

The Wailing Wall

Of Unmanned Locomotives

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Belly-Pack usage, since the start of its cram-down Jan. 1, 2002, has resulted in five amputations and four deaths in our United States of Railroading, according to U.S. OSHA figures- This horrific experience has run simultaneous with a time (the same 24 months) when there have been two deaths and zero amputations associated with conventional switching, even though conventional still performs a large majority (approx. 80%) of the classification work. How relatively telling, yet the carriers incredibly claim how much safer unmanned locomotives are! Obviously, there is an incredible disconnect, here, between safety reality and safety reporting.

As you need casualties in "war" in order to keep "score", instinctively and intuitively, carrier field officials do their honest best to dis-honestly deny Belly-Pack accidents. By the same, but opposite token, those same instincts and intuitions cause those same officials to publicize even the smallest conventional mishap as if promoting a "County Fair." Heaven forbid, should a yard engineer cause an amputation or death as R.R. management might react as if it were the "Second Coming of Christ". (No offence intended. In fact, I like to think "J.C." is on our side.) Since this R.R. spiritual phenomena has not occurred in the last two years, my instinct and intuition led me to call Washington D.C. to double-check conventional's lack of amputation or death publicity. Thankfully, instinct and intuition proved correct. So, the question looms larger than ever, where is the improved safety for unmanned locomotives?

Belly-Pack safety statistics are legitimately manipulated to give it the appearance of looking safer than it really is. Remember, there are lies, then there are damned lies and finally there are statistics. As most of you know, R.R. injury is not measured in terms of pain and suffering nor doctor's bills or FELA awards, but is instead measured in LostWork-Days as required by FRA rules. For example, if you were to experience a soft tissue back injury causing you to be out of service for one year, you would go on the books as having 180 lost-work-days, which is the maximum reporting limit allowed by FRA mles. In another example, let's say you were to suffer on the job permanent disability by way of amputation. Believe it or not, you would go on score as having 180 lost-work-days, which again, is the FRA limit allowed. Obviously, FRA accounting rules are severely warped as they fail to give scale and proportion to amputation. In other words, one 180 day strain injury would appear no worse

than one amputation. Ten 180 day strain injuries would appear 10 times worse than one amputation. You would be amazed at the high percentage of R R. officials who don't know what you now do about warped FRA accounting mles. Irregardless, I'm sure we all agree in that any number of sprains and strains is not the equal of any one amputation, let alone any number of sprains and strains equal to any one death — forget the soft tissue statistics — these statistics be damned!

The dis-connect between Belly-Pack's safety reality and safety reporting is explainable in yet another way — a most cruel way. Our carriers call it the "learning curve." The idea being, that even though the Civil War style pile of body parts and corpses keep growing, its pile is only temporary until Belly-Pack's learning curve flattens! As you know, new trainmen are being hired in troop ship quantities. (5,000 for U.P. alone) Fortunately for the new recruits, they will learn conventional switching, which has virtually flat amputation and death curves. Unfortunately for Belly-Pack learners, even the most experienced switchmen will fall victim to its higher amputation and death curves. This, alone, proves engineer operated locomotives are safer.

There is yet another unintended consequence of Belly-Pack. Since its cram-down, starting 1-1-02, railroads have promoted few locomotive engineers, indeed. Million dollar per month R.R. executives incorrectly speculated how Belly-Pack would free up thousands of yard engineers for main line service. The resulting shortage of engineers has exacerbated engineer fatigue to the train crash point. Ironically, these overly tired engineers are still safer than unmanned locomotives! Should fatigue induced main line train wrecks start happening, however, please anticipate how top R.R. management will use this as an excuse and alibi to apply for and receive government assistance for "Main Line Starwars." This is very possible. Unfortunately, we engineers will be blamed for our own fatigue induced train wrecks, when it was the false economy of excessive corporate greed, which caused the engineer shortage!

In case you didn't know, the carriers are yet again trying to scrap FELA. The carriers are correctly anticipating the many repetitive trauma injuries Belly-Pack will bring in the mid to long term, in addition to its wailing wall of amputation and death. As you know, Belly-Pack has made the physical chore of switching much more rigorous, if not strenuous. Middle-aged Belly-Packers are complaining of their inability to "doubleback" with any less than 16 hours off plus an absolute unwillingness to work overtime. Union Pacific response to the extra physical pain of Belly-Pack has been characteristically mean spirited by their saying: "Good, you're finally earning your wages. Your physical pain is consistent with a good work ethic", according to U.P. personnel. Many middle-aged switchmen have either retired earlier than intended or went to main line service, which has had the effect of dumping more and more of the Belly-Pack load to the younger and less experienced. Like young professional athletes with short career expectancy, their legs and/or backs will most likely fail first. Obviously, the grim truth is that for Belly-Pack to succeed, FELA will need to be

abolished. R.R. management understands this far better than most of us. Laughably, in my humble opinion, the future savings from an abolished FELA will be negated (wiped out) when the carriers soon discover the Workman's Compensation rate for BellyPackers will approach or even exceed 50%. In a Belly-Pack coin toss, "heads we lose — tails, the carriers will also lose."

Some of the extra Belly-Pack pain is due to U.P. Belly-Packers getting on and off moving equipment with shift-long regularity. I, personally, have witnessed this so many times that I had to call Tim Smith, our C.S.L.B- Chairman, to ask if U.P. 's rule book differed from BNSF's. Tim answered by saying, no, and that he, too, was getting identical reports from all over the U.P. where Belly-Pack exists. Obviously, to prevent further productivity loss, U.P. supervisors avoid Uniform Testing of Belly-Pack crews. In other words, rules aren't being enforced, which is a moot point, anyway, since unmanned locomotive accidents are denied. Thankfully, this cheating represents an unfair disleveling of the playing field. If it's any comfort or consolation to BNSF management as to why Belly-Pack is working better on the I-J.P., it's because BNSF Belly-Packers aren't cheaters. BNSF people stop the equipment before getting on or off. It is little wonder, then, U.P. is the most aggressive abolitionist of FELA.

In conclusion, to deny unmanned locomotive accidents and/or manipulate their safety statistics serves nobody within the R.R. companies. Outside of the R.R. companies, however, this denial serves Belly-Pack vendors and ultimately doctors and Imvyers. Otherwise, it has been my ongoing duty to inform co-workers of the amputations and deaths due to unmanned locomotives. As sorrowful and angry as my co-workers are for its victims, my co-workers are even more sorrowful and angry with Belly-Pack's implementing executives, whose top executives defend it to the death, literally! This shift of emotion, being less intense for the victims, and more intense for the executives, I did not anticipate. What no one anticipated, however, was the wailing wall of its amputation and death.

God Bless Them. Thank You.