

SAFETY BULLETIN

2024-04

SUBJECT: Conductor Switching Fatality

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is investigating an on-track collision resulting in a fatality of a conductor that occurred at 1:36 AM on July 6, 2024, at the Union Pacific Railroad's yard located in Melrose Park, Illinois. Based on FRA's preliminary investigation, the locomotive engineer of Train 1 was shoving a locomotive and approximately 45 cars on the City Lead track while communicating with the conductor by radio. The conductor was positioned on the leading end of the movement at the end platform of a tank car to protect the shove move. Train 1 was instructed to stop at the top of the City Lead where the track converges with the South Melrose Lead. Train 2 was departing the yard, operating eastbound on the South Melrose Lead. The surrounding area was unlit and consisted of an uphill grade with curves, and the conductor of Train 1 was equipped with a headlamp and lantern. That conductor was fatally injured when the tank car they were riding struck a black tank car in Train 2, at the point where the City Lead and the South Melrose Lead converge. The fatally injured employee was 27 years old and became a qualified conductor in May of 2024. While FRA's investigation into this accident is ongoing, its circumstances raise concern whether the employee was territorially qualified or provided assistance in accordance with FRA regulations.

The purpose of this Safety Bulletin, which is informal in nature, is to ensure the railroad industry is aware of this recent accident that resulted in a fatality of an employee and to encourage railroads to identify location-specific safety issues to cover during safety briefings and employee trainings. As FRA completes its investigation, it may take additional actions with respect to this accident.

FRA requests that railroads review this Safety Bulletin with employees to increase awareness of the importance of territorial qualifications on other than main track to ensure employees are familiar with the territory on which they work and the risks of shove movements, to include:

1. Railroads should carefully review 49 CFR § 242.301(d) which provides that if the conductor lacks territorial qualification on other than main track physical characteristics, then the conductor, where practicable, shall be assisted by a person who is a certified conductor and meets the territorial qualification requirements for other than main track physical characteristics. Where not practicable, the conductor shall be provided an appropriate up-to-date job aid. If an assistant or up-to-date job aid is not available to the conductor, then no movement should occur.
2. Railroads should review with employees Switching Operations Fatality Analysis (SOFA) Recommendation No. 5 – Mentor less experienced employees to perform services safely, and the SOFA Working Group Brief – Care During Shove Moves. The SOFA Working Group is a voluntary, non-regulatory, workplace-safety partnership formed to identify commonalities among fatalities that occur during switching operations. A SOFA Alert regarding this event and findings of previous events are available at <https://railroads.dot.gov/railroad-safety/divisions/partnerships-programs/switching-operations-fatalities-analysis-sofa>.

FRA also reminds the industry of Safety Advisory 2007-01, which addresses the safety of shoving or pushing movements in yards, as well as Safety Bulletin 2023-04 (Trainee Switching Fatality Involving a Shove Movement in a Yard) and Safety Bulletin 2023-05 (Shoving Movement Close Clearance Fatality).

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