



Inside THE RAIL

From NASA's Confidential Close Call Reporting System



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Close Clearances and Fouling the Right of Way

Railroad employees and contractors work in close proximity to moving equipment on the tracks on a daily basis. This can lead to a false sense of security since these movements can become second nature or routine. However, coming in contact with moving equipment can be very dangerous and could result in injuries or, on rare occasions, fatalities. Even the most experienced railroad workers can be caught by surprise in scenarios such as slow or switching moves that frequently change directions in a yard.

When employees or contractors are working on, near or around the tracks in any capacity, they should be alert and attentive to moving equipment at all times.

This issue of *Inside The Rail* shares reports of near-miss incidents or minor collisions from Engineers, Conductors, Machine Operators, and Brakemen encountering people, vehicles, obstructions, or machinery fouling tracks while moving trains.

Silence is Not Golden

These yard employees shared two perspectives on a minor collision with a small motorized vehicle. The ability of C³RS to capture and portray an event from multiple perspectives may provide more insight to the event than the view from any single lens.

From the Conductor's report:

■ *I needed to get an engine from Track X in the yard to spot the shop. There was a small motorized vehicle fouling, so I called the Foreman [an Electrician] to come out and move it in the clear. I grabbed 2 engines from Track X and cleared the switch, then headed in the opposite direction to spot one then drop the other on Track Y. After clearing the Track X switch to put the other 2 engines back, I started in the opposite direction with a 5 engine count to the hitch. The Foreman was still sitting in the small motorized vehicle in the clear. After one engine length, the Foreman didn't look and just pulled out in front of me at a half an engine length. I immediately said "stop, stop, stop" on the radio and then started screaming to the Foreman, [who] then turns and sees me and just freezes. We struck and pushed the small*



motorized vehicle off to the side after almost flipping it and almost pinning it between the train and light post.

From the Foreman (Electrician's) report:

■ *I had just finished inspecting [the] Engine and was walking back to the [small motorized] vehicle we were given to use in the yard (the size of a golf cart). This vehicle has no safety protection, no horn, no strobe lights, no flashers, no turn signal, and no rear view mirror. I saw the Conductor standing in the*

roadway about 25 feet from the [small motorized vehicle] and about 75 feet beyond, I saw an engine (not sure of the number) parked on Track X, no motion just beyond the switch. As I entered the [small motorized vehicle], I looked back and it was still parked, so I started the [small motorized vehicle] and started to move with caution, while looking back a second time. I saw the engine approaching to my surprise, so I tried to get out of the way but got side swept by the engine. By this time, the engine had stopped and the Engineer came out to see what took place due to operating from the second or third engine that was coupled to the first one. After explaining, we moved the [small motorized vehicle] out of the way and observed paint damage. The [small motorized vehicle] was parked in a safe spot between Track Y and Track X.

A Case of Inactive Duty

An Engineer reported that there was no Flagman on duty for Roadway Workers during a switching operation.

■ *While engaged in switching in yard, Contractor [and] Sub-Contractor repeatedly fouled yard tracks and main. At one point a man lift was driving down the main with no Flagman or protection while we were switching and the regular passenger train was in service. Roadway Protection Log indicated Flagman but none were on duty.*

One Track Mind on Two Tracks

A Machine Operator was called to clear up a track. The Machine Operator went back to work concentrating on completing the job and was focused on the task rather than the location of the Track Machine.

■ *I was operating a Track Machine on Track X, fouling Track Y with stop signs on Track Y. I was called to clear up of Track*

Y. I cleared up and went back to work in the clear on Track X, while they cleared up the rest of the gang. After a period of time went by, I forgot about the train coming and went back to work fouling Track Y. Then I heard the train coming and tried pulling the [machine] back but the train hit the [machine] as I was pulling it back. The train kept going and I was still able to put the machine in the clear. Then I called the Track Foreman.

C³RS Analyst's Callback Summary:

In a C³RS Expert Analyst callback, the Machine Operator said that two trains went down Track Y and only cleared up for one. It was the second one that hit the Track Machine. The reporter was unaware of a second train, so went back to work fouling Track Y. The reporter said there was some damage to the Engine but it kept going on its schedule. The Track Machine had damage to pistons.

Am I in the Clear?

While shoving a track, a Conductor noticed a track car may be fouling the track but continued instead of stopping the movement to verify that the track car was clear of the track.

From the Conductor's report:

■ We were shoving in a team track in a Yard. A track car was fouling track. As I approached the track car, I noticed it was close and I thought we could make it. While I was watching the move, I thought I saw the track car wobble. I stopped the move immediately to assess the situation. I determined there was not any damage to the track car or the train and I decided to make a reverse move to another track.

From the Brakeman's report:

■ While operating through an Interlocking, I moved to the front of the engine to observe signals and pass a hand sign to the Engineer Trainee because of difficulty seeing them due to the long nose being forward and curvature of track.

From the Assistant Conductor's report:

■ I was the Assistant Conductor on the assignment. I was working on a relief day for overtime. I was stationed at a switch for the runaround track and threw switch allowing our equipment to switch into the runaround. After the train cleared my switch points, I began to walk down to another switch towards the Track X switch. While walking the Conductor controlled the move of rail recovery cars into Track X. On radio I heard Conductor say "stop the move, stop the move". I then walked over to where the Conductor was positioned. The Conductor noticed a work vehicle was potentially fouling the track. The Conductor wasn't sure if

the train struck the vehicle. The Conductor asked me if the vehicle looked like it had any damage to it. A quick [visual] inspection on my part saw no visible damage. We then moved the cars to the track adjacent to that track and continued with our switching moves.

Out of Sight Strike

As with many close clearance scenarios, the safest way to protect the move is to have a crew member watching until the entire move has passed the close clearance area. This Engineer reflected on what could have been done differently and provides suggestions for improvement.

■ We were pulling into the yard to put our train away for the night. As we were pulling in, I noticed [an automobile] parked a little close to the track I was coming in on. This happens a lot, so as I came down to the [automobile], I watched to see if the engine was going to clear, which it did. I told my Conductor, on the rear of the train, to see how close the [automobile] was. When the rear of the train got to the [automobile], the Conductor had thought we had hit it. The mirror was pushed in towards the window and scratched, not broken. I told the Conductor I would go see if there was damage and tell the Dispatcher. I instead called the Supervisor on duty to report the incident. I then took pictures and went to the train to see that the equipment had in fact made contact with the [automobile]. The equipment was the second car from the engine, so I could not see if [we] had made contact or not while we were pulling in. There is no way for me to tell whether or not the train would hit that [automobile] until I actually hit it. More parking spaces should be dedicated to Crews that start out of the station or Trainmen should have parking passes to park at the station, while they are on duty. There should also be a line painted on the pavement designating where it is safe to park and where it is not. That way both the person parking their [automobile] and the Crew would know if the train would have hit the [automobile].

C³RS Analyst's Callback Summary:

During a callback with the C³RS expert analyst, the Engineer stated this it is a common occurrence for employees to park their cars near or around yard tracks. The reporter stated the headlight was on bright and the car was clearly visible, but the reporter misjudged the distance between the car and the track. The Engineer explained that since this situation is so prevalent, they have become desensitized to the hazard. Normally, the Conductor or Assistant Conductor would have been on the ground as the train passed to ensure the equipment would not touch the automobile.

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Transportation	2,398
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Engineering	42
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