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Canadian Pacific workers say colleague's death was preventable

By: Iris Perez

ST. PAUL, Minn. (KMSP) –

It has been one week since a 19-year veteran rail worker was killed by a Canadian Pacific train during a crew change in a St. Paul rail yard, and now, several employee advocates say this was completely preventable.

Railroad lover Jeff Harsh, a 19-year train engineer based in Milwaukee, Wis., probably never imagined his life would be cut short in St. Paul last Saturday doing the work he cherished on the tracks along Lower Afton Road and Highway 61.

Attorney Cortney Leneave said he was struck by an oncoming train after he got off of his inbound train coming from Portage. As a Canadian Pacific trainee, it was Harsh's first qualifying trip to St. Paul.

"He'd asked for orientation and guidance in terms of where he was at and the railroad refused to give that," Leneave said. Workers say three railroads operate at the Oakland crew change spot on only two radio channels. "You will not hear them until they're right on top of you," David Brown said. Union reps say trains run anywhere from 49 to 75 miles an hour, so, without whistle or warning, another train came around the curve just after midnight, striking Harsh head-on at the very place employees have raised safety concerns for the past two years.

And yet, Canadian Pacific took no action and we have a dead worker today; this is totally unacceptable," Phillip Qualy with the United Transportation union said. "It's dark with walking and tripping hazards, this has all been reported and discussed with CP management, and they continue to this day to change out crews at this location."

Now, at least two railway unions will ramp up the fight for safety at the Oakland crew change in Harsh's honor and seek compensation for the loss his family suffers. "I don't want to have to go to another funeral," Brown said.