



Inside **THE** RAIL

From NASA's Confidential Close Call Reporting System



ISSUE 12

APRIL 2021

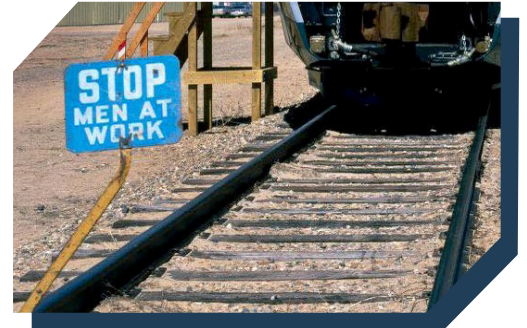
BLUE MEANS STOP!

The color red is universally known as stop. In railroad operations; however, blue holds a uniquely similar and important role. In any rail yard, maintenance facility and even on the main line; blue flags aren't just a stop sign, they are a stop sign protecting workers. Generations of railroaders know the significance of the blue flag and countless lives have been saved because of Blue Flag Protection.

One of the earliest known uses of Blue Flag Protection in the United States was by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. Rule 349 in the book of Rules and Regulations dated July 8th, 1874 said, "When making repairs to Cars standing on Main Track or Sidings, they must protect themselves by placing a Blue Flag in the Drawhead, or a Blue Lantern on the Platform or Step of the Car at each end of the Train, to prevent the Cars from being coupled to, or moved by an Engine or other Cars."

Today, Blue Flag Protection as stated in 49 CFR Part 218, Subpart B, § 218.21, "prescribes minimum requirements for the protection of railroad employees engaged in the inspection, testing, repair, and servicing of rolling equipment whose activities require them to work on, under, or between such equipment and subjects them to the danger of personal injury posed by any movement of such equipment." Blue flags can be clipped onto or between rail, onto locomotives (even on the control stand), or anywhere it is necessary to prevent movement of equipment where workers could be performing duties.

As important as observing a blue flag is, proper communication is also vital to crews working with Blue Flag Protection. Dispatchers, managers, carmen, traincrews, and all other employees need to communicate with each other to make sure blue flags are properly and accurately displayed and removed.



Bright Blue

A Conductor coupled into cars under Blue Flag Protection.

■ *It was a yard switching move. The Engineer was in the engine shoving two multiple unit cars. I was on leading end of move...I was given permission by the shop Foreman to enter his track and pick up two cars. After coupling on to the two cars to be taken from the Track, it was discovered a blue light was lit on the two cars. The headlight was on the west end of the two cars on the Track, which in retrospect, is a contributing factor to not seeing the blue light illuminated.*

Once in a Blue Moon

A Dispatcher did not apply Blue Flag Protection on all tracks requested.

■ *A Foreman requested Blue Flag Protection for multiple Tracks in the yard from myself. Protection was confirmed for all tracks. The incoming Dispatcher discovered that protection was not provided on Track X. The problem was corrected and no injury or work flow disruption was reported.*

C³RS Expert Analyst's Callback Summary:

The reporter, a Dispatcher, stated that one of the tracks which needed Blue Flag Protection splits off into two different

directions within the yard. The Dispatcher explained that they did not normally work this desk so the track configuration was not noticed, and thus not properly protected until the incoming Dispatcher came in for transfer. Upon realizing that a portion of the track was not protected, the reporter immediately applied the protection and no other issues arose from the incident.

Blue Right Past It

An Engineer hit the clamp to a Blue Flag applied on an adjacent track.

■ *Train received permission to enter the yard via Yardmaster. The Brakeman keyed the gates down and lined us into Track X. Upon reaching the switch that takes you to Track Y or Track X, I noticed a Blue Flag clamp, which was clamped on to the rail on Track Y. On Track Y, there was an engine on the east end and six cars. As I took the switch, I started noticing the Blue Flag clamp was a bit too close to my track, Track X. I applied some brake to slow down a bit to observe the flag, and noticed it was fouling my track by a bit.*

When I saw that, it was too late to add more brake. I hit the Blue Flag clamp from Track Y, while entering Track X... I stopped by the engine as I saw Mechanical Personnel on

the engine and told him of what happened. He responded, "It's not my Blue Flag," so I continued moving the train on Track X, and tied up the train... I believe that the Blue Flag clamp should have been placed more west on Track Y, and the person that placed the Blue Flag should be more aware of where he clamps it, to make sure he's not fouling any track.

C³RS Expert Analyst's Callback Summary:

The reporter, an Engineer, explained the Blue Flag was not applied on their track. The clamp for the Blue Flag on the adjacent track was tilting too close because it was applied beyond the clearance point... The movement was made at 1 MPH to 2 MPH and braking was applied when the train hit the clamp, knocking it off the rail, but not causing any damage. When the reporter went back to put the Blue Flag back up, it had an ID tag on it for an employee cleaning the equipment, but the reporter didn't see them working.

Into the Blue

A Conductor performed switching operations in a track with Blue Flag Protection.

■ We had finished our move on Track X and were going over to Track Y. The Yardmaster told us the blue flags were down on Track Y... Another crew called the Yardmaster asking for a line up into the other end of Track Y. They were told by the Yardmaster there was a blue flag on Track Y. I confirmed this with the Yardmaster. The flag was dropped, and we finished our move. We couldn't see the blue flag because of the curve on the track. Yardmasters often tell crews flags are down in an attempt to expedite the moves in the yard. They also have a screen that tells them if a flag is displayed. This situation needs to be addressed and corrected.

A Bolt from the Blue

An Engineer tied on to equipment under Blue Flag Protection.

■ ... The Conductor was informed to cut the lead engine off and move it over to the train next to us, on the next track, and tie on... The Mechanical Department had to remove the blue flag on the train next to us, and they thought it would be faster if they cut the 480 Volt cables and related hoses from between the locomotives. Who was I to argue? I set the locomotive over, tied on, stretched twice, and applied the handbrake. After we were finally finished, we discovered that the 480 Volt power cables were still attached to the train we tied onto, and it was still blue flagged on the other end of the train. The Mechanical Department was advised by me that once the flag is removed from one end of the train, then it's

not blue flag protected anymore. They didn't see it that way, they are also asking why we didn't ask if the 480 cables had been removed and all blue flags removed. I could see that saying less was more at this point and tied up. The cause of this was the Mechanical Department not understanding blue flag rules & regulations.

Out of the Blue

A Carman dropped Blue Flag Protection before all personnel were clear on a track in the yard.

■ Blue flags were up on Track and Locomotive. My co-worker dropped the north end without checking or hearing from me to do so. We still had a blue flag up for the Electrician. I called the train crew on Track to stop the train, because of the blue flag violation. The train was stopped, no one was hurt, and the flags were removed from the locomotive, and continued its day to revenue service.

A second Carman on the crew that dropped the flags also submitted a report explaining the close call incident.

■ After testing the Locomotive on Track, I received a call stating, "they were all clear." At the time I thought the person talking was my Partner, but I later learned it was an Electrician. After getting that all clear message, I began to remove all blue flags from my end of the train. The Engineer began to pull off. After the train rolled about 5 feet the other Carman called and had the train stop. After a couple seconds, the train was released and rolled away. I later learned the reason the train was asked to stop, was because there was still a personal protection tag on the train as he was just getting off the train at that time. I believe this occurred due to miscommunication...

Did You Know?

If you submit a C³RS report, a NASA C³RS Expert Analyst may call you if you do not include enough information or to better understand the safety issues you are sharing. It is very important that you return our call within 3 days so that your identification (ID) strip (sent by the U.S. Mail) can be returned to you quickly.

The more information you include in your report, the faster the ID strip can be returned to you!

Report Intake By Craft January through March 2021	
Transportation	560
Engineering	29
Mechanical	20

C³RS
Inside The Rail

Issue 12
April 2021

<https://c3rs.arc.nasa.gov>

Monthly Report Intake Previous 3 Months	
January	186
February	203
March	213