



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Railroad
Administration**

URGENT MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATOR

November 3, 2004

A review of FRA's accident/incident data demonstrates that overall safety of rail transportation continues to improve. However, within a 59 day period, seven railroad employees have lost their lives while on duty, and six of the seven were engaged in switching operations. They were:

September 2, 2004-Thursday- Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF), Clovis, New Mexico.
A 26-year-old switchman died when he fell from the leading end of a tank car as it derailed during a switching move.

September 20, 2004-Monday-Ann Arbor Railroad (AA), Saline, Michigan.
A 44-year-old brakeman died when he was crushed between a piece of track equipment and the rail car he was handling.

October 4, 2004-Monday- Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF), Topeka, Kansas
A 57-year-old machinist died as a result of an injury he sustained September 29, when he was struck in the face by an object that was ejected from a hydraulic press.

October 4, 2004-Monday- Norfolk Southern (NS), Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
A 58-year-old conductor was struck and killed by a shove move being performed by another crew when he stepped in front of the leading end of the move.

October 7, 2004-Thursday- Union Pacific (UP), Springfield, Illinois
A student trainman was killed when the cars he was walking beside derailed, fell on their side, and crushed him.

October 7, 2004-Thursday- Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF), Teague, Texas
A 60-year-old trainman was killed when the cars that he was between moved. His was the only crew working at the yard at the time.

November 1, 2004-Monday- Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF), Bowdoin, Montana
A 47-year-old conductor was killed when he was struck by a passing train that he was positioning himself to observe as it passed his standing train.

In its recently released report, *Finding and Recommendations of the SOFA Working Group: August 2004 Update*, the SOFA Working Group (SWG) states its belief that the 124 switching fatalities (occurring from 1992 to 2003) were potentially preventable by the Five Operating Recommendations or by awareness of Special Switching Hazards like Close Clearances, Shoving as a Direction of Movement, and Being Struck by Mainline Trains.

Two Operating Recommendations appear to be more powerful than the SWG believed when it released its first report, *Findings and Recommendations of the SOFA Working Group*, in October 1999. Job briefings before switching operations begin, and when the nature of work changes; and mentoring of less experienced employees are important components of Crew Resource Management. The latter Recommendation may grow still further in importance as carriers replace retiring employees.

The SWG is also working to eliminate Severe Injuries – injuries that are potentially life and career threatening, and include amputations, fractures of bones other than to fingers and toes, loss of sight, and severe burns. While all the mechanisms through which Severe Injuries occur are not understood, the SWG believes that the Five Operating Recommendations and awareness of Special Switching Fatalities are important in reducing these injury events. For educational purposes, the SWG has condensed the Five Operating Recommendations into the Five SOFA Lifesavers:

- **Secure equipment before action is taken.**
- **Protect employees against moving equipment.**
- **Discuss safety at the beginning of a job or when a project changes.**
- **Communicate before action is taken.**
- **Mentor less experienced employees to perform service safely.**

All of us in the Railroad Industry need to re-dedicate our sincere commitment to safety of operations and all of our work processes. We must focus on our personal and professional responsibilities toward safety and include our fellow employees in those considerations. Each employee is personally accountable for his or her actions on the job.

With business on the upturn and many new employees entering the workforce, keeping the focus on our jobs is more important than ever. We must continue to remain vigilant about our personal safety, the safety of others, and the safety of the equipment we use.

As we approach important holidays and the end of another year, let's all be watchful so that we can share these times with family and friends, knowing that others will enjoy the same blessings.



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