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Safety Alerts

March 1, 2023

Dedication:

The FAMES Committee dedicates its efforts to all roadway workers who have lost their lives in the performance of duty and to the families, loved ones, and coworkers they have left behind.

Fatalities on Adjacent Tracks

Mission Statement:

The Mission of the Fatality Analysis of Maintenance-of-way Employees and Signalmen (FAMES) Committee is to analyze all fatalities and selected related incidents in order to make recommendations to reduce the risk of future occurrences and eliminate fatalities to roadway workers.

Fatalities on Adjacent Tracks

Following the implementation of the Roadway Worker Protection (RWP) Rule in 1997, FAMES has analyzed a total of 62 fatal RWP accidents, in which 66 roadway workers have perished, as of March 1, 2023. The FAMES Committee analysis is based on the available data.

In 19 of the 62 cases where an adjacent track was present, the fatal accident occurred on the adjacent track immediately next to where the work was being performed. FAMES classified these 19 accidents as adjacent track fatalities. The available data indicates that all 19 adjacent track fatalities occurred on controlled track where track centers were 19 feet or less.

Findings:

- Of the 19 adjacent track fatalities:
 - 12 (63%) — no protection had been established on the adjacent track.
 - 5 fatalities (26%) — exclusive track occupancy was the form of protection established on the adjacent track. Trains were authorized to move on the adjacent track without the fatally injured roadway workers being notified.
 - 2 fatalities (11%) — train approach warning (watchman/lookout) protection was the form of on-track safety provided for the adjacent track. The watchman/lookout was the fatally injured employees.
- In 13 of the 19 (68%) adjacent track fatalities, Roadway Maintenance Machines (RMMs) were present and in use on the track where work was being performed.
- In 8 of the 19 (42%) adjacent track fatalities, roadway workers were struck while conducting training or observing surfacing operations.
- In 10 of the 19 (53%) adjacent track fatalities, the affected roadway work groups consisted of four or fewer roadway workers.

Recommendations and Reminders:

- Ensure that adjacent track protection has been established in accordance with FRA regulations, carrier rules, and as safety conditions dictate.
- Never use an adjacent track to walk around or observe work unless on-track safety has been established on that adjacent track.
- During the on-track safety briefing:
 - Identify if Roadway Maintenance Machines (RMMs) will be present and take actions to manage any additional risks associated with their presence.

- Recognize that RMMs introduce noise, reduce visibility, present a striking hazard, and add to the complexity of the work being performed, especially where adjacent tracks are present.
 - Communicate the type of on-track safety in effect, notification and warning procedures for approaching movements, and operating procedures for the adjacent track.
 - Designate each roadway worker's place of safety to occupy upon the approach of a train including specific methods for communicating when it is safe for roadway workers to resume work.
- Prior to authorizing movements through working limits on an adjacent track, the Roadway Worker in Charge (RWIC) must notify roadway workers and receive verification that personnel and equipment are clear of that adjacent track.
 - All Roadway Workers should have a heightened awareness of adjacent track risks when working in multi-track territory, especially around RMMs.
 - As a supplement to on-track safety protection, RMM operators should sound their horn whenever they observe movements approaching on the adjacent track.
 - When using Train Approach Warning, watchmen/lookouts must focus their sole attention on the detection of approaching movements.
 - If you observe someone fouling an unprotected track, adjacent or not, tell them to move to the clear.

The FAMES Committee consists of safety representatives from a cross section of rail labor, railroad management, and federal regulators. FAMES is a continuous improvement process that relies on the candid sharing of available data and the views of its participants. To enable the process, FAMES explicitly refrains from making any findings regarding whether any past or present practice or protocol satisfies any legal duty or standard of care.

The views, opinions, and recommendations contained in this report are those of the FAMES Committee and do not necessarily represent the views, opinions, or recommendations of any specific railroad, labor organization, or governmental agency.
