

Year-2002 SOFA Success

The SOFA 5 Major Safety Recommendations (5 Lifesavers) were first published in October 1999. The railroad industry supported a major implementation effort to make all employees more aware of the operating and safety rules mirrored by those recommendations. For the first full year (2000), the rail industry suffered 13 employee fatalities, all occurring during switching operations. Since then, and with considerable help from the United Transportation Union, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the American Short Line and Regional Association, the Association of American Railroads, and the FRA, fatalities from switching operations have plummeted. In 2001, SOFA-related fatalities dropped from 13 to 8 over the prior year, a 38 percent decline. In 2002, fatalities dropped to just 6, another 25 percent improvement.

Historical group records for SOFA go back to 1975. They show that six SOFA-related fatalities is the smallest number ever recorded in a single year. More importantly, two more employees made it home to their families this year than last. The six who did not make it home were:

- An engineer in Delaware struck by equipment on March 21.
- A switchman in Arkansas crushed by equipment on May 4.
- A switchman in Tennessee struck by equipment on June 16.
- A brakeman in North Carolina struck by equipment on July 16.
- A trainman in Ohio crushed by equipment on August 8.
- A conductor in Kentucky struck by equipment on August 31.

We can do better. More than five months have passed since our last SOFA-related fatality. With a renewed effort to live those safety and operating rules mirrored in the *SOFA 5 Safety Recommendations*, and a continued commitment by railroad management, labor, and our FRA inspectors, we will do better in 2003.