

From: bentley@ble-t.org [mailto:bentley@ble-t.org]
Sent: Tuesday, May 08, 2012 3:08 PM
To: newsflash@192.168.127.13
Subject: [BLET NewsFlash] FRA issues Safety Advisory 2012-02 regarding restricted speed

FRA issues Safety Advisory 2012-02 regarding restricted speed

<http://www.ble.org/pr/news/newsflash.asp?id=5274>

CLEVELAND, May 8 - The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) published Safety Advisory 2012-02 on April 25 to remind railroads and their employees of the importance of complying with restricted speed operating rules.

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce strongly condemned the "blame the worker" tone of the Safety Advisory. He warned BLET members to be on alert as the Safety Advisory recommends that railroads "...increase the level of operational testing with regard to the operation of trains on main tracks at restricted speed."

President Pierce said: "The NTSB, the Federal Railroad Administration, and the railroad industry should keep in mind that railroading is a complex system of operations and simply laying blame at the feet of operating employees will not get to the root cause of these accidents nor will it prevent similar accidents in the future. Indeed, everyone can - and should - go much further than simply conducting additional and burdensome compliance tests on operating crews."

The Safety Advisory is a follow up to the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) Safety Recommendation No. R-11-10, issued on January 12, 2012. It also comes on the heels of a NTSB hearing held April 24 regarding the fatal rear-end collision involving a BNSF coal train and a standing maintenance of way equipment train in Red Oak, Iowa, which happened on April 17, 2011.

"Railroad operating rules governing restricted speed require that train crews be prepared to stop within one-half their range of vision," the FRA wrote in the April 25 edition of the Federal Register. "During the previous 12 months, the railroad industry has experienced six rear end collisions that resulted in four employee fatalities, [and] eight employee injuries.... It appears these six incidents may have occurred because the train crews did not properly identify and comply with block and interlocking signal indications that required operation of their trains at restricted speed."

The Safety Advisory indicates that main line rear-end collisions are seldom caused by one single factor, but stressed that train crew members must maintain constant situational awareness while in the cab.

"[E]ven slight lapses in situational awareness, particularly when operating trains on 'Approach' and 'Restricting' signal indications can lead to tragedy," the FRA wrote.

FRA also warned against the practice of "self dispatching."

"Self-dispatching is the operation of a train based on assumptions about the locations of other trains. These assumptions are sometimes developed through overheard radio conversations among other train crew members."

As part of Safety Advisory 2012-02, the FRA issued five recommendations to railroads. They are as follows:

1. Review with operating employees the circumstances of the six rear end collisions identified above.
2. Discuss the requirements of restricted speed and related operational tests at future instructional classes (and also as part of ad hoc coaching and briefings) for operating employees, with a focus on the railroad's absolute speed limit for such operations, as well as requirements that ensure the ability to stop in one-half the range of vision. Special emphasis should be placed on situations in which the range of vision is limited (e.g., curves).
3. Evaluate quarterly and 6-month reviews of operational testing data as required by Title 49 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) section 217.9, and, as appropriate, increase the level of operational testing with regard to the operation of trains on main tracks at restricted speed. A representative number of operational tests should be conducted on trains following other trains into an occupied block, particularly in high-density corridors. Operational tests should also include a review of locomotive event recorder data to verify compliance with restricted speed requirements.
4. Reinforce the importance of communication between crew members located in the controlling locomotive, particularly during safety critical periods when multiple tasks are occurring, including such activities as copying mandatory directives; closely approaching or passing fixed signals that require trains to operate at restricted speed; approaching locations where trains' movement authority is being restricted; and during radio conversations with other employees or job briefings about work to be done at an upcoming location.

5. Review with operating employees the requirements of subpart C of 49 CFR part 220, and reinforce that the improper use of electronic devices during safety critical periods often leads to a loss of situational awareness and resultant dangers.

In his response to the NTSB Safety Recommendation No. R-11-10, President Pierce informed the NTSB that at least one BLET member is fighting to get his job back - with the help of his Local Division and his General Committee of Adjustment - after being dismissed for allegedly delaying his train by operating too slowly while traveling at restricted speed, in order to avoid failing a banner compliance test the Carrier had set up just ahead of his train.

In warning BLET members to heighten their vigilance when operating at restricted speed President Pierce said, "The FRA was provided a copy of our response to the NTSB, and I am outraged the agency is recommending that railroads expose our membership to even further harassment when they do not toe the line to an 'efficiency above all else' mentality. All BLET members are urged to exercise extra caution when operating at restricted speed to protect their safety and their jobs, and I am directing all BLET Local Chairman to immediately notify my office if one of our members is charged by a carrier with delaying the train or otherwise operating too slowly when being governed by restricted speed."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Full copy of FRA Safety Advisory 2012-02:
http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Safety_Advisory_2012_02.pdf

BLET response to NTSB Safety Recommendation R-11-10 regarding restricted speed:
<http://www.ble-t.org/pr/news/newsflash.asp?id=5243>