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## Andrew Coates, M.D.

Community Health and Social Medicine  
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## Jared Boehlke's birthday

November 24, 2009 at 7:54 am by [Dr. Andrew Coates](#)[Comments\(7\)](#) | [E-mail](#) | [Print](#)Tweet Recommend 

Jared Boehlke lost his life on his job on May 10, 2009. Today would have been his 34th birthday.

A "stand up guy," devoted to his wife Heather and their 3 year old daughter, Jared was a conductor [at the CSX railroad freight yard here in Selkirk](#).

Jared's employer, CSX, created the conditions for his death when it implemented something it calls a "one-person crew." A "one-person crew" is not only a stupid oxymoron. It has proven deadly. Yet the practice continues.

It should be unthinkable to ask a worker to man a freight train all alone. The average freight train carries thousands of tons. Hooking up cars is a silent, dangerous process. The cars come over the hump with a graceful, awesome momentum, colossal power that can easily crush the body of a human being.

Teamwork – the crew – is the key to safety. But CSX claims that technology – electronic devices – can protect workers instead. Of course electronic devices don't need paychecks or sick time or health insurance – or families.



The "one-person crew" is simply a way to cut costs – in a year when CSX has reported a profits over 2 million dollars per day. CSX could easily pay wages and benefits for fully staffed train crews – if only CSX was in business to support the families of the human beings who run the railroad.

After Jared Boehlke's death, railroad workers, among the few still unionized in America, fought back. His union, the United Transportation Union, united with the other railroad unions that organize members at the CSX yard, to demand an emergency end to the "one-person crew." (They even enlisted Congressman Paul Tonko in their cause.)

But they have lost the opening round. [The Federal Railroad Administration ruled that "no factual evidence to support the prohibition against one-person crew operations at this time."](#) You can read the letter from the Federal Railroad Administration [here](#).[Heather Boehlke](#), Jared's widow, asks for support and vows to continue her effort to prevent another family from enduring the suffering inflicted upon hers. Last night Heather sent the following message:

*I feel like I have just been punched in the stomach yet again, as I read the FRA's decision to not pass the one man ban. Tomorrow November 24, would have been my husband's thirty fourth birthday, instead of celebrating with cake and ice cream, I will be bringing my three year old daughter to her father's grave stone to say hello, to a man that she will now never know. How dare the FRA say there is not enough evidence to support the ban! How dare my husband's death go unanswered for! Here we are yet again with the blame the worker not the employer attitude! How many people should die, how many families should needlessly suffer before we stand up and unite and force this ban to happen! My daughter will never again be told by her daddy how much he loves her, and I will never again be held by his loving arms. I am so angered and frustrated by the FRA's decision, I will stop at nothing to ensure this does not happen again to another family, and I am hoping to have you all behind me in the end. I hope you all have a Happy Thanksgiving with your families, for mine there will be a big piece missing that can never be replaced. I will still remember to give thanks for what I do have, and that is the will to fight for change. I hope I have you all on board with me as we look towards the future and what lies ahead.*

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Photo by Jon Flanders

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1. *Linda Mix* says:

[November 24, 2009 at 7:19 pm](#)

Jared did not have to die that day. CSX should be ashamed of themselves. Jared was one of the most honorable and honest of men. He was a very conscientious and attentive to everything he did and everyone he met. I support Heather in her fight to save the lives and families of CSX workers.  
 Linda Mix

2. *Steven Spaziani* says:

[November 24, 2009 at 11:29 pm](#)

Heather, I did not know your husband but I also work for CSX as an engineer in Watertown NY. You have my deepest sympathy.

3. *Jason Emery* says:

[November 25, 2009 at 1:07 am](#)

Heather, i work for the NYSW Railway (who deals with csx all day long) as a conductor and i know how dangerous this 1 man crew is, there is no reason why one person should have to control a locomotive with a remote and also be responsible for switching out freight cars.CSX seems like a company thats only out for them selfs and will do anything to save a buck. I want them to know that I and im sure several other people are outraged at their insensitivity to your loss.

4. *Dave Magill* says:

[November 25, 2009 at 9:19 am](#)

Heather, Jared will always be remembered, I {again} am terribly sorry for your loss, I know as well as you it didnt have to happen. I worked with Jared from Selkirk to New Jersey, MANY times, and I KNOW how safe, and conciencious, he was, not to mention a good guy. I left CSX to work for another railroad just when these god awful remotes came to play. They were and always will be an accident waiting to happen, and of course it was probably "no fault" of CSX...Yeah right.I read the FRA letter, and it is pathetic. I know your fighting a battle that seems impossible, but keep fighting, we'll only hope this dosent happen again, but the unfortunate reality looms. And yes, CSX should be ashamed of themselves, they are a heartless company, JUST remember all of us that worked with Jared, will always remember the good times, laughs, and long nights, he will always be in our hearts. Heather, take care of yourself, and try and have a good holiday. We stand behind you...

5. *Thomas Mik* says:

[November 26, 2009 at 9:16 am](#)

Heather, I wish you good luck with this fight. Although I never knew your husband, I can pretty much imagine what he was like. The bottom line is that nobody should lose their life while trying to earn a living for their family, and certainly not as a result of conditions imposed by corporate and governmental scumbags for the purpose of that almighty dollar. Whats sad is that the very people responsible for all this will sit at home this Thanksgiving without a thought in their minds about how wrong they are. Their thoughts will be about how important they are and how much of a bonus they might recieve for their towing of the company line this year while tragedies such as Jared's took place and MANY of his brothers sat home furloughed. Its sickening. Try to remember though, that when they enter that management realm, they are brainwashed and beaten by memos, catchphrases, mission statements, posters, and rule after rule after rule designed to cover their butts and add even more responsibilities to the working people...all the while trying to figure out ways to take away as much pay and benefits from them that as can get away with. Also,

remember that the FRA is nothing more than a bureaucracy to create jobs. Any of us in the industry know how corrupt and political they are. There have been lots of bad things going on lately, and instead of doing the proper thing in response, the FRA continues to make a rule, order, or emergency directive aimed at the worker (NOT the management), so that the general public believes that something has been done to make change. Its a joke.

You have more supporters than you know, and I commend your efforts and drive. Talk to more people, and research the FRA and CSX's practices. Look here: csxsucks.com You will see that you are one of many victims out there and together, a difference really can come to fruition. Try and have an enjoyable holiday. You'll be in our thoughts.

6. [CSX\\_Conductor](#) says:  
[November 27, 2009 at 2:42 am](#)

My condolences go out to Heather, even though I did not know Jared, I do know the practices of CSX and fully believe the actions of the company resulted in this tragedy. It isn't the first time or will it be the last as long as the FRA continues to turn the other way and "not see" the dangers in this one man remote operation. It is about time for a change, there is too much deceit going on with the carriers and the FRA, derailments and collisions happening over and over again without being reported to try and keep the statistics looking good on paper. Well I ask the FRA and CSX management, did you have to spend Thanksgiving without someone you love because of these unsafe practices?

Hang in there Heather, hopefully with your supporters, your fight will open some eyes. Have a blessed Thanksgiving and the T&E crews of CSX are with you!

7. [Big G](#) says:  
[November 27, 2009 at 1:30 pm](#)

I hope that they ban these practices. I wish you the best Heather and my families condolences.

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