



## Engineer: 'I'm still trying to figure out what happened'

Case bound over to trial

The Norfolk Southern Railroad engineer who was at the controls when a freight train derailed last June 30 near Gardeau claims a memory lapse at the time of the crash, according to evidence aired at his preliminary hearing on Monday.

Comments from 45-year-old Michael Seifert were read into the record during a hearing before District Judge Bill Todd. He was ordered to stand trial on charges of reckless endangerment and risking a catastrophe.

Portions of Seifert's statements during a job termination hearing after the derailment revealed that he was unable to remember the seconds leading up to the crash.

"I'm still trying to figure out what happened," Seifert said.

He admitted that he was operating the southbound train when it crested Keating Summit traveling at about 10 miles per hour, a route he had covered upwards of 200 times before.

Seifert said the next thing he remembered was the conductor, Steve Rogers, shouting his name and the train speeding down the steep grade at more than 70 miles per hour.

By that time, he said, the train was traveling too fast for him to apply the brakes, which might derail it, so he decided to "ride it out." He claimed that he had followed a similar procedure during a training run with a supervisor many years earlier.

Defense attorney Paul Malizia of Emporium pointed out that conductors can also activate the brakes. He wondered why Rogers wasn't also facing charges. McKean County District Attorney John Pavlock said the investigation is continuing and further charges are possible.

State Trooper Gary Stuckey testified about the results of toxicology tests conducted after the wreck at Olean (N.Y.) General Hospital. Prosecutors say

Seifert was under the influence of opiates and benzodiazepines at the time of the crash. The former are found in numerous drugs, from pain relievers to heroin. The latter are commonly used to ease anxiety. Seifert has not been charged with any drug offenses.

Pa. Fish Commission Waterways Conservation Officer Robert Mader also took the witness stand to detail the loss of aquatic life as the result of a lye spill after tanker cars ruptured.