



Freight Railroads Announce Key Safety Measures in Drive to Zero Accidents

Industry to install approximately 1,000 new detectors, expand support for first responders and initiate actions based on preliminary NTSB advisory

Washington, D.C. – March 8, 2023 – The freight rail industry today is announcing an initial set of steps it is taking in its drive toward a future with zero incidents and zero injuries — one where what happened in East Palestine never happens again. The industry believes that the February 3rd derailment and its aftermath require railroads and freight shippers alike to lead with actions that restore trust and that will make a difference in the march toward zero.

- 1. Detectors – Spacing:** The industry has long recognized the risk posed by hot bearings and voluntarily installed thousands of hot bearing detectors (HBDs) across the railroad network. The railroads have also voluntarily installed acoustic bearing detectors, which can ascertain potential problems from the noise created by bearings that are starting to fail. For over three decades, the Class I railroads have voluntarily spaced HBDs no more than forty miles apart on key routes, which are routes over which commodities that are particularly hazardous travel. In recent years, all the Class I railroads have reduced their HBD spacing significantly below the 40-mile criterion. All Class I railroads have now agreed to go further and are immediately beginning to install additional HBDs across their key routes, with the goal of achieving average spacing of 15 miles, except if the route is equipped with acoustic bearing detection capability or other similar technology. This will amount to the deployment of approximately 1,000 new HBDs. **A route containing acoustic bearing detection capability or other similar technology shall maintain maximum HBD spacing not to exceed 20 miles where practical due to terrain and operating conditions.** Inoperative HBDs on key routes will generate critical incident tickets and be prioritized for dispatch and repair without undue delay.
- 2. Detectors – New Action Threshold:** The Class I railroads commit to stopping trains and inspecting bearings whenever the temperature reading from an HBD exceeds 170° above ambient temperature. This action establishes a new industry standard for stopping trains and inspecting bearings.

3. **Detectors – Shared Trending Analysis:** Analysis of trending data from multiple HBDs can reveal a bearing problem before an absolute temperature threshold is reached. While HBDs have been in use for a long time, it is relatively recently that software and data processing have led to the ability to proactively identify bearings that have not yet exceeded absolute temperature thresholds but that, based on HBD trending data, may become problematic and should be addressed. Each Class I railroad now uses trending analysis, but there are a variety of approaches employed by the Class I railroads to accomplish this goal. The Class I railroads are reviewing the trending analyses programs each uses and have targeted March 31 to arrive at recommendations regarding the use of trending analyses.
4. **Confidential Close Call Reporting System (C3RS):** As outlined in a recent [letter](#) to the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), all seven Class I railroads are joining the FRA's voluntary program to supplement their own programs for confidential reporting of safety issues.
5. **Training:** In 2023, the railroads will train roughly 20,000 first responders in local communities across the country on accident mitigation. In addition, the industry will facilitate the training of 2,000 first responders at the [Security and Emergency Response Training Center](#) (SERTC) facility in Colorado, which includes enhanced scenario planning and training at a new facility. SERTC's world-renowned program offers an immersive experience with full-scale training scenarios that prepare first responders for real-world surface transportation emergencies. SERTC is a member of the National Domestic Preparedness Consortium (NDPC), which fully funds local, state, tribal and territorial first responders to attend any of SERTC's DHS/FEMA-certified courses.
6. **AskRail:** The industry is expanding its efforts to get the [AskRail](#) app (which provides real-time information about the contents of every car in a train and the safe handling of those contents in the event of an accident) into the hands of every first responder by directly targeting emergency communication centers to promote broader access versus relying solely on individual downloads. Railroads are also targeting all 50 state fire associations. If successful, these measures should dramatically increase the number of first responders that have access to AskRail, with a goal of doubling the number of first responders who have access to the tool by the end of 2023.
7. **Tank Car Improvement:** Following [a safety advisory](#) from the NTSB raising the "potential for certain manway assemblies with aluminum protective housing covers to melt when exposed to extreme heat as experienced in a pool fire situation," the AAR's Tank Car Committee is accelerating the work of a dedicated task force that has been investigating the use of heat-resistant gaskets for tanks transporting flammable liquid. The task force, comprised of railroads, equipment owners and tank car manufacturers, will expand its scope to consider all fire performance improvements to service equipment.

"Healthy railroads are essential to the U.S. economy, and consistently and reliably safe operations are essential to healthy railroads," said Association of American Railroads (AAR) President and CEO Ian Jefferies. "Our long history of voluntarily employing safety measures that go above and beyond federal requirements proves our belief in that principle. While we will continue to follow the National Transportation Safety Board's ongoing investigation in Ohio closely and recognize its deliberate, methodical, and fact-based approach, railroads are committed to taking appropriate steps now."

Last week AAR released data showing that railroads are [very safe and getting safer](#). This is especially true for hazardous material transportation, where the accident rate is down 78 percent since 2000. Mainline accidents are down 44 percent in that same period.

"Rail is indisputably the safest way to move dangerous commodities," added Jefferies. "Yet we fully appreciate that these data do not comfort the residents of East Palestine and that public trust must be restored through action. Until we achieve our goal of zero, we will maintain our fierce commitment to getting there."

While participating in public policy discussions, railroads encourage policymakers to take an objective, data-driven approach. Policy actions taken reflexively that are not likely to achieve meaningful safety benefits could have a wide range of unintended economic and environmental consequences and a negative impact on the safe movement of all goods, including hazmat.

Congress and the USDOT can play a key role in the meantime in promoting both SERTC and AskRail, including through expanded outreach to states and counties. An all-the-above approach is needed.

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About AAR: The Association of American Railroads (AAR) is the world's leading railroad policy, research and technology organization focusing on the safety and productivity of rail carriers. AAR members include the major freight railroads of the U.S., Canada and Mexico, as well as Amtrak. Learn more at www.aar.org.

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