

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

DOCKET NO. OSHA–2021-0009:
HEAT INJURY AND ILLNESS PREVENTION IN OUTDOOR AND INDOOR WORK
SETTINGS

SUPPLEMENTAL COMMENTS OF
THE AMERICAN SHORT LINE AND REGIONAL RAILROAD ASSOCIATION

The American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (“ASLRRA”) on behalf of itself and its member railroads, submits the following comments in Docket No. OSHA-2021-009, addressing heat-related injuries and illnesses, regarding the Small Business Advocacy Review (SBAR) Panel materials. ASLRRA is a nonprofit trade association representing the entrepreneurial owners and operators of short line and regional railroads throughout North America. Short line freight is a critical part of the U.S. freight network. The nation’s approximately 600 short line carriers provide the first and last mile service for one in every five cars moving each year. Operating nearly 50,000 track miles, or 30% of freight rail in the U.S., they play a vital role in the transportation network. ASLRRA submitted comments jointly with the Association of American Railroads and the American Public Transportation Association in response to the Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on January 26, 2022.¹

The rail industry’s primary safety regulator, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), regulates heat-related safety considerations of railroad operations in a number of different contexts. For example, FRA’s regulations at 49 C.F.R. Part 229 address heat-related considerations for train crews, railroad mechanical employees, and any other railroad employees

¹ 86 Fed. Reg. 59,309 (Oct. 27, 2021)

that might occupy locomotive cabs. Section 219.119 requires that any new or remanufactured locomotives placed in service after 2012 be equipped with air conditioning units that must be regularly inspected and maintained. Upon the express authority of Congress (49 U.S.C. § 21106), FRA also regulates temperature-related considerations for the occupants of camp cars² (typically used by railroad maintenance of way or signal employees). Section 228.313 addresses air conditioning, ventilation, and heating requirements for camp cars, and Part 228 specifically defines the relevant temperatures (68- and 75-degrees Fahrenheit) camp cars must be capable of maintaining during both hot and cold weather situations. Further, FRA’s regulation at 49 C.F.R. § 214.505 requires that certain roadway maintenance machines, most often operated by railroad roadway workers (maintenance of way employees), be equipped with operative air conditioning and ventilation systems.

FRA’s regulations also comprehensively address various hot and cold-weather related infrastructure and equipment concerns that relate to the safety of railroad operations. For example, in the area of railroad industry infrastructure (*see, e.g.*, 49 C.F.R. § 213.119), FRA regulations govern the temperature ranges for continuous welded rail (railroad track). FRA regulations also govern railroad rolling equipment-related safety considerations such as the operation of train air brakes in varying temperatures (*see, e.g.*, 49 C.F.R. § 232.107 addressing train air brake requirements and “cold weather operations”). While these are not specific workplace heat exposure safety rules, they illustrate that FRA concerns itself with, and has taken regulatory actions related to, the safe operation of railroads in varying weather conditions, including hot weather operations.

² A trailer and/or on-track vehicle, including an outfit, camp, bunk car, or modular home mounted on a flatcar, or any other mobile vehicle or mobile structure used to house or accommodate an employee of maintenance of way (MOW) worker. *See* 49 C.F.R. §228.5.

Relatedly, unlike many other industries, railroads do not report most accidents, injuries, illnesses, or deaths that occur in the conduct of railroad operations to OSHA. Rather, railroads report such occurrences to FRA under that agency's extensive accident and casualty reporting regulations. *See* 49 C.F.R. Part 225. In that respect, FRA has long collected railroad industry heat illness/injury data. FRA has established specific injury reporting codes for heat-related illnesses as listed in FRA's "Guide for Preparing Accident/Incident Reports".³

FRA safety data indicates that heat-related illnesses have not been an issue in the railroad industry. For example, in 2020, there were only 25 heat-related illness/injury reports across the entire railroad industry. In context, there are nearly 200,000 railroad employees nationwide, and in 2020 the heat-related injury rate for those employees was less than 0.015 injuries per 200,000 railroad employee hours worked.⁴ Additionally, FRA data for 2021 indicates only ten potential heat-related illnesses/injuries across the entire railroad industry. A review of FRA's safety data also indicates that in the last 25 years, only a single railroad employee fatality report cites heat as a potential cause.⁵

In sum, the railroads have been successfully and safely conducting operations in extreme hot and cold climates in this country for over 150 years. FRA has long collected heat-related injury/illness data for railroad employees and has carefully evaluated the concerns raised in OSHA's ANPRM in many contexts. Applying its industry-specific expertise, FRA has implemented climate-related safety regulations that affect a wide variety of railroad occupations

³ *See* <https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/fra-guide-preparing-accidentincident-reports-0>.

⁴ *See* <https://safetydata.fra.dot.gov/OfficeofSafety/Default.aspx>.

⁵ Given the FRA railroad safety data described above, it is not surprising that railroads are not mentioned in the extensive ANPRM discussions. OSHA notes that most heat-related fatalities occur at very small businesses (under 10 employees). Virtually all railroad employees in this country work for much larger employers who have established procedures to ensure the safety of their employees in varying climates.

and infrastructure/rolling equipment standards. The safety regulation of railroad operations in various weather and climates is a field long occupied by FRA. Pursuant to longstanding jurisdictional precedents governing the federal safety regulation of railroad operations,

A representative from Farmrail System, Inc, participated in the SBAR Panel on September 13, 2023. As shared during the discussion, FRA safety data shows that there have only been two heat related injuries on short line railroads in the last five years.⁶ Given the extensive existing FRA regulations, OSHA should exclude railroad operations from this proceeding and instead permit FRA to continue to regulate temperature- and weather- related safety considerations unique to railroad operations and occupations. *See, e.g.*, 1978 FRA & OSHA Policy Statement at 43 Fed. Reg. 10,583 (Mar. 14, 1978).

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Respectfully submitted,



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⁶ *See* <https://safetydata.fra.dot.gov/OfficeofSafety/Default.aspx>.