



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Railroad
Administration**

JAN 26 2010

Administrator

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Colleague:

Preliminary data indicates that 2009 may have been the safest year on record by many measures. This accomplishment is the result of the diligent and sustained efforts of rail labor, rail management, and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). I thank you and commend you for your role in this accomplishment.

The news is not uniformly good, however. Last year, 16 railroad employees were killed on the job. This tragic toll is more than just a number; it represents human lives: a father not there to walk his daughter down the aisle, a mother not there for her son's first day of school, an employee nearing retirement who did not live to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

As the new year begins, I'm asking each of you to use your time and talents to help eliminate railroad employee fatalities. In this world of instant communication and technology and information "overload," we need to maintain complete situational awareness. Keep your mind clear of distractions—keep cell phones and other devices turned off—and focus on the task at hand. The railroad environment is totally unforgiving and the slightest lapse could be tragic.

We need to think about rules compliance and consider its impact on ensuring a safe return home after each tour of duty. We must break down the barriers that keep us from achieving rules compliance, like taking a shortcut or yielding to pressure from a supervisor to unsafely expedite a move. We must take the time to ensure each rule is complied with, and mentor fellow coworkers. Remind them that it is all about going home safely, and if you are pressured by a supervisor to expedite a move by turning your back on the rules, report it. FRA will work diligently to ensure that the focus on rules compliance is consistent within each carrier's organization.

Having spent 19 years on the ground myself, I—like you—understand the realities of railroading. My stomach still turns in knots each time I hear of an on-duty fatality. Let us each do everything we can to take care of ourselves and our coworkers. Zero fatalities is the only acceptable number, and it's a number we can all live with.

Sincerely,

Joseph C. Szabo
Administrator