



# Railroad Workers United

**Unity—Solidarity—Democracy: The Rank and File in Action!**

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## Press Release

Friday, June 13, 2014 is Railroad Worker Memorial Day. Railroad Workers United (RWU) is asking all Railroad employees to wear black to work in remembrance of our fallen fellow railroaders. In 2009, in response to the death of railroad worker Jared Boehlke, the fledgling organization has called for recognition of Railroad Workers Memorial Day, and has observed it each year on the Friday prior to Father's Day weekend.

Each year, RWU focuses on a specific incident, issue, or rail property. This year we focus on Metro North, the New York based commuter railroad with a horrendous safety record. In the last twelve months Metro North has suffered a series of train wrecks and track worker fatalities. In the wake of a wreck that killed four passengers and injured dozens more, the FRA has cited the railroad as having a "deficient safety culture". Federal inspectors found more than 7,000 defects and deficiencies within the Metro North Railroad system over ten years. Among the problems revealed in the report were track inspections that found broken or cracked joint bars, loose rail braces and missing bolts. FRA inspections found five times as many issues per 100 miles of track as similar inspections on other commuter railroads! For a railroad long considered the "gold standard" for the region's commuter systems, the recent debacle on MN has now revealed that the railroad in fact has lacked safety features that had been in place on some other railroads for decades. Apparently, glaring safety issues had gone unnoticed and unreported for years, a powder keg waiting to explode, as it did in 2014. Without a safety program that is designed to *recognize and eliminate hazards*, rather than simply focus on worker behavior, any railroad is a disaster waiting to happen.

Railroad worker safety and hazards on the job continue to be a serious issue that plagues the entire industry. On December 1, 2013 a Southwest Railroad train derailed in southern New Mexico that killed all 3 crew members on board. On March 10, 2014 James Romansoff, a Metro-North Railroad employee, was struck by a train while doing maintenance on the track, only a few months after a similar incident took the life of Robert Luden, also an employee of Metro-North. Unfortunately, these are not the only of our fellow railroaders who have lost their lives in the past year performing their duties.

The railroad carriers, along with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and our union leadership, continue to place blame on workers and not on the hazards themselves that are the root of workplace injuries. The Fatality of Maintenance of Way Employees and Signalmen (FAMES) Committee, an ad-hoc committee of government officials, railroad carrier representatives, and union officials, released a report that chooses to focus on worker behavior rather than focus on hazard elimination. This report, titled "Fatal Accident Patterns – Hours of Day" states, "*Various methods can be employed to enhance the mental and physical readiness of roadway workers after inactive periods, committee members believe. They recommend that roadway workers focus on the safety risk of transitioning from a sedentary period to active work environment, and participate in a job safety re-briefing after extended inactive periods, such as meal and travel times.*" This report concludes that fatalities are happening

because workers are not paying attention after they eat. This is not a serious solution to a serious problem.

We call on our union leadership to stop participating and collaborating with the carriers in placing blame on railroad workers for fatalities and to start pushing back and requiring the carriers to fix the hazards.

We call on the government, especially the FRA, to start holding the carriers accountable. Small fines against the carriers for gross violations of federal regulations is not enough stick to make them take these regulations seriously and start requiring they fix the hazards.

We call on the carriers to take the safety seriously and stop blaming their employees and start fixing the hazards.

We also ask for the support of our communities. If our unions start working and educating our communities, we can come together and put pressure on the carriers and the FRA to fix the hazards.