

SAFETY BULLETIN

2023-06

SUBJECT: Employee Amputation – Flat Switching, Kicking Operations and Securement

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is investigating a switching accident that resulted in the amputation of a crew member's leg. On September 1, 2023, a switching crew, comprised of a locomotive engineer and conductor, was preparing to service an industry. The crew lined their 12-car train towards a storage track and "kicked" one empty hopper car onto that track. The track already had secured cars situated about 500 feet away from the location where the car was kicked. The crew then pulled out of the storage track to service the industry, and the conductor realigned the switch for the industry track to spot 3 of the remaining 11 cars. As the train started moving onto the industry track, the conductor riding point to protect the shove move noticed the empty hopper car they had previously "kicked" rolling back towards them. After instructing the engineer to stop the train, via radio, the conductor dismounted and rushed towards the hopper car. In his attempt to apply the car's handbrake, the conductor fell in the gauge of the rail where the car ran over the lower part of his body, resulting in the amputation of his left leg and severe injury to the other. The conductor had less than 2 years of railroad experience.

The purpose of this Safety Bulletin, which is informal in nature, is to ensure the railroad industry is aware of this recent accident. Although FRA's investigation into this accident is ongoing, FRA reminds railroads of the importance of ensuring switching operations are conducted safely, including ensuring:

1. Operating rules and protocols adequately address hazards associated with "kicking" cars;
2. Employees receive adequate field training to enable them to recognize risks associated with improperly secured "kicked" cars and understand proper procedures for responding to a rolling car, mounting equipment, and applying handbrakes safely; and
3. All employees are reminded of the importance of proper securement protocols for unattended equipment, highlighting the risks linked to unintended movements of unsecured equipment.

FRA also reminds railroads of the recommendations made in FRA Safety Advisory 2013-03. In that Safety Advisory, FRA recommended that railroads:

Evaluate locations where flat switching operations are conducted and identify those where the physical characteristics and the types of cars being switched heighten the possibility that cars will roll out toward the employees conducting such operations. After identifying such locations, FRA recommends that railroads adopt procedures requiring that cars be shoved into couplings rather than kicked during such operations to lessen the potential safety risks, particularly when employees have to go between equipment.

In that same Safety Advisory, FRA also recommended that consistent with SOFA Recommendation # 1, railroads discuss with their employees the "need to ensure that equipment not attached to [a] locomotive is stopped, and is secured with handbrakes when necessary, before employees go between rolling equipment."



FRA requests that railroads review this Safety Bulletin with all employees. As FRA completes its investigation, it may take additional actions with respect to this accident.

FRA Safety Advisory 2013-03 is available on FRA's website:

<https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/kicking-cars-and-going-between-rolling-equipment-during-flat-switching-operations>

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