



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Safety Recommendation

Date: August 2, 1988
In reply refer to: R-88-37

Log R-604(1)

To Members of the Railway Labor
Executives' Association
(see distribution list attached)

In 1987, the National Transportation Safety Board undertook a safety study to review the first full year of implementation of the current Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) alcohol and drug rule. Also, the Safety Board wanted to examine what actions beyond those required by the rule could be undertaken by the railroads and the Federal government to reduce high losses from accidents involving railroad employees in safety-sensitive positions who continue to use alcohol and/or drugs on the job. ^{1/}

In 1987 and 1988, attention has been focused on accidents/incidents in which the use of alcohol and/or drugs by railroad employees has led to fatalities and serious injuries. The Safety Board's study reviewed the results of its accident investigation activities over the past 16 years (1972-87), all safety recommendations related to those accidents, and the responses of the organizations (public and private) to the Board's recommendations. Additionally, the Safety Board visited 10 railroads and interviewed more than 120 people directly involved in the railroad industry.

Three of the 10 railroads examined during the course of this study had Redblock programs: the Union Pacific (UP), CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSX), and the Burlington Northern Railroad Company (BN). The National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) is developing a program. Without exception, the employees interviewed were very supportive of their railroad's Redblock program. They emphasized that the program finally allows them to deal with this problem without threatening their friends' and colleagues' livelihood. Management representatives at these companies also voiced strong support for Redblock programs but indicated that the success of this program is clearly in the hands of the employees and their unions.

On the UP, 8 of 16 unions are currently participating in the Operation Redblock program, covering an estimated 20,000 of 28,000 eligible employees. Approximately 119 Redblock Committees are in operation across the system. As of May 1, 1988, these committees had confronted about 216 employees suspected of having drug or alcohol problems.

The CSX program has been in effect only since the beginning of 1988, but management and employees interviewed were strongly supportive. Approximately 25,000 employees systemwide are covered by the program. A local union official stated that although some unions had not yet agreed to participate in their program, Redblock was well regarded among unions and that membership would expand in the future.

^{1/} For more detailed information, read Safety Study--"Alcohol/Drug Use and Its Impact on Railroad Safety" (NTSB/SS-88/04).

BN's Redblock program is referred to as "Operation Stop." Participation has grown steadily since 1986, from 33 local committees to 68. In 1987, a reported 452 employees were confronted regarding suspected alcohol or drug abuse problems, 48.7 percent more than in the previous year. Operation Stop committees reported that about 78 percent of the referrals were from co-workers, 7 percent from supervisors, and the balance from friends or other sources. The majority of employees (53 percent) who came to the committee's attention were handled solely by counseling with committee members. An additional 34 percent were referred to company employee assistance programs (EAP), with the remainder receiving either no action or "other" action.

The clear consensus among both management officials and employees interviewed is that Operation Redblock/Stop is a valuable component of railroad drug/alcohol programs. The Safety Board shares this view and believes that Operation Redblock/Stop programs would be helpful to all railroads.

It also is apparent, however, that the incomplete participation among railroad unions significantly limits program effectiveness. By their nature, programs such as Operation Redblock cannot be mandated but must be born from and nurtured by the employees that they serve. The Safety Board is aware that international unions representing rail employees, such as the International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Engineers, have not yet endorsed or agreed to Redblock programs. Without the active encouragement and support from their parent union organizations, local union committees, which are the very heart of the Redblock program, may not expand.

The Safety Board believes that Operation Redblock and Operation Stop represent an important segment of the total program dealing with alcohol and drug use. Therefore, the Safety Board believes that all railroad unions should endorse Operation Redblock programs and actively support and encourage their locals' and memberships' participation. However, the Safety Board does not believe that Operation Redblock/Stop alone can address the continuing safety concerns. Increased levels of management supervision, expansion of mandatory and reasonable cause testing, and other parts of the program must be aggressively followed.

Therefore, as a result of its study, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the members of the Railway Labor Executives' Association:

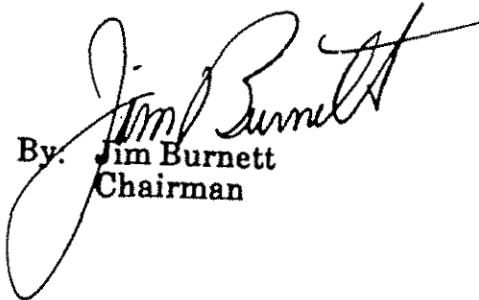
Encourage local union committees to support the establishment of and participate in railroad programs, such as Operation Redblock and Operation Stop, to identify employees who may be alcohol or drug abusers. (Class II, Priority Action) (R-88-37)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations R-88-23 through -33 to the Federal Railroad Administration, R-88-34 through -36 to members of the Association of American Railroads, R-88-38 to the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, and R-88-39 to the Association of American Railroads.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "... to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any action taken as a result of its

safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation R-88-37 in your reply.

BURNETT, Chairman, KOLSTAD, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, NALL, and DICKINSON, Members, concurred in this recommendation.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman

Mr. Frank Ferlin, Jr.
President
American Railway & Airway Supervisors
Association
Division of Transportation Communications Union
3 Research Place
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Mr. Robert J. Irvin
President
American Train Dispatchers Association
1401 S. Harlem Avenue
Berwyn, Illinois 60402

Mr. Geoffrey N. Zeh
President
Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees
12050 Woodward Avenue
Detroit, Michigan 48203

Mr. V. M. Speakman
President
Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen
Post Office Box U
Mt. Prospect, Illinois 60056

Mr. C. E. Wheeler
President
Brotherhood of Railroad Carmen
Division of Transportation Communications Union
4929 Main Street
Kansas City, Missouri 64112

Mr. Richard I. Kilroy
President
Transportation Communications Union
3 Research Place
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Mr. Larry D. McFather
President
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers
1110 B of LE Building
1365 Ontario Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Mr. J. F. Peterpaul
Vice President
International Association of
Machinists & Aerospace Workers
1300 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 200
Washington, D. C. 20036

Mr. Charles W. Jones
International President
International Brotherhood of Boilermakers
& Blacksmiths
570 New Brotherhood Building
Kansas City, Kansas 66101

Mr. Edward P. McEntee
International Vice President
International Brotherhood of
Electrical Workers
10400 W. Higgins Road, Suite 720
Rosemont, Illinois 60018

Mr. James L. Walker
International President
International Brotherhood of
Firemen & Oilers
122 C Street, N. W., Suite 280
Washington, D. C. 20001

Mr. Donald Carver
Assistant to President
United Transportation Union
Yardmasters Department
14600 Detroit Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44107

Mr. Donald C. Buchanan
Director of Railroad Workers
Sheet Metal Workers International Association
1750 New York Avenue
Washington, D. C. 20001

Mr. John E. Lawe
International President
Transport Workers Union of America
80 West End Avenue
New York, New York 10023

Mr. Fred A. Hardin
President
United Transportation Union
14600 Detroit Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44107