



Inside **THE** RAIL

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Carmen at Work: Close Calls and Safety Lessons

Behind every safe and efficient railcar journey is the skilled work of a Carman. These professionals play a vital role in inspecting, repairing, and maintaining railcars, ensuring they meet strict industry standards, company requirements, and federal regulations.

From hand and power tools to advanced welding and cutting gear, Carmen apply technical expertise with precision. They also operate heavy machinery such as forklifts, cranes, tractors, and specialized repair equipment, making versatility a key part of the job.

As the transportation industry evolves, so does the role of the Carman. Today's workforce must be highly skilled, with hands-on training and the ability to troubleshoot modern computerized systems and components. In addition to repairing equipment, Carmen also work on trains conducting federally required air brake tests and inspections. This requires them to receive assignments from Yardmasters and Train Dispatchers.

The work environment is just as dynamic as the role itself. Whether in a Mechanical Shop or out in rail yards and on active lines, Carmen must be prepared to work in all weather conditions. With shift work often including nights, weekends, and holidays, flexibility and dedication are essential. In this issue, we'll revisit close calls reported by Carmen that could have ended differently, and what they teach us about never leaving safety to chance.

Half a Car Too Far

It started as a routine inspection, another early morning in the yard where everything looked in place. But it didn't take long for this Carman's sense of normalcy to reveal something wasn't right.

■ *I, the Carman, was working Track X and Track Y in Yard X at approximately XA:00 AM when I noticed one of the tracks I was working (Track Y, Yard X) was in the foul on the east end. The track was over the clearance marker cone by about half of a freight car. The clearance markers are there to help prevent collisions of rail cars when being pulled out or shoved into. To inspect a track that is in the foul is considered a violation in our department. When starting the inspection on the track, I was unaware of it being in the foul but noticed it later on. In the future, I will do a better job of checking before starting my inspections.*

C³RS Expert Analyst's Callback Summary:

The reporter, a Carman, stated the cars on the two tracks looked like they were behind the clearance marker when the reporter pulled up in the company vehicle. The reporter noted the marker was partially blocked or covered with snow. The reporter walked one side of the adjacent track and then came back between the two tracks. That is when the cars

in Track Y were observed to be in the foul by approximately 15 feet. The reporter finished the inspection and removed the blue lights and switch locks on the tracks. At that time, the Conductor for the Yard Crew came over and shoved the cars back behind the clearance marker. The reporter had a Job Safety Briefing with the Conductor, who admitted to leaving the cars in the foul but did not have time to shove them back before the reporter arrived and established Blue Signal Protection.

Spec vs. Schedule: A Tight Window Decision

Ninety minutes on the clock, a train ready to roll, and a wheel that didn't quite measure up. This Carman's inspection quickly turned into a test of judgment and growing pressure to see something that wasn't there.

■ *Train A arrived in the yard for inspection. While doing the exterior inspection, I found a federal defect wheel shelling. I measured it at three inches with no island. I reported this to the Mechanical Foreman on duty. He agreed and reported it to the Manager on duty with pictures. The Manager said that he saw islands and to have me remeasure them. I found no islands that were flush with the tread of the wheel. I reported*

the same to the Mechanical Foreman and Manager. I was told to measure it again with the island that the Manager saw. I felt forced to comply. This equipment was the first to leave the yard. There were only 90 minutes from arrival to departure and no time to have a move/repair done at that time.

C³RS Expert Analyst’s Callback Summary:

The reporter, a Carman, stated all rules and guidelines were followed while taking measurements and inspecting the equipment. The reporter explained that there was no other equipment in the yard for the outbound train and Repair Crews were several hours away. The reporter felt there was pressure to make sure the equipment could be operated since there was no other equipment available. The reporter noted that the Mechanical Foreman did verify all measurements in person and the Manager only had access to the pictures being sent. The reporter stated all measurements were documented properly and the equipment departed on time with no issues.

Assumed Secure, Proven Otherwise

Before this Carman began an inspection, Blue Signal Protection was set up and in place. However, it quickly turned into a hard lesson in how gravity doesn’t wait but luckily enough, the impact did not cause any damage.

■ I was assigned to test a train on Track X. I prepared blue lights on the track. There was a locomotive in the front, a Multiple Unit Train in the back. The locomotive parking brake was not on when the Road Crew left the equipment. The Electrician charged up the locomotive, and I removed the parking brake. The train rolled two feet back and we had no chance to put the train in emergency in time. The equipment collided. We then immediately called the Foreman and Manager.

C³RS Expert Analyst’s Callback Summary:

The reporter, a Carman, started setting up Blue Signal Protection in the cab car of Train A and told the Electrician who was on the diesel locomotive at the other end of Train A it was OK to perform the Cab Signal and Positive Train Control tests. The Electrician then put the train in release. The reporter released the hand brake on the cab car to take standing power. The reporter then got off the equipment and went to Train B which was standing about three feet behind Train A to set up Blue Signal Protection. After doing so, the reporter got off Train B and was standing on the ground when Train A rolled back striking Train B. The reporter called the Electrician on the radio to stop but it was too late. Supervision was immediately notified. The reporter now communicates with the Electrician step by step what

actions are happening between them. The reporter stated the Electrician should have checked to ensure that the hand brake was applied. The reporter feels there are time limits to ensure that the equipment is ready in time to be dispatched.

One Lock Short of Safe

This Carman and co-worker established Blue Signal Protection on a track rarely used by mechanical employees. To their surprise, a locomotive was placed on the track while work was being completed.

■ A Co-worker and I were working on Track X. While my Co-worker was locking out for Blue Signal Protection. We thought that we had all switches locked and lined properly, but we mistakenly forgot to lock out Track Y, which goes into Track Z that needs to be locked to work Track X properly. Prior to working Track X, we asked the Foreman to come and make sure we had everything locked out correctly. The Foreman said he was busy and wasn’t able to come and double-check to make sure we had it locked out properly.

C³RS Expert Analyst’s Callback Summary:

The reporter, a Carman, stated that a Job Safety Briefing was not conducted prior to setting up Blue Signal Protection. The Carman disclosed that this section of the yard is rarely used by Mechanical employees. The Carman was a little unfamiliar with the track layout when the switches were locked out. The Carman would like to see bi-annual training on Blue Signal Protection and locking out tracks. When working in an area of the yard that is unfamiliar, the Carman will ask and wait for assistance from the Foreman.

Did You Know?

NASA C³RS has mobile friendly report forms so you can submit your report from your mobile device! Also, 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!

Report Intake By Craft January through June 2026		C³RS Inside The Rail Issue 33 July 2026 https://c3rs.arc.nasa.gov	Monthly Report Intake Previous 3 Months	
Transportation	2,180		April	405
Engineering	113		May	405
Mechanical	97		June	419