



FREIGHT RAIL EMPLOYEE SAFETY

Key Facts

- Grocery stores are a more dangerous workplace than freight railroads.
- Railroaders are encouraged to report safety issues.
- Drones, simulators, and remote-control locomotives help protect employees.
- Since 2005, Class I employee casualty rates have declined by 54%, reaching a record low in 2025.

From day one, railroads promote a strong, system-wide culture of safety—empowering employees to report concerns and adhere to rigorous operational protocols. This commitment is reinforced through ongoing investment in advanced training, modern technologies, and peer-driven safety programs that strengthen accountability at every level.

As a result, railroads remain among the safest sectors in the U.S. economy, consistently outperforming other modes of transportation as well as higher-risk industries such as agriculture, mining, and construction. Class I railroad injury rates are even lower than those in retail environments, including grocery and department stores. Since 2005, Class I employee casualty rates have declined by 54%, reaching a record low in 2025.

- The overall train accident rate down 14%
- Derailments down 13.6%
- Human factors-related incidents down 19.7%
- Equipment-caused accidents down 12.1%
- Track-caused accidents down 7.7%
- Mainline accidents down 2.8% industry-wide and 6.1% among Class I railroads

REPORTING IS AN IMPORTANT ACCIDENT PREVENTION TOOL.

Good faith reporting and accountability are critical pieces of railroad safety culture. This, combined with extensive training and the industry's highly skilled frontline employees, helped make and keep railroading an exceptionally safe place to work. Employee confidential reporting is an important tool to help prevent accidents. Recognizing the value, all Class I railroads have longstanding programs. These provide a protected avenue for reporting close calls or other incidents without fear of negative consequences.

Federal statute (49 USC §20109) prohibits retaliation against any employee of a railroad carrier. This applies if the intent is to discourage "reporting, in good faith, a hazardous safety or security condition." Federal regulations mirror this in 49 CFR 225.33. These outline that railroads must have internal policies prohibiting retaliation for the lawful reporting of accidents, incidents, injuries, or illnesses. They also prescribe disciplinary action against any employee or supervisor found to have done so.

Close Call Reporting: Railroads remain committed to joining FRA's C3RS program. They have participated in several FRA Railroad Safety Advisory Committee (RSAC) meetings. The goal is to find a path that prioritizes the safety, confidentiality, transparency and accountability necessary for 3RS to operate properly. While this process has not moved as quickly as we would prefer, railroads remain ready. They are willing to continue discussion at the FRA-led RSAC to find a resolution.

RIGOROUS TRAINING PREPARES EMPLOYEES FOR REAL-WORLD SITUATIONS.

Many railroads use a combination of field [training](#), on-the-job training and distance learning to create their professional workforce. Additionally, some railroads own dedicated technical training centers. Simulators range from locomotive and power-operated switches to grade crossing simulators. For example, engineers can virtually learn train handling procedures on different track parts.

They can also experience how the [Positive Train Control \(PTC\)](#) system initiates its processes. The system constantly assesses many variables to ensure safety by guaranteeing the train has the necessary time and space to stop safely along the route when necessary. PTC is a set of technologies that prevent the most serious human-error accidents. These include train-to-train collisions and over-speed derailments. Today, PTC is fully implemented and in operation on 100% of Class I PTC route-miles network-wide.

REMOTE CONTROL LOCOMOTIVES PREVENT MISCOMMUNICATION.

[Remote control locomotives](#) allow employees in rail yards to control and operate locomotives with hand-held transmitters. This helps reduce incidents where an engineer operating a locomotive could inadvertently injure another worker in the yard due to miscommunication.

DRONES HELP KEEP EMPLOYEES OUT OF HARMS WAY.

Drones play a pivotal role in railroad infrastructure maintenance. They conduct [comprehensive inspections](#) of bridges. They also capture video and imagery of challenging, inaccessible areas within the structures. Post-weather events, railroads deploy drones extensively to assess and identify issues. For example, these include washouts, downed trees, and misaligned tracks resulting from adverse weather conditions. Moreover, drones are instrumental in examining sections of track impacted by severe weather. They provide valuable insights into potential damage and facilitate prompt response and maintenance.