



Railroad Workers United

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The Rank & File in Action!

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RWU Resolution on Sleep Apnea

Whereas, Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) is a commonly occurring condition in roughly 2-4% of the U.S. adult population, characterized by repetitive episodes of shallow or paused breathing during sleep, resulting in reduced and abnormal restorative sleep, and

Whereas, because of its relationship to involuntary sleeping episodes during waking hours, OSA has been found to be a very real danger for transport workers, their passengers and the communities they operate through; and

Whereas, investigations into several train wrecks in recent years have found that OSA has been a contributing factor to these wrecks; and

Whereas, sleep apnea is easily diagnosed and treated, making for a safer workforce and a happier and healthier one; and

Whereas, sleep apnea is exacerbated by conditions of unpredictable work schedules such as poor diet, obesity, smoking, lack of exercise, erratic and poor sleep habits, irregular sleeping times, and general fatigue; and

Whereas, the above contributing factors to OSA are themselves an indirect and often direct result of the policies, procedures, and management practices of many rail carriers; and

Whereas, these rail carrier policies, procedures and practices that exacerbate OSA in operating employees (and others) include: excessive working hours, limited time off work, a lack of scheduled jobs, irregular work hours; split-shifts, minimal time off between work periods; poor predictability of job start times prior to performing service; and

Whereas, these fatigue-inducing management practices are then made exponentially worse by harsh disciplinary and attendance policies, slashing personnel, along with chronic short-staffing; and

Whereas, because a known diagnosis of OSA could result in a serious disruption of a worker's income, an incentive exists for at-risk individuals to avoid diagnosis; and

Whereas, any effort to diagnose and treat sleep apnea cannot be separated from a comprehensive program of fatigue amelioration which addresses the myriad factors outlined above; and

Whereas, such a comprehensive program would necessarily include an assortment of readily available options, including: adequate and proper staffing of pools and extra boards, call windows, a lengthening of call times, scheduled trains, a limit on excessive hours, the additional time off work; and abolition of harsh attendance policies;

Therefore, Be it Resolved that RWU support a comprehensive program of fatigue abatement which would include diagnosis and treatment of OSA, adequate time off work, advance call times, and/or call windows, scheduled trains, adequate personnel on boards and pools, the right to mark off fatigued without incurring discipline, etc.; and

Be it Further Resolved that - as required by law - the rail carrier provide a safe workplace, and should it be determined that achieving this would require testing employees for OSA, then - just like annual vision, hearing and other exams - this would be the rail carriers' obligation to make this test available and to take the financial responsibility for providing this exam; and

Be it Finally Resolved that RWU demands that the carriers and unions, together with the FRA live up to the Rail Safety Improvement Act (RSIA) of 2008 and immediately develop fatigue abatement plans for each carrier as required by the Act.

Adopted by the RWU Steering Committee 2/1/17