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Rail Employees at Nation's Largest Rail Yard to Confidentially Report 'Close Calls' Under New Federal Rail Safety Pilot Project

Employees at the nation's largest rail yard in North Platte, Nebraska can now voluntarily and anonymously report "close call" incidents that *could have* resulted in an accident, but did not, without fear of sanction or penalty from their employer or the federal government as part of a new rail safety pilot project, announced Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph H. Boardman.

"Having the opportunity to learn about and analyze these 'close-calls,' will help us identify and correct problems across the industry," Boardman said, noting that the aviation industry already has a similar program. FRA currently requires railroads to report a wide range of accidents and incidents that actually occur. The 'close call' information will be studied to determine areas of potential risk and to develop solutions to prevent accidents in the future.

The Confidential Close Call Reporting Pilot Project involves Union Pacific Railroad (UP), the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) and the United Transportation Union (UTU). Each has ratified an agreement with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to allow railroad employees to anonymously contact the U.S. Department of Transportation's Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), to report potentially dangerous situations or near misses.

Examples of "close calls" could be as minor as employees lifting objects that place them at risk for minor injuries, or more serious events, such as a train operating in non-signaled, or dark territory, proceeding beyond its track authority, or a train crew member's failure to properly test an air brake before leaving a yard, which could lead to a runaway train.

The pilot project at the UP railroad yard in North Platte began February 1 and FRA plans to extend it in the coming months to other yards, including BNSF Railway in Lincoln, NE and Canadian Pacific in Portage, WI. "Close call" reports will be taken for five years to permit researchers enough time to collect a sufficient number of incidents for thorough analysis. Importantly, a review team will evaluate the reports as they are received in order to make safety recommendations for those that require immediate attention. FRA is also currently in discussion with commuter railroads to launch a fourth pilot project location.

Boardman said the 'close call' project is one of the key elements in FRA's National Rail Safety Action Plan, a comprehensive effort designed to reduce the causes of train accidents.

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