



Inside **THE** RAIL

From NASA's Confidential Close Call Reporting System



ISSUE 32

APRIL 2026

The Yardmaster Chronicles: *Close Calls and Course Corrections*

Every day, long before a train ever rolls out of the yard, one role is already orchestrating the movement of hundreds of rail cars with precision and safety. Yardmasters are the traffic controllers of America's train yards and so much more. They use advanced computer systems to build train consists while ensuring every detail aligns with federal regulations and company policies.

Yardmasters issue the essential Track Bulletins and paperwork Train Crews rely on, and they prepare switch lists for Yard Crews. These switch lists map out exactly which cars belong on which tracks based on classification and destination. This process ultimately determines how outbound trains are built and how cars move efficiently through the system.

They also work directly with customers to ensure freight needs are met, and in some locations, they are responsible for ordering Train Crews and arranging taxi services. Coordination with Dispatchers is constant, ensuring trains move safely and on time through their territory. Simply put, Yardmasters are key to keeping the railroad running safely, efficiently, and smoothly. In this issue, we'll take a closer look at C³RS reports submitted by Yardmasters and what we can learn from them.



Wrong Track Number, Wrong Cars, Big Catch

It was supposed to be a straightforward move, repaired cars out for service, but a track number mix-up sent this Yardmaster's day in an unexpected direction.

■ *I gave the Switching Crew directions to move repaired cars from the repair facility to the yard for service. I unintentionally gave the Crew the wrong track numbers causing them to pick up unrepaired cars and the cars were placed on a revenue passenger train for service. The mistake was caught later in the day, and the cars were removed from service.*

C³RS Expert Analyst's Callback Summary:

The reporter, a Yardmaster, stated the wrong passenger cars were placed on the train because of an incorrect track list. The track lists are sent by Mechanical Department Managers and are manually written, and not always consistent. The cars were listed out of order on the list the Yardmaster gave the Switch Crew. The reporter stated that newer Yardmasters don't always pay close attention to the lists, and the reporter received a bad turnover. The reporter added there are not digital car information readers entering the yard, so there is no way to verify track lists. The Mechanical Department

requested a pair of cars to be spotted for repair. That's when it was discovered the cars were in a train. The reporter also stated that a better system other than manual writing lists would prevent events like this.

Clear Track Missing Wire

What started as a Conductor's simple request to spot equipment, quickly shifted off script when a track choice and a missing catenary wire collided.

■ *A Conductor asked for permission to set equipment on Track X to connect the Engine. I advised the Conductor, I could not do that since I had other Crews to move. He could place the equipment on Track Y and connect to the engine there. The Conductor asked if he could make the move on Track Z. He would fit and be in the clear. I agreed to the move and forgot the pantograph wire had been removed from Track Z off the Shop. The Conductor proceeded to make the move coming off the wire and flipping the pantograph. During this time, I was attempting to move another Crew and issue Blue Signal Protection to Mechanical Forces.*

C³RS Expert Analyst's Callback Summary:

The reporter, a Yardmaster, stated that it was a very busy shift with multiple issues in the yard. The reporter explained

that this situation has been a trap for about a year now, and the carrier could easily put up a "Dummy Wire" to solve the issue, but they have refused. The reporter further explained that the workload at the yard has been exorbitant lately because of staffing issues, resulting in everyone working too fast to keep up. It was noted that the reporter informs Crews to slow down and work safely. The reporter will follow the same advice as well.

Hand Brake Hide and Seek

One missed Yardmaster's handoff. One misunderstood procedure. One cut of cars rolling free.

■ *A Yard Job entered the yard. I instructed them to tie hand brakes on the north end of Track X, which was correct per the Timetable Instructions... Then, they doubled over and departed the Yard. That track stayed until second shift, where I failed to tell the Supervisor that the hand brakes were on the north end of the cut, rather than on the south end, per the Standard Operating Procedures of switching practices...*

C³RS Expert Analyst's Callback Summary:

The reporter, a Yardmaster, stated the Timetable rules were followed when he instructed a Yard Crew to tie the hand brakes on the north end of the yard. The Yardmaster explained that the main issue of the event was that he did not inform the incoming Yardmaster of the change in the Standard Operating Procedures which states that hand brakes on trains on the track in question should be applied to the south end. Therefore, when the incoming Yardmaster instructed another Crew to move the train, they disengaged the brakes on the north end of the train because they did not know that the brakes on the south end had not been applied. After the Crew disengaged the brakes, the train began to roll, and it traversed three crossings in the yard and ran through multiple switches. The Yardmaster noted that there was minor damage to the switches and they were repaired the same day.

Two Trains, One Track

A moment of a Trainee's inexperience met a moment of high stakes when two opposing trains were headed to the same track.

■ *Yardmaster Trainee gave Crew X permission east out of Yard X after giving permission to Crew Y west into Yard X.*

C³RS Expert Analyst's Callback Summary:

The reporter, a Yardmaster, stated that the incident occurred while training a new Yardmaster. The reporter explained

that the Yardmaster Trainee had inadvertently granted permission for two opposing trains to proceed toward the same signal simultaneously. The reporter added that the Yardmaster Trainee had not confirmed that the first train had reported clear. Upon hearing the verbal authorization, the reporter immediately stopped both trains and took the opportunity to explain the critical error to the Yardmaster Trainee, emphasizing the potential consequences of such a mistake. The reporter noted that the yard operation at this location is complex, as it involves managing two separate yards, one controlled by signal indication and yard-controlled switches, while the other requires Train Crews to manually line switches and receive verbal permission. Moving forward, the reporter intends to conduct more extensive and in-depth Job Safety Briefings on managing both yards before allowing a Yardmaster Trainee to issue instructions or permissions to Train Crews.

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MOBILE FRIENDLY REPORTING

when you submit a C³RS report, a NASA C³RS Expert Analyst may call you to get more information or to better understand the safety issues you are sharing. It is very important that you return our call as soon as possible so that your identification (ID) strip (sent by the U.S. Mail) can be returned to you quickly.

The incoming call on your phone will not say NASA, but will be from area code 650 or 217. Remember, the more information you include in your report, the faster the ID strip can be returned to you!

Inside THE RAIL

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Report Intake By Craft January through March 2026	
Transportation	1,070
Engineering	46
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C ³ RS Inside The Rail
Issue 32 April 2026
https://c3rs.arc.nasa.gov

Monthly Report Intake Previous 3 Months	
January	359
February	375
March	415