



Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters

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Improving Track Maintenance is Key to Oil Train Safety

Track Related Defects are a Leading Cause of Train Accidents in U.S.

[WASHINGTON] “The key to reducing the frequency of oil train derailments plaguing North America is improved track maintenance,” says Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division President Freddie N. Simpson.

Track conditions are a leading cause of train derailments in the United States, accounting for approximately one-third of all train accidents, according to data published by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).

FRA statistics confirm 1,220 reportable train derailments occurred in 2014, resulting in nearly \$200 million in repair/replacement costs for damaged track and equipment alone, not including the cost to human lives, private property, and the environment. Of these derailments, a full 39 percent (475) were determined to be track caused.

Railroad companies solely determine the level of track maintenance they perform; FRA regulates maximum allowable train speed based upon those track conditions. “By every measure, track caused accidents are the most prevalent and the most preventable,” said Simpson. “Even discounting the large number of low speed accidents regularly occurring in rail yards, there were still 649 main line train accidents in the U.S. in 2014. Of these main line accidents, 329 were classified as derailments and an astounding 47 percent (155) of these were reported by the railroads themselves to be track caused.”

“Main line tracks crisscross the nation passing through thousands of cities, towns, and communities where we live,” said Simpson. “The key to reducing track caused derailments is maintaining the tracks to a higher safety standard. Unfortunately, the railroads’ own statistics speak for themselves and track caused derailments—including those involving highly volatile crude oil—continue to be a threat to the nation. We can significantly improve railroad safety by improving the quality of the track. The technology, the skilled workers, and the higher track standards already exist; this is not rocket science,” said Simpson.

Transporting crude oil on U.S. railroads grew from just 9,500 carloads in 2008 to more than 400,000 carloads in 2013. “The wear and tear on the track structure, coupled with the volatility of the commodities being transported, requires additional track maintenance

to stay ahead of the rate of track degradation,” said Simpson. “The railroad companies have been amassing record profits for years and we want them to continue to be exceptionally profitable. Safety and profitability go hand-in-hand.”

“BMWED has been actively pursuing common sense track safety improvements for years; however, the industry arrogantly claims they cannot afford to maintain the tracks to a higher safety standard,” said Simpson. “My question to the nation is, can we afford for them not to?”

BMWED is a railroad labor union representing approximately 35,000 hard-working men and women who build, inspect, maintain, and repair the tracks, bridges and related infrastructure on all Class I freight railroads, Amtrak, and a number of commuter and shortline railroads throughout the United States. BMWED was founded in 1887 and is a Division of the 1.4 million member International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

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