

Report on the 2004 Federal Railroad Administration/American Shortline Railroad Seminar on Safety Practices.

Date: August 10, 11 & 12, 2004

Place: Marina Hotel, Port of Los Angeles, San Pedro, CA

Some Background: About 6 years ago, region seven of the FRA decided, along with its shortline partners through the Pacific region of the American Shortline Association, to host a safety seminar covering various existing safety rules and new ones affecting the shortline and regional operators. In that time, safety seminars have been held in San Bernardino, San Francisco, McCloud, Modesto, and Richmond etc. This year's version was held in San Pedro at the Marina Hotel and hosted by Pacific Harbor Lines, a large switching carrier that moves most of the intermodal container traffic in the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles.

This report reflects the highs and some of the lows of the various information imparted during two and one half days of classroom and field studies.

The morning activities usually involve introductions of everyone including the host railroad followed by a general review of the agenda.

One of the facts shared by George Hardy, head inspector for the FRA in Sacramento and the master of ceremonies, was that region 7 of the FRA was the second safest region in the country for the year 2003 and was on track for a repeat performance.

Day 1: The first day dealt with a general overview of trends in safety, some from reemphasis on existing rules usually caused by same change (accidents) or by new rules created to meet some new dynamics such as September 11, 2001.

Security was discussed suggesting all railroads should be more vigilant about trespasser on their properties especially around hazard material handling facilities.

The operation lifesaver discussion was canceled due to illness on the part of the presenter.

So, Brad Hess, head track inspector for region 7, discussed the roadway worker protection and maintenance of way rules. This discussion centered around new rules for track maintenance machinery (tamperers, regulators, tie inserters, etc) primarily for machines built after 1991 that must provide sufficient seats for all riders with the exception or motor cars that do not exceed 7500 pounds. This means that machines built new must have this equipment and if built after 1991 must be retrofitted. Machines with windows must have safety glazing, turntable safety restraints.

Hi-railers must now have annual inspections of their high rail equipment and all hi-railers must now be equipped with back up alarm, gumball warning device and tow bar when towing push cars (no chains). All defects made in writing must be repaired 30 days and report made out no more that 7 days after the incident. All reports must be retained for one year.

Next up, locomotive engineer certification. The big discussion here was decertification of engineers. I don't know why they put so much emphasis on this subject but they did. The presenter wanted everyone to know the Designated Supervisor Locomotive Engineer (DSLE) can be decertified as well as engineers, pilots and instructors mostly for incompetence including failures to obey stop signals, passing red flags, failing efficiency tests, fast running, improper air tests and tampering with alerters.

Random drug testing for engineers and crewman were also discussed which only affects railroads with 16 or more employees and really didn't affect most of the shortlines in the room.

The chief inspector for the southern California, Allisa Dwiggins, gave the accident reporting portion of the seminary. All shortlines in the US regulated by the FRA must file a month accident report. New regulations were discussed meaning new types of accident incidents must be reported. Every year more and more data must be reported to the FRA. It is an on going method to create an accurate database in order to find or refine areas where safety can be tightened. It is a royal pain for most railroads since each small incident must be reported on different forms, all of which must be notarized.

The last session of the day was presented by George Hardy. Drug and Alcohol. It was presented out of order, as were most of the topics for the

day. George explained the incident and random drug kits and their use. All railroads regulated by the FRA must have these kits on hand. Railroads with 15 or less employees must have them on hand in the event of a reportable accident where a urine sample is required. Cheating on random sampling was discussed. It was noted various methods to insure that no cheating can occur during the random donation process. All were encouraged to open up a kit and become familiar with its contents.

The day closed out on time with notification that we were all to meet at the 6th street yard at 8 AM for field classes. Previous signups helped to determine the number of people in each class.

Day 2: The second day began sharply at 8 AM. I had signed up for the track classes in the morning and locomotive and railcar inspection in the PM.

Some of the track information was a repeat of previous years but there is always something new. Seeing the track inspectors for the FRA arguing with the chief track inspector of the region over rule interpretation was a kick. They debated over the interpretation of CFR 49 concerning turnout tolerances for spring frogs and whether all or part of a turnout must be maintained when the switch points are spiked out of service. The correct interpretation by the chief inspector is the entire switch must be maintained.

We measured a curve for consistency in the flow and came up with the average degree of the curve. We also checked cross-level and measured for gage. Tie condition was also discussed as well as the parameters for various classes of track and speed.

We had approximately 2 hours for lunch from twelve to two PM. I was invited to inspect the Red Car barn and the Red Cars during this time. The Red Car line is a recreation of the Pacific Electric Railroad in southern California in a much shorter version. The tracks are industrial trackage operated primarily by Pacific Harbor Lines but with overhead catenary. It runs approximately 1.5 miles from near 6th street in San Pedro to an area near the Port of Call mall. The amazing thing is the red cars they use. One is an original PE electric streetcar while the others are faithful reproductions. These two cars are some of the best replications I have ever seen. The Red Cars are owned by the Port of Los Angeles and operated by Herzog Corporation. More on how the operated later in the report.

The afternoon field session started promptly at 2 PM. If anything the feds are punctual.

This session started with locomotive inspections, first on the ground and then the cab. Both inspectors were very knowledgeable and I enjoyed talking with them about various inspection challenges. Both are former SP locomotive maintenance employees.

Next came car inspection. Once again I enjoyed talking with the inspector who was somewhat traditional in his interpretation of the rules but that's okay.

We quit early at 4:15 PM so we could prepare for a boat trip around Terminal Island.

Day 3: Once again we assembled at 8 AM. This morning's academic session at the hotel started with the one subject that most of us hated, that being hazard materials. Since it didn't apply to the people I represent, I listened but took no notes.

After the mid morning break, Motive Power and Equipment along with updates to the power brake law was on deck. This was interesting to me as it always is. However, for the most part, the new power brake laws apply to trunk carriers and not to shortlines so I took no notes of this either. The amount of time spent on motive power and equipment was very small with the primary emphasis being on the power brake law changes.

Since George Hardy was rushing, for some reason, to get on with the final session, they rushed into bridge inspection, a very interesting subject for me.

Bridge regulations are somewhat vague and advisory at this point. Restraint devices are required when working over the side of a bridge but bridge audits are still in the embryo stage. The FRA is requesting shortlines to submit themselves to volunteer inspection in order to assemble data to create new rules to force them into compliance. There are some good points to the approach and some bad points.

Finally, signals were discussed mostly automatic warning devices. The talk was heavily weighed in the favor of flagging incase of warning device failures and flagging for track being repaired. The rules are somewhat confusion and since most shortlines don't have flagman for work areas but instead receive track and time or lockout the work areas with derails, this rules were not particularly interesting to me. I was mostly interested in any changes in flagging for crossings without automatic devices or crossings where they had failed. Nothing-new here.

The seminar ended with few in the room and early, about 12 PM. I was once again invited to ride on the Red Car Line and did so at about 2:30 PM. The two replicas ran in tandem and operated perfectly. Even sounded like a P.E. streetcar, with the proper peanut whistle, cong bell and that wonderful winding sound of the traction motors.

Conclusion: The biggest value in attending the seminary always is the regulators you meet and the shortline people you run into each year. It reminds me that we are all in the same boat of problems. The downside continues to be the overly general nature of the curriculum offered. Too much broad, unuseful and inapplicable information is offered. They need to focus the curriculum on the audience at hand and forget about many rules that only apply to mainline railroads is overlooked. Moreover, they need to break the presentation down to smaller groups, such as shortlines that don't handle hazard materials, have no new locomotives, no new track maintenance machinery, don't have over 16 employees for drug testing purposes and etc. This would allow for a richer and a more in depth discussion over the issues and challenges facing shortline operators.

End of Report.