

NOTICE OF SAFETY BULLETIN (unnumbered) - Recommended safety practices for Direct Train Control (DTC) operations.

On December 3, 1996, FRA published a Notice of Safety Bulletin in the Federal Register (Vol. 61, No. 233, page 64191), addressing recommended safety practices for Direct Train Control (DTC) operations. It reads as follows:

Preliminary investigatory findings following the head-on collision of two CSX freight trains at Smithfield, West Virginia, on August 20, 1996, indicate that existing carrier Direct Train Control¹ rules and procedures should be enhanced in order to reduce the risk of similar collisions. Therefore, the following three safety practices are recommended in DTC territory:

In non-signalled DTC territory - when a train holds an “after arrival of” block authority:

1. After the train to be met has been visually identified by engine number and the rear end marker has passed the point of restriction, the train being restricted shall establish positive radio contact with the train to be met in order to confirm the identity of the passing train. If radio contact cannot be established, the train dispatcher shall be contacted to provide the required confirmation. The train identification information received from the train to be met or from the dispatcher shall be recorded in writing by both the conductor and engineer, i.e., Engine (*number*) has passed (*location*) at (*time*).

In all DTC territory:

2. Once a movement authority is in effect, no alterations may be made other than those specifically prescribed by carrier operating rules.
3. Conductors and engineers should retain for seven days copies of all en route movement authorities transmitted by radio. These records should be periodically inspected by carrier officials.

In addition to these recommended safety practices, FRA emphasizes that strict adherence to existing FRA safety regulations will enhance safety of these rail operations. Railroad officials and employees should be particularly aware of the following regulations and their effect on the safety of DTC operations:

¹This is an umbrella term and refers to methods of operation known variously as Direct Traffic Control (DTC), Track Warrant Control (TWC), Track Permit Control Systems (TPCS), Form D control system (DCS), and similar methods of authorizing train movements.

FRA regulations at 49 CFR 220.61 (b)(5) require that both the conductor and engineer shall have a copy of all movement authorities transmitted by radio. FRA has traditionally interpreted this to mean that the conductor and the engineer shall *each* have a copy. Both crewmembers having their own copy of all movement authorities will, in accordance with the purpose of the rule, provide needed safety checks on unauthorized train movements.

FRA regulations at 49 CFR 217.9 (b)(1) require that a carrier's program of operational tests and inspections provide for operational testing and inspection under the various operating conditions on the railroad. Consequently, operational tests and inspections conducted in accordance therewith must include a representative number of tests and inspections specifically covering operations in DTC territory.

Issued in Washington, D.C. on November 25, 1996. Bruce Fine, Associate Administrator for Safety.