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News

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Trump's Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy to Enforce English Language Proficiency Among Rail Crews Along the Southern Border

'Whether you're operating an 80,000-pound big rig or a massive freight train, you need to be proficient in our national language – English'

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy today announced that the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is cracking down on cross-border train operators who lack basic English language proficiency to make rail operations safer in the U.S.

In conducting routine regulatory oversight of cross-border operations this past fall on Canadian Pacific Kansas City Limited (CPKC) and Union Pacific Railroad (UP), FRA inspectors discovered instances in which inbound crew members appeared to have difficulty interpreting General Track Bulletins and communicating safety requirements in English with inspectors.

"Whether you're operating an 80,000-pound big rig or a massive freight train, you need to be proficient in our national language – English. If you aren't, you create an unacceptable safety risk," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy. "These commonsense steps will ensure every train crew operator can communicate with inspectors and understand basic operational bulletins. This Department will continue to put you and your community's safety first."

"Train crew operators who can't speak English pose a significant safety risk that should not be ignored," said FRA Administrator David Fink. "Dispatchers and first responders need to know that they can communicate with train crews, especially during times of emergency."

Additional Information:

Under 49 CFR Parts 240 and 242, railroads may only certify locomotive engineers and conductors who possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to operate safely. Due to

important train documents and radio communications being in English, these potential language barriers that FRA observed raised severe safety concerns.

FRA issued letters to CPKC and UP informing the railroads of the concerning findings from the focused inspection and that FRA is clarifying its approval of the railroads' locomotive engineer and conductor certification programs. Specifically, crews from Mexico may not operate more than 10 miles into the U.S. from their point of entry. FRA also explained that uncertified (and therefore potentially untrained) crews must stop at the customs inspection point and that any interpreters must be certified under safety regulations.

Any occurrences of crews operating in the U.S. without a sufficient understanding of the English language to perform their duties safely could result in the Trump Administration taking enforcement action.

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