



Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

A Division of the Rail Conference of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters

Railroad fatalities not uncommon

(The following story by Sharna Johnson appeared on the Clovis News Journal website on March 2, 2009.)

CLOVIS, N.M. — The death of a 56-year-old Clovis railroad conductor Saturday was the fourth employee fatality in the last 44 days for BNSF's southwest division.

BNSF spokesman Joe Faust said a locomotive engineer lost contact with Gregory Blevins when the two were preparing to move rail cars to a side rail.

After communication was lost, rail officials are uncertain exactly what happened or why, Faust said, but investigators think, "He simply may have slipped and fell, then he was struck shortly there after."

Blevins was an experienced, 35-year employee with the railroad, he said.

Trains are manned by a conductor and locomotive engineer who are responsible for maintaining the trains and communicate via hand-held radios, he said.

According to data from the Federal Railroad Administration, the last railroad employee fatality in New Mexico and Arizona was in 2007. Prior to that there were three in 2004.

Last year, BNSF, as a whole, had two employee fatalities.

The southwest division is, "a busy, heavily traveled route for the BNSF railway," Faust said, explaining it is the mainline of operations en route from southern California to Chicago and back again.

In light of the recent fatalities in the region — comprised of New Mexico and parts of Arizona — BNSF is stressing safety to its employees, Faust said.

"We are working very hard to communicate again, as we always do, to operate safely, to be vigilant and to follow safety operating practices," Faust said, mirroring an employee safety reminder issued Monday on BNSF's website.

Blevins death remains under investigation, he said.

Efforts to reach Blevins' family Monday were unsuccessful.

Clovis resident Virginia Brock said she met Blevins at church around eight years ago.

Though she hadn't talked to him recently, Brock said news of his death shocked her.

"I just can't imagine that happened. It really hurt very, very hard," she said. "He was always a very pleasant person to me."

Brock said she and Blevins joked often and had a game they played where she would steal the large cowboy hat he always wore.

"(He was so tall and I was so short), I'd have to stand up on a chair to reach his hat," she said laughing.

"He had a tremendous sense of humor... I loved him dearly. He was a good friend that way."

Tuesday, March 03, 2009

bentley@ble.org

<http://www.ble.org/pr/news/headline.asp?id=25385>

© 1997-2012 Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

[**http://www.ble.org**](http://www.ble.org)