose interests must be taken into account. We must insist that we have the right to exercise full authority over these decisions, carried out by the rank and file in a democratic decision-making process. If anything is done which violates our directives, then we must reserve the right to take any and all actions which we deem appropriate.



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