ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN RAILROADS

FREIGHT RAIL SAFETY ACTIONS SINCE EAST PALESTINE

Freight railroads continue advancing safety by investing in the core network, deploying proven technologies and innovating new ones, and regularly reviewing operations to reduce risk.

These daily efforts are core to the industry's strong safety culture and reflect a commitment to using today's technology while continuously pursuing future safety innovations. At the same time, railroads are focused on ensuring first responders have the training, information, and resources to safely manage in the event of a rail emergency.

All together, these actions build on the industry's annual investment of more than $23 billion per year to drive continuous safety improvement across the network, from East Palestine, OH to every corner of the nation.

Safety Progress Across the Network

The latest Federal Railroad Administration safety data show continued, measurable progress across the rail network.

- Industrywide, train accident and derailment rates remain near historic lows;
- Employee injury and fatality rates continue to decline
- Human factor and track related incidents have improved year over year.
- Preliminary FRA data for the first 11 months of 2025 indicate that several core safety metrics – including the employee injury rate and the train accident rate – are on track to reach record or near record performance.

Proven, Tangible Actions That Strengthen Safety

AAR and the railroads revised Field Manual Rule 36, effective July 1, 2025, to strengthen roller bearing safety standards.

The update lowers the temperature threshold at which a railcar must be removed from service due to an hot-bearing detector (HBD) reading between 200°F to 170°F, when confirmed that the bearing is hotter than other bearings.

This change enhances early detection of potentially overheated bearings while avoiding excessive false positives, since properly functioning bearings can reach high external temperatures in hot, sunny conditions. In addition to this threshold, the rule continues to provide that a bearing is overheated when a manual reading is 200°F or above or when a bearing is 95°F above the temperature of its mate bearing on the same axle.

Railroads expanded both traditional wayside detectors and advanced automated inspection portals across key corridors, significantly broadening their safety monitoring capabilities.

In addition to installing hundreds of new HBDs and complementary sensors, railroads are deploying high-speed inspection portals that use machine vision, advanced imaging, and artificial intelligence to capture ultra-high-resolution, 360-degree views of railcars as trains move through at track speed.

These systems generate thousands of images per car, analyze them with sophisticated algorithms to identify potential defects, and flag issues for rapid expert review. Together, closer detector spacing and continuous, automated inspections provide more frequent data points, earlier identification of anomalies, and a stronger, more proactive approach to railcar safety across the network.

The freight rail industry adopted a new trending rule, strengthening its approach to detecting bearings at risk of overheating.

Historically, each Class I railroad applied its own internal trending rules, using their own algorithms to determine when a bearing is potentially problematic. Railinc and the railroads conducted a detailed review of these algorithms. Using this analysis, the railroads agreed to a common algorithm that would be used across the industry (with railroads continuing to use their own algorithms as well).

All six Class I railroads are using this common algorithm, and the industry agreed to share alerts generated by this algorithm. This coordinated effort represents a significant step forward in consistency, early detection, and systemwide safety.

The AskRail Task Force (ARTF) continues to meet biweekly, uniting Class I and short line railroads, the IAFC, and the FRA to deliver measurable improvements in first-responder access to timely, accurate rail information.

In 2025, ARTF's nationwide outreach to nearly 5,000 Emergency Communication Centers (ECCs)—which conservatively represent access points for hundreds of thousands of first responders nationwide—drove 660 completed onboardings.

These onboardings expanded adoption of the AskRail LaunchPad and User Management portal, and advanced key system upgrades. Results included a modernized consist schema, development of APIs to enable consist push integration, migration of users to the more robust LaunchPad platform, and multiple data-quality and usability enhancements.

A recertification pilot launched in November 2025 reached 2,048 users, with 723 successfully recertified, strengthening system integrity and compliance. ARTF set priorities focused on transitioning from consist pull to consist push data—significantly speeding information delivery—while supporting railroads' readiness for full HM-263 compliance by June 2026.

Together with direct agency onboarding, these efforts support railroads' commitment to providing more than 2.3 million first responders nationwide with streamlined, reliable access to AskRail.