



SAFETY BULLETIN

2023-01

SUBJECT: Switching Operation Accident

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is investigating a recent switching accident that resulted in a crewmember leg amputation. Based on FRA's preliminary investigation, a three-member local switch crew was in the process of switching loaded and unloaded tank cars to assemble an outbound train. It was dark and raining. The crew was handling cars from yard tracks and kicking them into an adjacent siding where the outbound train was being assembled. One of the crewmembers was positioned between a yard track and the siding. He was alternating between operating the uncoupling lever on cars located in the yard tracks and lacing air hoses in the siding. While in the process of lacing air hoses, a cut of kicked cars coupled into the stationary cars in the siding. This coupling caused movement of the stationary cars resulting in the crewmember's leg being amputated.

Although FRA's investigation into this accident is ongoing, FRA notes the importance of the following factors to ensure switching operations are conducted safely:

- Proper training, periodic oversight, and application of appropriate railroad operating rules when fouling equipment.
- Proper job briefings and communications between assigned crewmembers during switching operations. All crewmembers must have the same understanding of the switching moves.
- Maintenance of situational awareness; always be prepared for unexpected movement when fouling equipment.

The purpose of this Safety Bulletin, which is informal in nature, is to ensure the railroad industry, including railroad employees, are aware of this recent accident that resulted in a serious injury to an employee and to recommend that railroads brief their employees about the circumstances of the accident. As FRA completes its investigation, it may take additional actions with respect to this accident.

FRA requests that railroads review this Safety Bulletin with employees to increase awareness of the hazards relating to switching cars and the role that operating rules, job briefings, communications and situational awareness plays when fouling equipment. FRA also reminds railroads of the need to ensure all individuals involved in switching operations are properly trained and qualified on how to conduct those operations safely. Additionally, FRA reminds railroads and train crew members of the work of the Switching Operations Fatality Analysis (SOFA) Working Group, a voluntary, non-regulatory workplace-safety partnership formed to identify commonalities among fatalities that occur during switching operations. SOFA findings are available on FRA's website at <https://railroads.dot.gov/railroad-safety/divisions/partnerships-programs/switching-operations-fatalities-analysis-sofa>.

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